

ORIGINAL CONTRIBUTION

Role of Intergroup Contact as Relational Initiative to Alleviate Prejudice among Faith Based Groups

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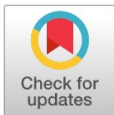
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Abstract— Prejudice is defined as negative attitudes, feelings, or intentions toward other people based on the belief that they belong to different social groups. Prejudice influences young people's social experiences and contributes to intergroup conflicts and patterns of social exclusion throughout their lives. In this regard, the current study was conducted to see the effectiveness of intergroup contact in mitigating prejudice among university students and to examine the efficacy of intergroup contact in mitigating prejudice between out-of-sect university students. Because of this, this study used a quantitative research design and survey research methods. The data was collected from students attending the three most prominent universities in the province of Punjab, which are situated in the province's south, north, and center, respectively. A questionnaire was used as a tool for data collection. Preexisting scales regarding variables were adapted and used in the study. The amended scale was provided to the students through email and the instant messaging application WhatsApp. The information was gathered from 218 respondents using a convenience sampling technique. Regression and correlation analyses were used in order to analyze respondents' inferential responses. The study results showed that there is a substantial and positive correlation between contact with outside sects and reduced prejudice towards those sects. Moreover, contact with out-group sects showed a positive and significant effect on attitudes toward prejudice reduction among university students. In the Pakistani context, there are many studies regarding prejudice, but research gaps exist. This study is trying to uncover the research gap of preexisting studies regarding prejudice. Our study focused on prejudice among faith-based groups; the area that was uncovered in this study is the role of Intergroup Contact as a Relational Initiative to Alleviate Prejudice among Faith-Based Groups.

Index Terms— Prejudice, Intergroup sects, Intergroup conflict, Beliefs, Attitudes

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Introduction

Generally, prejudice is defined as unfavourable evaluations, attitudes, feelings, or intentions against other individuals based on the belief that they belong to certain social groups (Dovidio, Hewstone, Glick, & Esses, 2010). It has been shown that prejudice may begin to emerge at a very early age (Aboud et al., 2012; Dunham, 2017) and that it continues to evolve and alter as adolescents and young adults mature (Levy, Shin, Lytle, & Rosenthal, 2017). Consequently, prejudice influences young people's social experiences and contributes to intergroup conflicts and patterns of social exclusion throughout their lives (Killen, Elenbaas, & Rutland, 2015; Mai, & Thuy, 2015). Consequently, several treatments and interventions have been suggested and tried to minimise bias among children and adolescents (Gabielli, Catalano,

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Maricchiolo, Paolini, & Perucchini, 2022). As children mature, these methods and treatments aim to foster more social integration, inclusion, and harmonious social relationships. Intergroup engagement is one of the most effective therapies for reducing prejudice and strengthening intergroup attitudes and social bonds among adolescents (Woodgate et al., 2020). In the context of this study, "contact" usually means face-to-face interaction between people who belong to easily recognizable social groups, such as racial, ethnic, religious, linguistic, or national groups.

Social psychologists agree that intergroup contact is one of the most effective and strongest ways of fostering better ties between various social groupings (Dovidio et al., 2010). Allport's (1954) Interaction Hypothesis suggests that establishing positive relationships with members of an out-group may reduce prejudice towards the group as a whole. To achieve this effect, social connections with members of out-groups must be characterized by similar goals, intergroup cooperation, and authority support.

Contact between groups decreases bias towards a variety of out-groups, including ethnic and migratory minorities (Pettigrew, 2006). However, just a few studies have examined how the contact effect differs based on the out-group involved in the meeting (Bagci & Blazhenkova, 2020). This issue is not exclusive to the subject of intergroup contact research; it may be seen in other subfields in the field of intergroup relations literature as well (Whitley & Webster, 2019). In the increasingly diverse cultures in which we live, we believe that more research that acknowledges the complexity of intergroup relationships would be beneficial. This would help us get a greater grasp of the dynamics behind bias and its root causes (Mulvey, Hitti, & Killen, 2023). Due to the diversity of social groupings prevalent in contemporary nations, the potential for conflict between social groups exists in the majority of modern societies. However, intergroup conflict is more likely to be detrimental in nations where violent interethnic and religious clashes occur as well as in emerging nations that draw migrants from less developed nations. This is due to the fact that these nations are more likely to have a larger population of individuals from developing nations (Tropp, 2012).

Objectives of the study

- To see the effectiveness of intergroup contact in mitigating prejudice among university students.
- To examine the efficacy of intergroup contact in mitigating prejudice between outer sect university students.

Review of Literature

Reducing prejudice through intergroup contact

People's perceptions of members of out-groups as different from themselves may be one of the reasons why they have prejudices and biases. We might worry that interactions with people from different racial groups will be unpleasant, which could lead us to avoid interacting with them (Mallett, Wilson, & Gilbert, 2008). This indicates that fostering deeper relationships between members of various groups is an effective strategy for reducing bias. People will be more hospitable toward others when they come to see them as more similar to themselves, as being closer to themselves, and when they develop greater care for them. According to the contact hypothesis, when kids from different ethnic groups play together in class, their attitudes towards one another will improve. Also, if we encourage college students to travel abroad, they will meet people from all cultures and get a more positive opinion of them.

In 1954, the landmark U.S. Supreme Court decision *Brown v. Board of Education* provided a significant illustration of the use of intergroup interaction to alter bias. In this case, the U.S. Supreme Court agreed, largely based on the testimony of psychologists, that busing Black children to schools attended primarily by White children, and vice versa would have a positive effect on intergroup attitudes, not only because it would give Black children access to better schools, but also because the resulting intergroup contact would reduce prejudice between Black and White children. At the time this technique was launched, the majority of schools in the United States were racially segregated to an extreme degree.

Following the Supreme Court's decision, the busing programme was implemented, and it had a big impact on American schools. The fact that there were significantly fewer segregated schools in the 1960s after the programme was put into place shows how successfully it changed the student population. Moreover, busing improved Blacks' academic and professional success as well as their willingness to interact with Whites, for instance, through the development of inter-racial friendships (Stephan & Finlay, 1999). Overall, the desegregation of schools in the United States lends credence to the notion that intergroup interaction, at least over the long term, may be effective in altering views. Nonetheless, as a consequence of numerous later rulings by the U.S. Supreme Court, the programme of desegregating schools by busing was not extended into the 1990s.

Although busing students to desegregate schools is a notable example of intergroup interaction, it happens in several other contexts as well. There is strong evidence for the usefulness of intergroup interaction in enhancing group attitudes in a range of settings, including schools, workplaces, the military, and public housing. Pettigrew (2006) did a meta-analysis in which they examined more than 500 research on the impact of intergroup interaction on group attitudes. They discovered that sentiments about interacting groups got more

favourable with time. Furthermore, contact was shown to have favourable impacts on both preconceptions and bias, as well as on several sorts of contracted groups.

Positive benefits of intergroup interaction may be partially attributable to an increase in care for others. (Galinsky & Moskowitz, 2000) Discovered that encouraging students to adopt the viewpoint of a different group member, which improved empathy and connection to the individual, also decreased bias. And the conduct of students on college campuses underscores the significance of interpersonal connections and the risks of failing to do so. (Sidanius, Van Laar, Levin, & Sinclair, 2004) found that students who joined exclusive campus organisations like fraternities, sororities, and minority ethnic groups (like the African Student Union) were more prejudiced to begin with and became less connected to and more intolerant of members of other social groups as they remained in the organisations. It appears that being a part of these groups made students more focused on themselves and people who were very similar to them, which reduced their tolerance for individuals who were different from them.

Pakistan is a developing country with a lot of cultural and religious diversity. This makes it an interesting place to study intergroup conflict. The history of religious persecution and bloodshed in Pakistan stretches back to the nation's founding. Nonetheless, during the late 1970s and early 1980s, Pakistan experienced an intensification of sectarian division as a result of domestic political changes, the repercussions of the Islamic revolution in Iran, and the negative reaction of some Arab nations to the assumption of power by clergy operating from the holy city of Qum. This happened as a consequence of both internal and international political upheavals. The military government of General Mohammad Zia-ul-Haq, which came to power on July 5, 1977, pursued an "Islamization" campaign, which widened sectarian divisions between Sunnis and Shi'ites, on the one hand, and between different Sunni groups, on the other. Against the backdrop of the religious friction that exists between these two communities, both the history of Islam and South Asia play a key role. Sectarian violence is a part of and interacts with larger discussions about Islam's place in public life in Pakistan, a country that considers itself to be an "Islamic state" in some ways. This is because sectarian conflict is so common in Pakistan. The conflict between the Shi'a and Sunnis has lasted for more than a thousand years, but it is still present today.

Despite the fact that religious minorities comprise just around 4% of Pakistan's total population, they are often covered in the media in connection with Pakistan, the second-largest Muslim nation-state in the world. The second difficulty that develops from a restricted emphasis on persecution and exclusion is that it generates the appearance that the experiences of all minority members are identical. This gives the impression that all members of a minority are being treated unfairly and are going through the same thing. It will seem that it makes no difference if a person is Shi'i, Ahmadi, Christian, Hindu, or Sikh since, ultimately, all minorities are victims of what is seen to be a collective rejection by the Pakistani government and society. The individuality, personal history, and agency of individuals of minority groups are diminished as a result of this narrative that is continually being spread. She reduces her varied life and religious experiences to concerns about religious exclusion and a constant struggle against what is typically referred to as "bigotry." Instead, minority belief systems—which include their religious beliefs and practices, as well as matters of piety, religious community, and identity—are complex and varied phenomena that greatly change depending on a person's geographic region, social status, and religious affiliation. In light of this, the purpose of this study was to determine whether intergroup interaction among university students in Punjab, Pakistan aids in reducing prejudice towards other religious students.

Methods

This study was conducted using a quantitative research design with a survey research method. The data was collected from students attending the three most prominent colleges in the province of Punjab, which are situated in the province's south, north, and center, respectively. The Arid Agriculture University in Rawalpindi is located in the northern portion of Punjab, the University of Punjab in Lahore is located in the province's center portion, and BahaUddin Zakariya University is located in the province's southern portion. This study's objective was to examine the phenomena of prejudice and contact closeness between students of various religions in each geographical region of the Punjab province. Additionally, this research tried to guarantee that the greatest number of university students from each region of Punjab were included in the sample. Alpert's scale was adapted to better represent the predominant cultural normative inclinations in Pakistani society. Allport's scale is a measure of prejudice in a society. It is also referred to as Allports Scale of Prejudice and Discrimination or the Allports Scale of Prejudice. It was devised by psychologist Gordon Allport in *The Nature of Prejudice* (1954). The amended scale was provided to the students through email and the instant messaging application WhatsApp. The information was gathered from 218 respondents using a sampling technique known as convenience sampling. After the respondent completed the survey, the data was entered into the SPSS software and analyzed there. By using descriptive analysis, the frequency and percentage of the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents were analyzed. In addition, regression and correlation analyses were used in order to analyze research objectives.

Results

Table I
Descriptive statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Gender	218	1	2	1.75	.435
Study area	218	1	5	2.40	1.334
Marital Status	218	1	3	1.05	.231
Residential Area	218	1	3	1.84	.742
Religion	218	1	4	1.02	.224
Sect	218	1	5	3.50	1.510
Valid N (listwise)	218				

The aforementioned table reveals that the mean value for the gender of the respondents is 1.75, indicating that the majority of respondents fell into category 2, which is female. Regarding the study area of the respondents, the mean value of 2.40 indicated that the majority of the students were studying in the Social Sciences and Humanities and Medicine disciplines. Regarding the marital status of the respondents, the mean value is 1.05, indicating that the majority of the students were never married. Regarding the residential area of the respondents, the mean value of 1.84 indicated that the majority of the students were living in urban areas. Regarding the religion of the respondents, the mean value is 1.02, indicating that the majority of the students belong to the Islamic religion. The mean value for the respondents' sect is 3.50, indicating that the majority of students belong to the Islam AhleHadees and Shia sects.

Table II
Correlations

		COS	POS
COS	Pearson Correlation	1	.302**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	216	215
POS	Pearson Correlation	.302**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	215	215

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

There is a substantial and positive correlation between contact with outside sects and prejudice towards outer sects, as shown by the *r* value of 0.302 and the sig value of 0.000 in the table above. In addition, *r* is less than 0.80, indicating that there is no multicollinearity concern between the variables.

Regression analysis

Table III
Model summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.302 ^a	.091	.087	5.60274

** a. Predictors: (Constant), contact toward outer sects.

The *R* value indicates correlation in the table. The *R* square value implies that a change of one unit in one of the independent variables would have the same effect on the other independent variable. The *R* square value in the table is 0.91, indicating that when an independent variable changes, the dependent variable also changes by 0.91. Thus, the variation of 0.87 in bias against students of outside sects may be explained by independent variables, namely the degree of interaction with students of exterior sects. The modest difference between *R* square and adjusted *R* square shows that the sample result has a more significant impact on the population.

Table IV
ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	670.926	1	670.926	21.373	.000 ^b
	Residual	6686.209	213	31.391		
	Total	7357.135	214			

a. Dependent Variable: POS

b. Predictors: (Constant), COS

ANOVA tables are used to assess whether or not a model adequately fits the data. When *F* is more than 5, and the significance criterion is less than 0.05, the model is deemed well-fitted. The ANOVA table reveals that the *F* value is larger than 5, or 21,373, and the significance level is less than 0.05, or 0.000, suggesting that the model is well-fitted.

Table V
Model summary

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients B	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
1	(Constant)	15.497	1.384		11.198	.000
	COS	.198	.043	.302	4.623	.000

a. Dependent Variable: POS

This table is used to determine the effect of independent variables on the dependent variable, i.e. the effect of the independent variable (intensity of contact with exterior sects) on the dependent variable (prejudice reduction for outer sects). With a coefficient of 0.302 and a significance level of 0.000, the independent variable of the intensity of contact with outside sects demonstrates a positive and statistically significant relationship with prejudice reduction for outer sects. As a consequence, the frequency of interaction with other sects is positively linked with the reduction of prejudice towards such sects.

Discussion

According to the previous study, prejudice influences young people's social experiences and contributes to intergroup conflicts and patterns of social exclusion throughout their lives (Killen et al., 2015; Malik, M. & Sagheer, 2022). The results of our study are the same as those of the previous study which most of the students, particularly those in minority religions, faced many troubles. The factors of prejudice affect the lives of both individuals, one causing the intergroup conflict through his actions and the other facing all these things. As the factor of prejudice is mostly seen in the case of different religions, and such feelings to consider any other religion or a sect of religion inferior is mostly taken from the home and educational institutes where we treat the Christians or Hindus or even Shia, Sunni, Ehlai Hadees etc. sects of Islamic religion inferior to one another and consider own sect or religion superior to them.

Another previous study shows that intergroup conflict is more likely to be detrimental in nations where violent interethnic and religious clashes occur, as well as in emerging nations that draw migrants from less developed nations. This is due to the fact that these nations are more likely to have a larger population of individuals from developing nations (Bhalerao, 2016; Dovidio, Gaertner, Saguy, & Halabi, 2008). Such intergroup conflicts arise because such feelings become strong from our childhood to adolescents, and religions other than Islam are in the minority in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, and their rights are exploited on a high level. Just like other religions, the sects of the Islamic religion also have intergroup conflicts and issues. Therefore, this study supports the intergroup conflicts and prejudice among the sample population and our study's result.

The other previous study results show that Perhaps one of the reasons why individuals may have stereotypes and biases is because they perceive members of out-groups to be distinct from themselves. We may get anxious that our encounters with members of various racial groups may be negative, and these worries may cause us to avoid engaging with those individuals (Mallett et al., 2008).

So our study results support the result of the previous study, which means that the independent variable intensity of contact with outside sects demonstrates a positive and statistically significant relationship with the dependent variable prejudice reduction for outer sects. As a consequence, the frequency of interaction with other sects is positively linked with the reduction of prejudice towards such sects.

Conclusion

Considering the findings of our study, we concluded that the dependent variable, prejudice reduction for outside sects, and the independent variable, intensity of interaction with outside sects, show a positive and statistically significant association. As a result, there

is a positive correlation between the frequency of engagement with other sects and the decline in bias towards them. Additionally, the study's descriptive findings imply that a significant number of respondents fell into category 2, which includes women. The majority of responders were students majoring in social sciences, humanities, or medicine, according to their fields of study. In terms of respondents' religion, the vast majority of students identify as Muslims. Based on the study's findings, it is concluded that there is a large and favourable association between exposure to outside sects and hostility against those sects, as well as a greater impact on the population.

Practical Implications

Intergroup contact is crucial for reducing prejudice and fostering more positive intergroup attitudes. Such research has significant policy-related ramifications. Work on contact emphasises the significance of institutional backing and advocacy for more good intergroup connections, the significance of group equality, the significance of group collaboration, and the significance of favourable media portrayals of intergroup friendships, to mention a few.

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