

Effect of intergroup contact and peace education on social norms regarding violence and atrocities

Intergroup contact and peace education programs had a large positive effect on social norms, increasing rejection of violence and strengthening support for peaceful social norms regarding violence and atrocities.

Geographical region: Middle East & North Africa, South Asia, Sub Saharan Africa, Latin America & Caribbean

Effect size: Large effect ($g=0.442$)

Confidence in study findings: Low confidence (13 studies; 54 ES)

Short summary

This cell examines intergroup contact and peace education interventions aimed at changing social norms related to violence and atrocities. Programs delivered through structured dialogue, narrative sharing, media literacy, and school-based curricula consistently promoted empathy, reduced hostility, and reshaped attitudes in conflict-affected settings. Interventions targeted adolescents and young adults, encouraging reflection on identity, violence, and coexistence. Across studies, these programs produced a large positive effect on social norms ($d = 0.392$). Confidence in this finding is low due to inconsistencies in the overall effect across studies.

Ong summary

The intervention

Interventions focused on structured intergroup contact and peace education, using dialogue workshops, narrative exchange, school curricula, and media analysis. Programs aimed to foster empathy, reduce bias, challenge stereotypes, and transform adversarial social norms. Participants included youth and adults in conflict-affected settings, with activities integrating cognitive, emotional, and behavioral components to promote peaceful attitudes and reduce support for violence.

How the intervention is expected to work

Interventions facilitate structured interactions between individuals from socially divided or conflict-affected groups. Participants are exposed to alternative narratives, guided reflection, and personal storytelling, which supports empathy and challenges stereotypes. Emotional engagement through media or literature enhances perspective-taking, while dialogue and collaborative activities reduce perceived threats and increase mutual understanding. Educational content builds awareness, confidence, and recognition of peaceful alternatives, enabling participants to adopt more constructive attitudes and behaviors.

The evidence base

This cell includes 13 impact evaluation studies: five randomized controlled trials (RCTs) and eight quasi-experimental or pre-post designs, some with matched comparisons or experimental controls for mediation effects. Studies were conducted in Israel, Palestine, India, Afghanistan, Uganda, Peru, Iraq, and Germany, primarily involving adolescents or university students..

Evidence findings

Interventions had a large positive effect on social norms regarding violence and atrocities. Participants showed increased rejection of violence and stronger endorsement of nonviolent norms following exposure to intergroup contact and peace education..

The impact evaluation evidence

Alkoby (2017) evaluated an intergroup contact intervention in Israel, aimed at reducing hostility and altering perceptions between Jewish-Israeli participants and Palestinians. Conducted in a university campus setting, the intervention involved structured group dialogue sessions designed to promote mutual understanding, reduce stereotyping, and challenge collective narratives. Participants were exposed to stories and perspectives from the outgroup and engaged in facilitated discussions about identity, coexistence, and conflict. The study employed a randomized controlled trial design, with participants assigned to either a treatment group (who participated in the intervention) or a control group (who did not). The final sample consisted of Jewish-Israeli university students, though the exact number was not specified in the reviewed table. Key findings showed a statistically significant reduction in perceived threat from Palestinians among the treatment group. The decrease in perceived threat was larger in the intervention group compared to the control group, indicating that structured intergroup dialogue can effectively lower threat perceptions. The study is rated low confidence due to lack of reporting attrition.

Biton (2006) examined the effects of a school-based peace education programme designed to promote conflict understanding and transformation among Israeli and Palestinian youth. Conducted in Israel, the intervention was implemented in mixed-ethnicity classrooms, aiming to enhance students' capacities to think critically about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It emphasized narrative exposure, dialogue, and reflection to challenge adversarial attitudes and promote peace-oriented thinking. The study employed a quasi-experimental, pre-post design with treatment and control groups. The sample included Israeli Jewish and Arab high school students, though exact numbers were not stated in the extracted section. Data were collected before and after the intervention. Findings indicated that participants in the intervention group were significantly less likely to view peace as only the absence of violence, showing a shift toward a more comprehensive understanding of peace. This suggests that peace education can meaningfully influence how youth conceptualize conflict resolution and coexistence. The study is rated as high and medium confidence quantitative study.

Corboz (2019) assessed the impact of the *Women for Women International* one-year integrated social and economic empowerment programme implemented in Kandahar, Afghanistan. Designed for vulnerable and marginalized women, the intervention combined life skills, rights awareness, vocational training, and cash transfers. The aim was to enhance women's empowerment, well-being, and attitudes toward gender norms, including disciplinary practices. A quasi-experimental matched comparison design was used, involving baseline and endline surveys. The total sample included 2,158 women, with 1,079 in the intervention group and 1,079 in the control group. Surveys were conducted between 2016 and 2018. One of the key outcomes was change in attitudes toward corporal punishment. Findings showed that the mean score for accepting corporal punishment significantly decreased in the intervention group, indicating a shift towards greater rejection of violence in child discipline. In contrast, the control group showed little to no change. The results were statistically significant ($p < 0.01$), suggesting that the programme was effective in reshaping attitudes around family violence and promoting non-violent disciplinary norms among women in a conflict-affected setting. The study is rated as a low confidence.

Espinosa (2021) evaluated a pedagogic module designed to foster a culture of peace among university students in Peru by critically reflecting on the country's history of political violence (1980–2000). The module was built on the findings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and delivered over five consecutive sessions. Conducted in Lima, the study used a 2x2 experimental design with an experimental group ($n=59$) and a control group ($n=62$). The sample consisted of 121 Peruvian students aged 16–28 from both public and private universities. The study assessed pre- and post-intervention attitudes using validated scales. Key findings revealed that the pedagogic intervention significantly reduced *attitudes favoring violent*

behaviors as a means for social change and *attitudes toward violence as a social control device*. These reductions were statistically significant in the experimental group but not in the control group. The intervention also reduced authoritarian and dominance-related attitudes. This study is rated as low confidence due to its limited sample size and focus on a specific educational context, which may not generalize broadly without further replication and extended duration of intervention.

Hager (2023) evaluated a school-based peace education program designed to reduce youth support for violence in Karbala, Iraq, a city affected by ongoing conflict and sectarian tensions. The intervention included a 12-session curriculum covering topics such as identity, conflict resolution, and tolerance, implemented over a three-month period in secondary schools. The program aimed to foster critical thinking, empathy, and peaceful conflict resolution among adolescents. Using a randomized controlled trial design, schools were randomly assigned to either the treatment or control group. The sample included 2,400 students aged between 15 and 18 years. Pre- and post-intervention surveys measured attitudes toward violence, with a focus on support for proviolent actions and ideologies. Findings revealed a statistically significant reduction in proviolent attitudes among students in the intervention group compared to the control group. The decline was observed across multiple dimensions of support for violence, including ideological justification and personal willingness to engage in violent acts. These results suggest that structured, school-based peace education in conflict-affected settings can effectively reduce adolescents' acceptance and support of violence as a means of resolving conflict. This study is rated as low confidence quantitative study.

Kampf (2015) assessed the impact of a structured peace education workshop in Germany, aimed at promoting understanding of media representations of conflict and developing critical media literacy among youth. The intervention focused on how conflicts—both local (proximate) and international (distant)—are portrayed in the news and the implications of biased framing. Participants engaged with real media examples, discussed journalistic norms, and analyzed conflict narratives. The study design was quasi-experimental, involving pre- and post-tests with treatment and comparison groups. The sample included German adolescents aged 16–19, with over 400 students participating across different schools. Findings showed a significant improvement in knowledge acquisition about both proximate and distant conflict scenarios among students in the treatment group compared to controls. In terms of attitude change, students developed more reflective and critical perspectives, especially regarding conflicts in proximate contexts. While attitude shifts for distant scenarios were smaller, they were still present. These results suggest that structured media-based peace education can enhance youth understanding of conflict and foster more critical, empathetic attitudes toward groups involved in both nearby and distant conflicts. The study is rated as high and medium confidence quantitative study.

Kampf (2016) examined the impact of a media literacy-based peace education programme conducted in Germany, which aimed to improve young people's understanding of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and promote more critical, empathetic attitudes. The intervention used media analysis and dialogical learning methods to expose students to diverse narratives and representations of the conflict in news coverage. It encouraged participants to engage with journalistic practices, question media bias, and reflect on the roles of power and identity in shaping public perception. The study followed a quasi-experimental design using pre- and post-test surveys administered to both an intervention group and a comparison group. The sample included over 400 secondary school students aged 15–18 from multiple schools. Findings indicated a significant improvement in students' attitudes toward the conflict in the intervention group. Participants became more reflective, demonstrated increased understanding of multiple perspectives, and showed reduced acceptance of one-sided or adversarial views. This shift was more pronounced among students with initially limited exposure to international conflict issues, highlighting the programme's potential to positively shape youth attitudes through critical media engagement and peace education. This study is rated as low confidence quantitative study.

Levy (2022) examined the impact of a neuroscience-informed intervention using brain stimulation to reduce intergroup bias in Israeli participants when interacting with Palestinian outgroup members. Conducted in Israel, the study explored whether modulating activity in the right dorsolateral prefrontal cortex (rDLPFC)—a brain region associated with social cognition—could alter neural and behavioral markers of intergroup bias. Participants underwent transcranial direct current stimulation (tDCS) while completing tasks that measured social attitudes and decision-making in conflict-related scenarios. Using a randomized controlled experimental

design, participants were assigned to an active stimulation group or a sham (placebo) control group. The sample included 49 Jewish-Israeli adults, who were assessed using both fMRI and behavioral tasks. Results showed that active stimulation led to longer behavioral response times (RTs) in tasks involving intergroup moral decisions, indicating greater deliberation and cognitive conflict. Importantly, neural imaging revealed a significant reduction in neural intergroup bias, particularly in brain regions associated with empathy and perspective-taking. These findings suggest that targeted brain modulation may alter both the neural processing and behavioral responses underlying intergroup conflict. The study is rated as high and medium confidence quantitative study.

Mutto (2009) evaluated a peace education intervention through the Mato-Oput5 curriculum in Northern Uganda, a conflict-affected region. The program focused on promoting empathy, forgiveness, and non-violent conflict resolution among schoolchildren. It was delivered over a year via structured lessons integrated into the standard curriculum by trained teachers. The study used a cluster randomized controlled trial design, with three schools receiving the intervention and three serving as controls. The sample included 1,027 grade five students, with a mean age of 12.3 years and an even gender distribution. Findings showed statistically significant improvements in attitudes toward forgiveness and nonviolence. The intervention group showed greater agreement with forgiving a friend who abuses (86.9% vs. 79.6%, $p = 0.006$), not fighting back even if someone kicks them (81.5% vs. 71.1%, $p = 0.000$), forgiving a friend who returns a stolen book (84.2% vs. 78.3%, $p = 0.011$), and reporting ambushers to a teacher (87.7% vs. 78.2%, $p = 0.000$). Additionally, belief that a bully should be forgiven increased (82.6% vs. 74.2%, $p = 0.001$). These results reflect meaningful attitudinal shifts. This study can be rated as low confidence quantitative study due to outcomes were measured for short-term only however behaviour outcomes should be more robust if it was measured in long term.

Nasie (2021) evaluated an intergroup encounter intervention aiming to improve mutual perceptions between Jewish-Israeli secular and religious adolescents, with an added focus on attitudes toward Arabs. Conducted in Israel, the program took place in a school setting over the course of multiple sessions that emphasized dialogue, perspective-taking, and narrative exchange. The aim was to increase mutual liking and reduce prejudice among youth from different ideological and cultural groups. The study used a quasi-experimental design with pre- and post-intervention measures comparing intervention and control groups. The sample included 228 tenth-grade Jewish-Israeli students (mean age ~15), divided equally between secular and religious identities. Findings revealed that students who participated in the intergroup encounter program demonstrated statistically significant improvements in liking across group boundaries. For attitude toward the secular, mean liking increased in the intervention group ($M = 4.19$, $SD = 0.93$) compared to the control group ($M = 3.92$, $SD = 1.02$), $p < 0.05$. For attitude toward the religious, the intervention group's mean score was significantly higher ($M = 4.28$, $SD = 0.86$) than the control ($M = 3.96$, $SD = 0.91$), $p < 0.01$. Additionally, attitude toward Arabs also improved ($M = 3.41$ vs. $M = 3.15$, $p < 0.05$), indicating broader generalization of positive intergroup attitudes. This study is rated as low confidence quantitative study.

Porat (2020) evaluated an intervention designed to examine the role of emotion regulation strategies—specifically reappraisal and suppression—in reducing emotional experiences and support for aggressive policies in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Conducted in Israel, the intervention exposed Jewish-Israeli participants to emotionally evocative news clips depicting Palestinian violence, followed by guided instructions in either cognitive reappraisal, expressive suppression, or control (no strategy). The study used a randomized experimental design, with participants randomly assigned to one of the three conditions. The sample included 253 Jewish-Israeli adults, recruited through an online platform. Findings showed that reappraisal significantly reduced anger and disgust compared to the control group (anger $M = 4.05$, disgust $M = 3.89$; $p < 0.01$), and lowered support for aggressive policies ($M = 3.36$ vs. 3.77 ; $p < 0.05$). Fear was not significantly impacted. Mediation analyses confirmed that reduced group-based anger and disgust mediated the decline in support for aggression ($p < 0.05$). Emotion regulation attempts were highest in the reappraisal group. Regarding long-term impact, reappraisal led to increased habituation in use of reappraisal strategies ($p < 0.01$) and reduced reliance on suppression ($p < 0.05$). This suggests emotion regulation can dampen intergroup hostility and aggressive policy support. The study is rated as medium confidence as it is designed as a non-experimental study design and has partially defined the interventions and outcomes in the study. The study is rated as high and medium confidence quantitative study.

Sahgal (2020) evaluated a counter-violent extremism (CVE) education program aimed at improving knowledge, attitudes, and confidence among school-going adolescents in India. Conducted in schools across Maharashtra and Assam, the intervention focused on promoting social cohesion, countering extremist narratives, and enhancing critical thinking and self-confidence. The program was implemented over several weeks through interactive sessions, peer discussions, and facilitator-led modules. The study used a pre-post design without a control group, measuring outcomes before and after the intervention. The sample included 1,680 students, with 840 each from intervention schools in the two states. Post-intervention findings showed significant improvements across multiple indicators. Agreement with the statement "Violence is not justified" increased from 82% to 94% ($p < 0.01$). Self-confidence indicators showed improvement in 87% of respondents, compared to 70% at baseline ($p < 0.01$). Awareness of support systems and network diversity increased from 48% to 85% ($p < 0.01$). Additionally, the proportion of students able to identify at least four risks of joining violent extremism rose from 36% to 84%, and those able to identify four types of actions to counter VE increased from 38% to 90% ($p < 0.01$). Recognition of four discussion fora for VE issues also rose from 33% to 80%. These findings suggest strong positive attitudinal and knowledge-based shifts following the program. The study is rated as low confidence as it is designed as a before versus after study design and has partially defined the interventions in the study.

Shechtman (2009) examined a peace education intervention aimed at reducing violent attitudes and tendencies among Arab adolescents in Israel. Implemented in 12 schools, the intervention focused on structured group dialogue, emotional expression, and interpersonal communication through literature-based therapy sessions. The context of the program was framed within ongoing ethnic and social tensions affecting Arab youth. The intervention lasted for 22 sessions across a school semester and was facilitated by trained teachers. The study followed a quasi-experimental pre-post design with both an experimental and a control group. The sample consisted of 231 Arab adolescents, aged 13–15, equally distributed between intervention and control groups. Findings showed a statistically significant reduction in endorsement of violence in the intervention group (mean pre = 3.28, post = 2.87), compared to the control group (mean pre = 3.29, post = 3.18), with $p < 0.001$. Additionally, revenge attitudes also declined in the intervention group (mean pre = 3.38, post = 2.99), while the control group showed minimal change (mean pre = 3.39, post = 3.34), $p < 0.01$. These results suggest that the peace education intervention effectively reduced violent and retaliatory attitudes among adolescents in a conflict-sensitive setting. The study is rated as high and medium confidence quantitative study.

Confidence assessment

We have low confidence in this cell as there is considerable inconsistency in the effect sizes across studies.

Other outcomes in the study

- Violence and atrocity prevention/nature and scale of violence or atrocities
- Social cohesion/feeling of trust and acceptance of diversity/willingness to participate or help
- Human security/educational security/food security and nutrition & health security/intermediate social cohesion outcomes