

## INTERGROUP ANXIETY AND NATIONAL IDENTITY AMONG SLOVAKS (PRELIMINARY FINDINGS)

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### Abstract

Slovaks belong to nations that have long-term negative attitudes towards migrants (e.g. Bozogáňová, Piterová, 2020). We are interested in whether national identity is related to intergroup anxiety (contact with a person of another ethnicity). Intergroup anxiety can be broadly defined as the arousal that occurs as a result of individuals' negative expectations of rejection or discrimination during cross-group interactions or fears that the interaction partner or they themselves may behave in an incompetent or offensive manner (Stephan & Stephan, 1985, Turner, Hewstone, Voci & Vonofakou, 2008). The aim of the paper is to determine the relationship between national (Slovak) identity and intergroup anxiety and further determine whether there are differences in these constructs in the context of sex and age. The research sample consisted of 1001 respondents (49% men) aged 17 to 75 ( $M = 44.81$ ;  $SD = 14.92$ ). The data were collected online in the form of a panel collection in Slovakia with the ambition to obtain a representative sample of respondents (based on sex, age, region, and education). Intergroup anxiety was measured by the Stephan and Stephan (1985) scale (Cronbach  $\alpha = .866$ ). Slovak national identity was measured by 8 items from ISP 2013 - National Identity III (Cronbach  $\alpha = .801$ ). It was found that there is a weak positive relationship between national identities and intergroup anxiety. Multivariate analysis of variance was conducted to compare national identity and intergroup anxiety. Using Pillai's trace, there was a significant effect of sex, age, and there was a significant effect of interaction sex x age. Results showed that older respondents (53 and above) scored higher than younger age groups in terms of national identity. Intergroup anxiety was higher in men. It appears that national identity is higher for women with increasing age, while for men its value decreases. The limit of the study is its exploratory and cross-sectional character. However, we consider it a steppingstone, when examining the mentioned constructs in the given context.

**Keywords:** *National identity, intergroup anxiety, Slovakia, MANOVA.*

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### 1. Introduction

Slovaks belong to nations that have long-term negative attitudes towards migrants (e.g. Bozogáňová, Piterová, 2020). In previous research it was found that lower socioeconomic status, lower education, higher religiosity, older age, and rightist political orientation are associated with a higher sense of immigrant threat (see e.g. Hainmueller & Hiscox, 2007, Gorodzeisky, 2013, Tartakovsky & Walsh, 2015, Hoxhaj & Zuccotti, 2021). According to the IOM (2022), as of December 2021, the share of foreigners in the population of Slovakia was 3.07%, which is the third lowest share of foreigners among the countries of the European Union (after Poland and Romania). Most foreigners come to Slovakia from neighboring countries - the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Austria, and Ukraine. Based on the 2021 census, 10.8% of the total population with permanent residence subscribed to national minorities (mostly Hungarian, Roma, Czech and Ruthenian) (SODB, 2021). In our contribution, we have chosen a different perspective on this issue. We are interested in whether the national identity is related to intergroup anxiety (contact with a person of another ethnicity).

Intergroup anxiety can be broadly defined as the arousal that occurs as a result of individuals' negative expectations of rejection or discrimination during cross-group interactions or fears that the interaction partner or they themselves may behave in an incompetent or offensive manner (Stephan & Stephan, 1985, Turner, Hewstone, Voci & Vonofakou, 2008). According to Stephan (2014), an anxiety intergroup consists of several components. The affective component is experienced as negative and

aversive. From a cognitive point of view, anxiety between groups can be created by assessing that interaction with non-group members is expected to have negative consequences. From a physiological point of view, people experience various bodily changes (see Stephan, 2014). All three components overlap. According to Stephan (2014), in addition to personality traits, which are predisposed to intergroup anxiety (e.g. ethnocentric, intolerant, hostile ...), there is second type of relatively permanent personality traits that affect intergroup anxiety and consist of various aspects of social identity. People who strongly identify with the social group (e.g. national, ethnic, religious, or gender) to which they belong can be expected to experience intergroup anxiety when interacting with members of a different social group. The high value that their own group attaches to them will lead them to fear threats from the other group.

We focused specifically on national identity. The literature on national identity and outgroup rejection is rich and diverse. There are different ways of defining national identity, and different aspects of national identity can be related to attitudes to outgroup members in different ways (Blank & Schmidt, 2003; Grigoryan, 2016). National identity has customarily been examined in terms of national boundaries and attachment to the nation. Despite its complexity, two principal dimensions of national identity are commonly identified—national boundaries (determined by a civic/ethnic framework) and attachment to the nation (in the dual forms of patriotism and nationalism) (Ariely, 2020). Nationalistic identification focuses on the comparison between the national ingroup and relevant outgroups, whereas patriotic identification is a kind of critical loyalty with the ingroup that aims at improving the ingroup according to its standards and norms (Wagner, Becker, Christ, Pettigrew & Schmidt, 2012, Wagner, Kotzur & Friehs, 2022).

## 2. Goal

The aim of the paper is to determine the relationship between national (Slovak) identity and intergroup anxiety and further determine whether there are differences in these constructs in the context of sex and age. This paper has exploratory character.

## 3. Methods

Intergroup anxiety was measured by 11 items adapted from the Stephan and Stephan (1985) scale, with higher scores reflecting greater anxiety (Cronbach  $\alpha = .866$ ). Instruction was “Imagine that you only work with people from other ethnic groups - how would you feel?” - example of items: confident, happy, defensive. Respondents answered on scale where 1 = not at all – 10 = extremely. Positive items (confident, happy, accepted, self-assured) have been recoded for better interpretation of the results. A higher score means a greater intergroup anxiety. The summary score was divided by the number of items in the questionnaire: minimum – 1, maximum – 10).

Slovak national identity (ethnic and civic identity) was measured by 8 items from ISP 2013 - National Identity III (Cronbach  $\alpha = .801$ ). The instruction was “Some people say the following things are important for being truly Slovak. Others say they are not important. How important do you think each of the following is?” – examples of items: to have Slovak ancestry, to feel Slovak, to live in Slovakia for most of one’s lives. Respondents answered on a scale where 1 = very important - 4 = not important at all. The items have been recoded for better interpretation of the results. A higher score means a higher national identity. The summary score was divided by the number of items in the questionnaire: minimum – 1, maximum – 4).

Using factor analysis (principal axis factoring), we verified whether the two-factor or one-factor solution of the used questionnaire works in the Slovak population (see Ariely, 2020). The results showed that there is no distinction between ethnic and civic identity in Slovakia - we are working with the general name national identity (one-factor solution). Factor was comprised of 8 items reported on a 4-point scale that explained with factor loadings from .288 (being Christian) to .745 (have Slovak citizenship).

### 3.1. Research sample

The research sample consisted of 1001 respondents (49% men) aged 17 to 75 ( $M = 44.81$ ;  $SD = 14.92$ ). Out of these respondents, 54.2% were employed, 7.5% unemployed, 5.1% self-employed, 7.5% on maternity/parental leave, 20.6% pensioners and 5.1% students. 1.9% of research sample completed primary education, 54.5% secondary and 43.7% completed university education. The data were collected online in the form of a panel collection in Slovakia with the ambition to obtain a representative sample of respondents (based on sex, age, region, and education). Data were processed in IBM SPSS v.26, with respect to conditions of used methods.

#### 4. Results

It was found (Pearson correlation) that there is a weak positive relationship ( $r = .119$ ;  $p < .001$ ) between national identities and intergroup anxiety. In Table 1 are descriptive characteristics of intergroup anxiety and national identity for men, women, and age categories.

Table 1 Descriptive characteristics.

|     |                    | Intergroup anxiety |       |       | National identity |      |
|-----|--------------------|--------------------|-------|-------|-------------------|------|
|     |                    | N                  | M     | SD    | M                 | SD   |
| sex | men                | 490                | 4.546 | 1.415 | 2.929             | .588 |
|     | women              | 511                | 4.153 | 1.466 | 2.868             | .563 |
| age | less than 35 years | 330                | 4.199 | 1.485 | 2.855             | .533 |
|     | 36 - 52 years      | 336                | 4.461 | 1.535 | 2.843             | .607 |
|     | 53 and more years  | 335                | 4.375 | 1.328 | 2.994             | .574 |

Based on the averages, we can see that the Slovak respondents state the intergroup anxiety and national identities in the mean values of the individual methodologies used.

Multivariate analysis of variance (sex, age (categories: less than 35 (early adulthood - 33% of respondents), 36 – 52 (middle adulthood - 33.6% of respondents), 53 and more (late adulthood and old age - 33.5% of respondents), sex x age) was conducted to compare national identity and intergroup anxiety.

Using Pillai's trace, there was significant effect of sex,  $V = .017$ , ( $F(2, 994) = 8.344$ ,  $p < .001$ ); age,  $V = .017$ , ( $F(2, 994) = 4.286$ ,  $p = .002$ ) and there was significant effect of interaction sex x age  $V = .010$ , ( $F(2, 994) = 2.448$ ,  $p = .044$ ).

Table 2. Tests of Between-Subjects Effects.

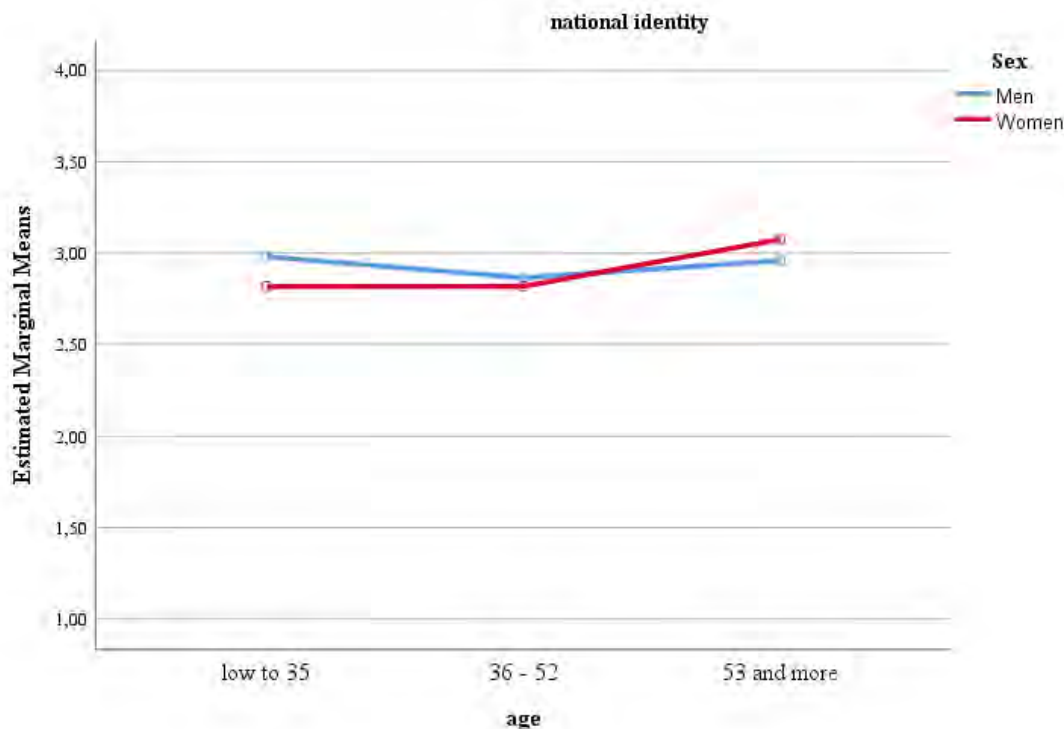
|           |                    | F      | df | Sig.   | Partial Eta Squared | Observed Power |
|-----------|--------------------|--------|----|--------|---------------------|----------------|
| age       | intergroup anxiety | .706   | 2  | .494   | .001                | .170           |
|           | national identity  | 7.332  | 2  | .001** | .015                | .938           |
| sex       | intergroup anxiety | 16.593 | 1  | .000** | .016                | .983           |
|           | national identity  | .638   | 1  | .425   | .001                | .126           |
| age x sex | intergroup anxiety | 1.298  | 2  | .274   | .003                | .282           |
|           | national identity  | 3.959  | 2  | .019*  | .008                | .711           |

\*\*  $p < .001$ ; \*  $p < .05$

Specifically, differences were demonstrated based on age ( $F = 7.332$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p = .001$ ) in national identity. Based on sex in intergroup anxiety ( $F = 16.593$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and within age x sex interaction in national identity ( $F = 3.959$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p = .019$ ).

Results showed that older respondents (53 and above) scored higher than younger age group (36 – 52 years) in terms of national identity ( $MD = .1507$ ,  $p = .002$ ,  $CI[.045, .256]$ ) and also score higher than age group low to 35 years ( $MD = .1380$ ,  $p = .006$ ,  $CI[.032, .244]$ ). Intergroup anxiety was higher in men ( $MD = .406$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $CI[.210, .601]$ ). The interaction between sex and age was significant in national identity, showed in Graph 1.

Graph 1. Interaction age x sex in national identity.



Based on the graph, it appears that national identity is higher for women with increasing age, while for men its value decreases. However, these differences are very small (it can be a coincidence), so it will be appropriate to examine this trend further.

## 5. Discussion and conclusion

The aim of the paper was to determine the relationship between national (Slovak) identity and intergroup anxiety and determine whether there are differences in these constructs in the context of sex and age. The results showed a weak relationship between national identity and intergroup anxiety. Given the number of foreigners in Slovakia based on statistics (SOBD, 2021; IOM, 2022) we can consider this relationship to be logical. Also based on the results of a Eurobarometer survey (Bozogáňová, 2020) the Slovak respondents seldom or never come into contact with migrants and in almost 80% of the cases, respondents from the Slovak population do not have immigrants as friends or family members. Slovaks are unlikely to meet migrants and other ethnic groups, which may be related to the low level of reported intergroup anxiety. Intergroup anxiety was higher in men than women, but this difference was small. We can theorize about the reason for these differences - it may be related to the position of a man in society, often presented as the breadwinner of the family. Contact with another ethnic group may be perceived as more threatening due to the presence of other ethnic groups in the workplace (Ukrainian and Ruthenian workers in factories in Slovakia – see Bozogáňová, 2020, Bozogáňová & Piterová, 2020). The presence of these people can pose a perceived threat to the job. However, these considerations need to be further verified.

Another finding was a higher level of national identity among older respondents (late adulthood) compared to younger groups (early and middle adulthood). We can explain this result by the consideration that the longer a person lives in a country, the more they feel they belong to it. Wagner, Kotzur and Friehs (2022) stated that the strength of the effect of group identification on outgroup derogation depends on two moderators: The salience of a specific group membership in a situation – the sudden recognition that an interaction partner is a member of a specific immigrant group can change an interaction dramatically from one minute to the other – and the degree of identification with an ingroup. Thus, based on social identity theory, one can propose that the more salient national or ethnic group membership in a situation and the more individuals identify with a national or ethnic ingroup, the stronger their rejection of immigrants (Wagner, Kotzur & Friehs, 2022).

Based on the last of our findings, it appears that national identity is higher for women with increasing age, while for men its value decreases. However, these differences are very small (it can be a coincidence), so it will be appropriate to examine this trend further. The limit of the study is its

exploratory and cross-sectional character. However, we consider it a steppingstone, when examining the mentioned constructs in the given context. The advantage is the "representative" research sample of the Slovak population. In future research, it is appropriate to use multifactor methods for national identity research and a situational approach to measuring intergroup anxiety. The methodology used may be too abstract for respondents and they may not be able to imagine the given situations.

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