

Research Plan

Title: The Interlinkages between Racism, Bullying, and Radicalization: A Study on Analyzing Community Responsibility to Enhance Youth Wellbeing in Lapland

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Introduction and Background of the Study

Finland, despite its high rankings in global happiness and quality of life (Helliwell et al., 2024), continues to grapple with significant issues such as racism, bullying, and youth marginalization. European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights revealed that Finland is one of the most racist countries in Europe (FRA, 2018). According to the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare (THL), nearly 40 percent of people with foreign backgrounds in Finland experienced discrimination within a year (THL, 2020). Racism has evolved beyond skin color and ethnic background (Nurmi, 2019) and is also affecting young people. In a recent survey by the Finnish Red Cross, 82 percent of young people aged between 15-24 living in Finland witnessed or experienced racism against themselves or others (Turja, 2024). Individuals within the 15-19 age group in Finland who have an immigrant background face more significant discrimination than their peers with Finnish backgrounds (Myllyniemi, 2017, p. 54). In addition to this, 6 to 10 percent of young individuals report experiencing bullying at least once a week in Finland (Mäntylä, 2015). These situations highlight the challenging environment faced by young people (Toiviainen et al., 2020). A recent study on youth shows that experiencing those situations of racism and bullying could increase the risk of radicalization (Miklikowska et al., 2023). Moreover, Finland is already experiencing the issues of violent radicalization among youth, and it is increasing (Save the Children Finland, 2021).

Finnish societal attitudes often downplay racism and bullying as minor issues (EVA, 2023). As a result, the consequences of these events could have very damaging effects on young people. The person who faced those consequences felt isolated, ignored, or marginalized (Kolstrein & Jofre, 2013; Toiviainen et al., 2020). According to a 2023 survey conducted by the Advisory Board for Ethnic Relations (ETNO) in 16 cities of Finland, young people who experience racism and discrimination feel distressed and vulnerable (Henttonen & Kareinen, 2023). If these issues are left unaddressed or exploited, it will increase the risk of radicalization. (Benjamin et al., 2023; Wilson et al., 2022; Xu et al., 2020). Those incidents can profoundly impact the well-being of young people (Trent et al., 2019; Elias & Paradies, 2016; Berman & Paradies, 2008) and make them vulnerable to issues such as limited access to education, employment, and challenges in meeting basic needs and social relationships (Toiviainen et al., 2020). In 2021, according to statistics from Finnish Youth Work, in Lapland, 11.7% of youth (aged 15-28) are not engaged in any form of education, employment, or training, which is concerning (Nuorisotilastot, 2021). Research on these issues within Finnish schools has been limited (Zacheus et al., 2019). In this context, this study aims to create new scientific knowledge of the phenomenon. Furthermore, the ETNO report emphasizes that the voices of young people facing those challenges are often overlooked by the professionals working with them (Henttonen & Kareinen, 2023), which raises significant concerns regarding trust. This disconnection between the lived experiences of young people and public perception calls for bold and critical research that challenges prevailing views. The intrinsic value of this study lies in addressing these overlooked narratives and integrating unexpected perspectives. Consequently, this research adopts a novel and experimental approach to examine how the interconnections between racism, bullying, and radicalization impact youth well-being, incorporating the perspectives of both youth and community professionals, particularly in diverse and remote regions such as Lapland. This doctoral study is a multi-year interdisciplinary project designed to ensure a plurality of voices through collaboration with young people,

educators, social workers, youth workers, and community leaders in Lapland, making the research not just about youth, but conducted alongside them.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The objective of this study is to develop a theoretical framework that combines social identity theory, critical race theory, and ecological systems theory as lenses for examining the connections between racism, bullying, and radicalization. Additionally, it aims to investigate the role of the community in preventing these issues. Social identity theory explains how group affiliations impact self-esteem and behavior in youth (e.g. Evans et al., 2023), critical race theory highlights the systemic nature of racism and bullying in the structural institution (e.g. Lawrence & Hylton, 2022), and ecological systems theory emphasizes the role of community, institutions, and broader societal factors in shaping individual outcomes (e.g. Crawford, 2020; Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Addressing these interconnections holistically is essential for enhancing youth well-being, ensuring community responsibility, and preventing the adverse outcomes of radicalization in Lapland.

Research Objectives and Questions:

The primary objectives of this research are:

1. To analyze the forms of racism and bullying among youth in Lapland from the perspective of young people and professionals.
2. To explore how young people and professionals perceive racism and bullying contribute to the radicalization of youth in Lapland.
3. To examine the role of community structures, initiatives, and services in addressing these issues.
4. To propose community-based strategies to enhance youth well-being and prevent radicalization.

The interconnection between racism, bullying, and radicalization has not been explored in the context of Finland earlier, specifically focusing on remote and culturally unique regions like Lapland. Furthermore, there is a lack of research that specifically focuses on the perspective of youth trust in professionals who support them at the local level in the context of Lapland. As a result, the study will evaluate how young people and professionals perceive these things, what their understanding of those contexts and their interlinkages by examining the following research questions:

1. What are the interconnections between racism, bullying, and radicalization?
2. What are the limitations of services provided by professionals for youth well-being?
3. How can professionals enhance trust among youth for their well-being through community engagement?

Research materials and methods

This study will use a qualitative approach to explore the connections between racism, bullying, and radicalization among youth in Lapland, focusing on the community's role in addressing these issues for improved youth well-being. The study will be conducted in three cities of Finnish Lapland. Participants will include youth aged 15–24, as well as community stakeholders such as teachers, educators, youth workers, social workers, city officials, and community leaders. A purposive sampling method will ensure diverse participation (Palinkas et al., 2015). The research will involve 15 in-depth interviews (five from each city) with young people, and three group interviews in three cities with community stakeholders (five to eight participants each). The in-depth interview and group interview will increase the richness of the data (Lambert & Loiselle, 2008). Furthermore, the data will be analyzed through thematic analysis to uncover recurring themes and patterns. The interviews will be digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Ethical Considerations

The study will adhere to the principles of ethical research as outlined by the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity (TENK, 2019; TENK, 2023). It has already obtained ethical review permission from the University of Lapland's Ethical Committee on June 23, 2025.

Work outline

Months (2025-2027)	2025	2026			2027		
Activity or Task	(September-December 2025)	Every 4month	box=	box=	Every 4month	box=	box=
Ethical approval has already been obtained. Communication is ongoing with three cities, schools, Lapha, and other institutions for research approval and data collection.							
Data Collection (Individual interviews with 15 youth participants, three group interviews with approximately 15-24 community professionals from three cities)							
Data Analysis and Interpretation							
Writing and publishing 3 Scientific Articles	1		1		1		
Participating in Scientific Conference/ Seminars							
Educational and awareness-raising writings for the non-scientific community							
Writing a Dissertation							
PhD Defense							

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