

The effect of media and communication on sense of belonging

Effects: Mostly moderate to large positive effects

Confidence in study findings: High and medium confidence and low confidence

Headline finding: Media and communication interventions—including counter-narratives and peace-promoting media like radio drama - can have a moderate to large effect on an individuals' sense of belonging.

Short summary

The interventions assessed include counter-narratives (targeted communication meant to undermine extremist ideologies) and media for peace (radio dramas or campaigns promoting empathy and shared identity). The intended outcome i.e. an increase in individuals' sense of belonging, though achieved was not consistent. In fact, most studies did not find significant positive effects on belonging, and a few even reported negative outcomes, especially in unstable environments or where interventions were not tailored to local needs.

Long summary

The intervention

Two types of interventions were studied. First, counter-narratives, which are short media communications such as videos, texts, social media content, were used to reduce violent extremist narratives and susceptibility to radicalisation. Second, media for peace interventions were assessed which included longer-form radio dramas or broadcast campaigns. These interventions were typically implemented in post-conflict or fragile settings across Africa, the Middle East, and Asia.

How the intervention is expected to work

These interventions functioned through theories such as narrative persuasion, the transportation-imagery model, and social norm change. By presenting alternative narratives or emotionally compelling stories, they aimed to reshape audience attitudes, reduce intergroup hostility, and promote inclusive group identities.

The evidence base

Carthy et al., 2020 synthesised findings from 19 studies, primarily randomised controlled trials, of counter-narrative messaging to combat violent extremism using videos, print material and computer games. Six of these studies report findings related to outcomes capturing a sense of belonging.

Sonnenfeld et al., 2021 included 24 studies evaluating 31 interventions, with five on media-based approaches such as radio dramas, mostly conducted in fragile or post-conflict **settings, two of which report a sense of belonging as an outcome.**

The review findings

Counter-narratives have a large effect reducing in-group favouritism ($g=-0.90$, one study) and out-group hostility ($g=-0.36$, six studies).

Two studies reporting the effect of media for peace interventions report moderate effects but in opposite directions. There is a positive effect in Rwanda ($g=0.19$) and an adverse effect in DRC ($g=-0.15$).

Effects: Positive effects range in absolute terms from 0.15 to 0.90, with one adverse effect of 0.19.

Confidence assessment: The reviews are rated high confidence [Sonnenfeld (2021)] systematic review and low confidence [Carthy (2020)] systematic review. The confidence in the cell findings is moderate because of the low number of effect sizes, and one conflicting effect.

Sources: Carthy (2020) and Sonnenfeld (2021)

1. Carthy, S. L., Doody, C. B., Cox, K., O'hora, D., & Sarma, K. M. (2020). Counter-narratives for the prevention of violent radicalisation: A systematic review of targeted interventions. *Campbell Systematic Reviews*, 16(3), e1106.
2. Sonnenfeld, A., Doherty, J., Berretta, M., Shisler, S., Snilstveit, B., Evers, J., ... & Obaid, R. (2021). Strengthening intergroup social cohesion in fragile situations. *3ie Systematic Review*, 46.