

Effect of Intergroup contact and peace education on Sense of belonging

Intergroup contact and peace education programs have small effects on sense of belonging. Some interventions foster trust, social cohesion, and national pride, while others show limited effects or reductions in self-efficacy.

Geographical region: Europe & Central Asia, Middle East & North Africa, Sub Saharan Africa

Effect size: Small effect ($g = 0.089$)

Confidence in the study findings: Low Confidence (5 studies; 14 ES)

Short Summary

This cell examines intergroup contact and peace education interventions aimed at enhancing a sense of belonging. Across studies, programs produced a small effect: exposure to diverse communities sometimes strengthened national and ethnic identities, while other interventions had limited impact or reduced self-efficacy. Overall confidence is low due to most studies being low-quality and inconsistent effect sizes.

Long summary

The Intervention

Interventions focused on structured intergroup contact and peace education to promote trust, social cohesion, and belonging. Programs included volunteering, theater, structured dialogue, and peacebuilding activities. Some interventions increased trust and community engagement, while others showed limited effects or reduced self-efficacy.

How the intervention is expected to work

These interventions aim to enhance a sense of belonging by fostering trust, empathy, and shared identity through structured interactions between diverse groups. Activities such as volunteering, theater, and national service create opportunities for meaningful relationships and collective action, reinforcing connection to communities. Exposure to different perspectives broadens understanding and promotes inclusion. Effectiveness depends on sustained engagement, equal-status interactions, and institutional support to achieve lasting attitudinal change.

The evidence base

This cell includes five impact evaluation studies and one systematic review. Study designs include quasi-experimental, difference-in-differences, field experiments, lab-in-the-field experiments, and instrumental variable regression.

Studies were conducted in Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Liberia, and Nigeria.

Evidence findings

Interventions had a small effect on sense of belonging. Some programs increased trust and national pride, while others produced limited change or reductions in self-efficacy.

The review evidence

The review evidence suggested that the effect of intergroup contact and peace education intervention is mixed on a sense of belonging.

The Impact evaluation evidence

Aladysheva (2017) evaluates the *LivingSideBySide*® (LSBS) peacebuilding program in Kyrgyzstan, focusing on its impact on students' sense of belonging. It uses a quasi-experimental design with a difference-in-means approach, analyzing treatment and control groups across various schools. The sample includes 912 students, with subgroups analyzed for gender and ethnicity. Results show a significant increase in trust towards first-time acquaintances (0.32, $p < 0.01$), a decrease in self-efficacy (-2.50, $p < 0.01$), and reduced feelings of belonging in Kyrgyzstan (-0.19, $p < 0.01$). Other results highlight positive program impacts on girls, such as improved trust in same-ethnicity peers (0.17, $p < 0.05$) and similar trends for boys. The study is rated high confidence.

Alaref (2019) evaluates the impact of the National Volunteer Service Program (NVSP) in Lebanon using a quasi-experimental design with a difference-in-difference (DiD) approach. The intervention involved inter-community volunteering and soft skills training, targeting youth from 22 NGOs (treatment group) and comparing them to youth from 16 non-selected NGOs (comparison group). The final sample included 759 youth (473 treatment, 286 comparison). The program had a statistically significant impact on the sense of belonging, with a 0.3–0.4 standard deviation (S.D.) increases for selected youth, mainly because non-selected youth experienced a sharper decline in belonging perceptions. Results show that perceptions of belonging to the Lebanese community increased by 0.35–0.36 S.D. The study is rated low confidence due to its little description of the intervention.

Feuchte (2020) investigated the effects of Forum Theater interventions in postwar Liberia. Conducted in two communities with a sample of 218 diverse Liberians, the field experiment evaluated two plays: one addressing rebuilding trust after intergroup conflict and another focusing on a public health issue. Participants were divided into groups corresponding to each play, with a control group receiving no intervention. The study found that both Forum Theater interventions enhanced participants' sense of community and willingness to engage in collective action. Specifically, the effect sizes for improvements in the sense of community were 0.452 and 0.537. Notably, only the play centered on intergroup conflict increased intergroup trust and reduced social distance toward a disliked group. The study is Low confidence quantitative study.

Karim (2018) examines gender balancing in the Liberian National Police (LNP) using a lab-in-the-field experiment with 612 officers in Monrovia, Liberia. Participants were randomly assigned to 102 groups of six officers with varying gender compositions (0%, 33%, 67%, or 100% women). The study found that increasing female representation improved unit cohesion in terms of preference alignment, with all-female groups exhibiting an increase of 0.171 standard deviations ($p < 0.05$) compared to all-male groups. However, collegiality declined slightly, with all-female groups showing a 0.132 standard deviation increase in non-collegiality, though not statistically significant. Gender balancing did not enhance sensitivity to sexual and gender-based violence, as neither men nor women showed a significant tendency to identify such crimes (effect sizes: 0.839 for all-female groups, -0.943 for four-women groups, 0.328 for two-women groups, all statistically insignificant). Male officers' beliefs about women's roles in policing remained unchanged (effect sizes: 0.0058 for all-female groups, 0.0228 for four-women groups, -0.0441 for two-women groups, all statistically insignificant). However, participation increased significantly in groups with more women (0.478 standard deviations for

all-female groups, $p < 0.05$). The study is rated as low confidence quantitative study because there was no information about the sample size.

Okunogbe (2018) investigates the impact of Nigeria's National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) program, which randomly assigns university graduates to serve in different regions, on interethnic relationships and national identity. Conducted in Nigeria, this quantitative study employs an instrumental variable (IV) regression design with a sample of 644 respondents, focusing on Yoruba participants posted to non-Yoruba regions. Results show that serving in a non-Yoruba region increased pride in being Nigerian ($\beta = 0.181$, $p < 0.1$), reduced interactions with Yoruba peers (-0.403 , $p < 0.01$), and improved interethnic dating rates ($+0.144$, $p < 0.05$) but had limited effects on attitudes toward other ethnic groups. This study can be rated as low confidence quantitative study due to generalizability is limited to Yoruba participants and self-reported data could introduce recall or social desirability bias.

Confidence assessment

The cell's confidence is low due to low confidence studies and inconsistency in the effects sizes.

Link to review summaries

Sonnenfeld (2021)

Other outcomes in the study

- Human security/Educational security/ Intermediate social cohesion outcomes/ Physical security/ Economic security
- Violence and atrocity prevention/Nature and scale of violence or atrocities
- Social cohesion/Feelings of trust/ Acceptance of diversity/ Willingness to participate or help/ Intermediate social cohesion outcomes