

INTERGROUP CONTACT AND OUTGROUP DISCRIMINATION: THE ROLE OF SOCIAL NORMS

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Abstract

Tense intergroup relations in multicultural societies reflect the presence of prejudice and discrimination and pose a challenge for the improvement of intergroup relations. According to the social psychology theories, direct intergroup contact is proven as a useful tool in reducing prejudice and discrimination towards the outgroup, thus providing conditions for the improvement of intergroup relations. The role of social norms may be crucial in explaining why intergroup contact is such an effective tool in reducing intergroup prejudice. The purpose of this research is to examine the relation between direct intergroup contact and the tendency to discriminate against the outgroup. We wanted to explore if this relation was mediated by social norms. In total, 361 pupils from 8th and 9th grades from the city of Tetovo, Republic of North Macedonia, are included in this research (195 pupils that study in Albanian and 166 that study in Macedonian language). The average age of the pupils is 13.7. Structural equation modeling was used and the hypothesized model appeared to be a good fit to the data. In the model, direct intergroup contact predicted the discrimination tendency being affected only by family norms. The indirect effect test shows that family norms mediate the relationship between direct intergroup contact and the tendency to discriminate. The model accounted for 48% of the variance discrimination tendency. There were differences in model predictions for the groups of different statuses (i.e. majority and minority). Our results show that direct intergroup contact may be well used in improving intergroup relations and that social norms may be a powerful tool in producing these effects.

Keywords: *direct intergroup contact, tendency to discriminate, family norms*

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Introduction

The contact theory (Allport, 1954) claims that contact with outgroup members contributes to the improvement of intergroup relations, reduces prejudice and discrimination. Studies that have tested the contact hypothesis have proven the effect of contact on intergroup relations of different age groups, which has shown that the contact effect on intergroup attitudes is stronger in children and youngsters than in samples of adults (Pettigrew and Tropp, 2006) which shows that young people are more open and willing to change than adults. However, Allport (1954) emphasizes that the positive effect of contact in intergroup relations, namely in attitudes towards the outgroup would be maximized if the contact is realized under certain conditions. According to him, when groups are set on an equal situation, and if they cooperate to achieve a common goal, but are institutionally supported, then this contributes to the reduction of prejudice and discrimination (Pettigrew, 1998). The intergroup relation research shows that the intergroup contact effect on attitudes towards the outgroup is asymmetrical, respectively it is higher in the members of the majority (Tropp & Pettigrew, 2005). The individuals who have had more friends belonging to minorities most often have less willingness for discrimination and less non-acceptance of migrants (Schlueter & Scheepers, 2010). Regardless of the fact that many research studies have shown the contact effect on intergroup relations, Pettigrew and Tropp (2011), in their metanalytic study, highlight that the association strength of contact to attitudes towards the outgroup has been weak, which leaves space for further research on other factors that mediate or moderate this relation.

Intergroup contact is closely related to the social context, i.e., depending on norms, which in certain contexts allow and encourage positive intergroup contact. Young people who perceive positive expectations of intergroup contact have established longer friendships with outgroup members (Titzmann et al., 2015). Furthermore, social norms and real contact together have a stronger effect depending on the group status. Ingroup norms and contact quality have a joint effect on intergroup relations in minorities. In majorities, the effect of norms and contact is independent and the existence of positive family norms is sufficient to have positive attitudes towards the outgroup (Mähönen, 2011). The interference of social norms in the relation between intergroup contact and intergroup relations is shown by other research studies (Ata et al., 2009; Mähönen, 2011). Given that in some research studies the norms on this relation have played the role of the mediator (De Tezanos-Pinto et al., 2010) while some have proved the role of their moderator (Mähönen et al., 2013), we decided to examine their role in our study. The purpose of this research is to examine the relation between direct

intergroup contact and outgroup discrimination and to test if this relation is mediated by family and peer norms.

Method

Sample

The sample of this research includes 361, 8th and 9th-grade students, in five elementary schools where teaching is conducted in one language, from the city of Tetovo, the Republic of North Macedonia. Of the total number, 195 students study in Albanian² (minority) while 166 in Macedonian (majority). In total, 174 girls and 181 boys were included in the survey, while 6 did not respond on their gender. In terms of grades, 180 students are in 8th, while 181 are in the 9th grade. The average age of the students is 13.7.

Measures and procedure

The tendency to discriminate against outgroup members is measured with adapted tasks by Čorkalo Biruški and Ajduković (2007), which contain eight situations of students' everyday life, while the students had the *Yes* or *No* alternatives for each situation, depending on whether they would have definitely chosen the ingroup member in the given situation. Item example: "If two of my peers, a Macedonian and an Albanian, were hurt and need help, I would have chosen the Macedonian/Albanian."

Direct contact is measured with adapted items by Ajduković and Čorkalo Biruški (2008) which include measuring intergroup contact intensity (level and quantity). In the statement "My personal contact with Macedonians/Albanians" the participants have chosen one of the provided alternatives (a. "I know they live in Tetovo, but I do not come in contact with them", b. "I only have random contact with them", c. "I have acquaintances (I know them and greet them in the street, but I do not socialize with them)", d. "I have friends (we socialize and can count on each other)". For the last two responses, the participants also provided an additional assessment. In the sub-question "such acquaintance/friend of Macedonian/Albanian ethnicity, I have" have chosen one of the provided answers: one or two, some, many. The answers are recoded into eight levels: 0 = *I have no contact*, 1 = *I only have random contact*, 2 = *I have one or two acquaintances*, 3 = *I have a few acquaintances*, 4 = *I have many acquaintances*, 5 = *I have one or two friends*, 6 = *I have some friends*, 7 = *I have many friends*.

² The Republic of North Macedonia is a multicultural country where the majority of citizens are of Macedonian ethnicity, while regarding minorities, the most numerous are citizens of Albanian ethnicity.

Peer norms are measured with a total of four items. For each item, the participants have chosen a level of agreeability on a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*). Item example: “My friends have Macedonian/Albanian friends.”

Family norms are measured with a total of six items. For each item, the participants have chosen a level of agreeability on a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*). Item example: “My father/mother has Macedonian/Albanian friends.”

The questionnaire was administered in groups, at the school premises, during lessons and lasted about 1 class. The questionnaire is translated into two languages, Albanian and Macedonian, and the students have completed it in their native language. The research was anonymous. After obtaining a permit from the parents, the students have voluntarily decided to participate in the research.

Results

Data of the difference of the variable used in the research regarding the participants' ethnicity

The descriptive data on variables used in this research and the tests of differences, considering the ethnicity of participants are shown in Table 1. The participants, on average, report a moderate tendency to discriminate ($M = 4.87$), with high variability in responses. The students tend to discriminate in five of the eight situations offered and there is no difference between students of different ethnic groups.

Regarding family norms, there are statistically significant differences, where, as participants report, the norms of Macedonian parents in terms of interethnic contact are more permissive ($M_M = 2.74$) than the norms of Albanian parents ($M_A = 2.40$). As for peer norms, Albanian students perceive that their peers approve contact with outgroup members to a greater extent ($M_A = 2.70$) than the Macedonian ones ($M_M = 2.43$).

Related to outgroup members contact, the participants, on average, report a low intensity of direct intergroup contact, respectively that they had several acquaintances ($M = 2.57$, $RD = 0 - 7$), while there was no statistically significant difference between participants of Macedonian and Albanian ethnicity.

Table 1.

Presentation of descriptive data on variables used in the research and differences test results regarding the participants' ethnicity

	Sample			Macedonian		Albanian		<i>t</i>
	Response distribution	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	
Tendency to discriminate	0-8	361	4.88 (2.05)	166	4.85 (1.94)	195	4.90 (2.13)	-.19 .845
Family norms	1-4	361	2.55 (1.15)	166	2.74 (1.10)	195	2.40 (1.17)	2.83 <.01*
Peer norms	1-4	361	2.58 (1.13)	166	2.43 (1.11)	195	2.70 (1.13)	-2.31 <.05*
Direct contact	0-7	361	2.57 (2.10)	166	2.74 (2.04)	195	2.42 (2.13)	1.42 .154

The correlations between the contact variables (direct contact), the variables of social norms (family and peer norms), and the relation with the tendency to discriminate are shown in Table 2. The variable of interethnic contact is weakly to moderately positively related to social norms (family and peer norms). The direct contact is weakly positively related to family norms in the entire sample ($r_{\Sigma} = .24$). The students who report that have more intensive direct contact with outgroup members perceive that their families approve contact with outgroup members to a greater extent. There is a weak positive relation between direct contact and peer norms ($r_{\Sigma} = .24$). The students who have direct contact with outgroup members perceive more that their peers approve of interethnic contact. Direct contact is also negatively related to the tendency to discriminate. Social norms are significantly moderately negatively related to the tendency to discriminate, more specifically, family norms ($r_{\Sigma} = -.45$) and peer norms ($r_{\Sigma} = -.34$).

Table 2.

The correlation matrix of variables in the entire sample N=361)

	2	3	4
1. Tendency to discriminate	-.45**	-.34**	-.35**
2. Family norms		.45**	.24**
3. Peer norms			.21**
4. Intergroup contact			

Note: ** Correlation significant at level .01

The role of social norms in the relationship of intergroup contact and the tendency to discriminate against outgroup

In order to test the mediating role of social norms in the relation between direct interethnic contact and the tendency to discriminate, we conducted modeling with structural equations in Amos 22. The decline in fitting a simpler model was tested by the difference in the size of the CFI index. The difference must be equal to or less than .01 for the decline in model fit to be insignificant.

In the first step, we set up the model shown in Figure 1.

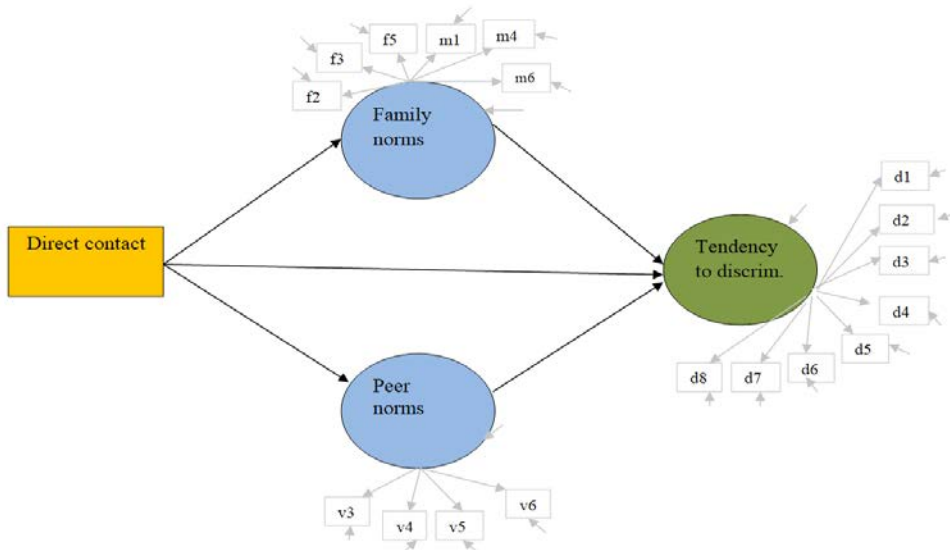


Figure 1. An initial model of the social norm as a mediator of the relation of direct contact and the tendency to discriminate against outgroup

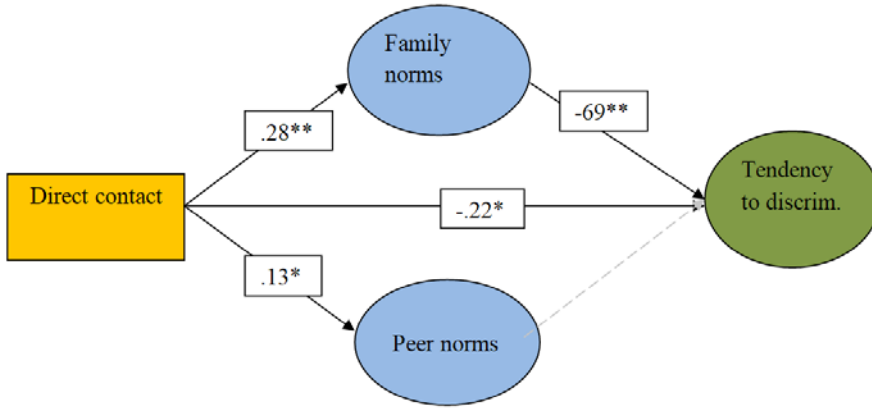
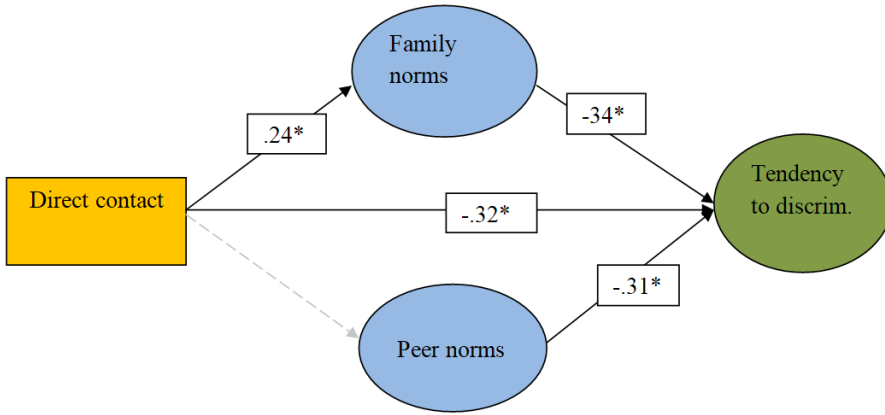
Note: the bright part of the model = the measurement model: the arrows from the ellipse towards the rectangles= factorial saturation; arrows towards ellipses= measurement errors. The dark part of the model= structural model: one-way arrows= regression association

The fit indices for the initial assumed structural model indicate good fit of the model to the data ($\chi^2(143) = 248.82; p < .000; \chi^2/df = 1.74; SRMR = .03; CFI = .94; TLI = .93; RMSEA = .04$). Given that some associations did not prove to be statistically significant (between direct contact and peer norms, between peer norms and tendency to discriminate), these associations were removed in the next step, and the fit of the model to the data was checked again. The model without insignificant associations from the first step (initial model) also showed good fit to the data ($\chi^2(145) = 251.7; p < .000; \chi^2/df = 1.73; SRMR = .03; CFI = .94; TLI = .93; RMSEA = .04$) and does not differ significantly from the fit of the model from the first step ($\Delta CFI = .000$). In this model of the direct relation of contact and social norms, the association of direct contact with family norms proved to be significant. The relation between family norms and the tendency to discriminate was also significant, just as the relation between direct contact and the tendency to discriminate.

To test the mediation relation (the mediation effect of family norms on the relation between direct contact and the tendency to discriminate), structural nested models were tested. With the difference in CFI index ($\Delta CFI = .000$), an insignificant decline in the fit of a simpler model was found ($\chi^2(146) = 271.45; p < .000; \chi^2/df = 1.85; SRMR = .04; CFI = .93; TLI = .92; RMSEA = .04$), which means it is a matter of full mediation. The model accounted for 48% of the variance discrimination tendency and 38% of peer norms. Direct contact is significantly positively related to family norms ($\beta = .32$). Family norms are significant predictors of the tendency to discriminate ($\beta = -.69$), wherein, the participants whose families are less approving of intergroup contacts have a higher tendency to discriminate. Based on mediation tests, the indirect effect of family norms on intergroup contact on the relation between direct contact and tendency to discriminate was found ($IE = -.22, p = .015$).

To verify moderator roles of group status, multigroup testing was conducted using the nested models' method, step-up strategy (Byrne, 2010). Using the mediation model of social norms on the relationship between contact and tendency to discriminate against outgroup, we fitted a multigroup structural model distinguishing between Macedonians and Albanians solely with the assumption of metric invariance of the measured model. The model has shown good fit of data ($\chi^2(286) = 405.51; p < .000; \chi^2/df = 1.41; SRMR = .04; CFI = .93; TLI = .92; RMSEA = .03$). In the following step, constraints on the equality of all regression coefficients between groups were set and the model showed a significant decline in fit of data ($\Delta Gr. CFI = .07$), group status in the mediation of the social norms on the relation between intergroup contact and tendency to discriminate moderate some paths (Figure 2).

Macedonians



Albanians

Figure 2. Structural model of the moderating effect of group status in the model of social norms mediation in the relation between direct contact and the tendency to discriminate against outgroup in Macedonians and Albanians.

Note: one-way interrupted arrows = insignificant regression paths predicted by the initial model; one-way full-line arrows = significant regression paths from the final model; Note: ** significant at level .01; * significant at level .05

Direct contact is related to peer norms only in the Albanian subsample ($\beta = .13$), while in the Macedonian subsample, the relation is insignificant. Peer norms are negatively related to the tendency to discriminate in the Macedonian subsample ($\beta = -.31$), while this relation is insignificant in the Albanian subsample. In both samples, direct contact predicts a lower tendency to discriminate, with this relation being stronger in Macedonians ($\beta_M = -.32$; $\beta_A = -.22$). Direct contact is

related to family norms in both subsamples, but the relation is stronger in the Albanian subsample ($\beta_M = .24$; $\beta_A = .28$).

Family norms are related to the tendency to discriminate. More permissive family norms on contact with outgroup members predict a lower tendency to discriminate. That relation is stronger among the Albanian subsample ($\beta = -.69$), in contrast to Macedonians ($\beta = -.34$).

In the Albanian final model, the tendency to discriminate explains 54% of the variance, while in the Macedonian model, it explains 51%.

Discussion

Intergroup contact can be used as a useful tool to improve intergroup relations. The family norms in our model were shown as significant mediators of the relation between direct contact and the tendency to discriminate while the peer norms did not appear as such. The data obtained in our research showing that family norms are more important than peer norms for the relation between direct intergroup contact and intergroup relationships are in line with other research studies. Previous research has shown that family norms are more important for the relation between intergroup contact and attitudes towards an outgroup, in contrast to other social norms, such as media and school norms (Ata and al., 2009).

Direct contact reduces the tendency to discriminate against the outgroup, but this effect is fully realized when significant others, such as family, maintain contact with the outgroup. It indicates that positive family norms are important for children to behave positively towards the outgroup. The results that signify the positive effect of direct contact on intergroup attitudes, when family norms are more permissive are in line with the results of previous research conducted in other settings (Ata et al., 2009; Mähönen et al., 2013).

Multigroup testing results of social norms mediation on the relation between direct contact and the tendency to discriminate show that the group status (majority-minority) acts as a moderator on several direct paths in the model. A stronger negative direct relation between direct contact and the tendency to discriminate among Macedonians than among Albanians is in line with the findings of Pettigrew and Tropp (2011) who ascertained that contact with outgroup contributes more to reducing prejudice in majority than minority groups. In the subsample of the Macedonian majority, direct contact, i.e., the experiences with outgroup members and peer norms, have an independent effect on intergroup outcomes. This data is consistent with the findings of Mähönen (2011) who also found that direct contact and social norms in the majority have an independent

effect on intergroup attitudes. The negative relation of family norms with the tendency to discriminate is stronger in the minority. In our context, the minority is dominated by traditional families, where the importance of the family in shaping the attitudes and behaviors of children is quite significant.

The research contributes to the clarification that direct contact in real context affects intergroup relations, especially when the family environment is permissive regarding intergroup contact. This implies that intergroup contact between children should be stimulated, as well as creating opportunities for positive meetings. The family norms are important for the contact effect in intergroup relations, which highlights Allport's condition, the support of the authorities/institutions. This suggests that, in order to achieve the effect of improving intergroup relations, support from the authorities is required, just as enabling that contact policy drafting is oriented towards sustainability and not a coincidence.

A limitation of this research is that it has used measuring tools that consist of one item, such as direct contact. This may have affected the measurement results and other researchers may repeat the study with more rigorous measurements of contact.

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МЕЃУГРУПЕН КОНТАКТ И ДИСКРИМИНАЦИЈА НА НАДВОРЕШНАТА ГРУПА: УЛОГАТА НА СОЦИЈАЛНИТЕ НОРМИ

Шерузе Османи Балажи

Кратка содржина

Напнатите меѓугрупни односи во мултикултурните општества укажуваат на присуството на предрасуди и дискриминација и претставуваат предизвик за подобрувањето на меѓугрупните односи. Според теориите на социјалната психологија, директниот меѓугрупен контакт е докажан како корисна алатка за намалување на предрасудите и дискриминацијата кон надворешната група, и на тој начин обезбедуваат услови за подобрување на меѓугрупните односи. Улогата на социјалните норми може да биде клучна во објаснувањето зошто меѓугрупниот контакт е толку ефективна алатка за намалување на меѓугрупните предрасуди. Целта на ова истражување е да се испита врската помеѓу директниот меѓугрупен контакт и склоноста кон дискриминарање на надворешната група. Сакавме да истражиме дали оваа врска е посредувана од социјалните норми. Вкупно 361 ученици од 8 и 9 одделение од градот Тетово, Република Северна Македонија, се вклучени во ова истражување. Од вкупниот број, 195 ученици учат на албански јазик а 166 на македонски јазик. Просечната возраст на учениците е 13,7 години. Користено е моделирање на структурни равенки и хипотезираниот модел добро се вклопува во податоците. Во моделот, директниот меѓугрупен контакт ја предвидел склоноста кон дискриминација под влијание само од семејните норми. Тестовите за индиректен ефект покажуваат дека семејните норми посредуваат во односот помеѓу директниот меѓугрупен контакт и склоноста кон дискриминација. Моделот сочинува 48% од тенденцијата за дискриминација на варијансата. Имаше разлики во предвидувањата на моделите за групи со различен статус (т.е. мнозинство и малцинство). Нашите резултати покажуваат дека директниот меѓугрупен контакт може добро да се искористи во подобрувањето на меѓугрупните односи и дека социјалните норми можат да бидат корисна алатка за креирање на ваквите ефекти.

Клучни зборови: директн̄ен меѓугруп̄ен контиакт̄, склоност̄ кон дискриминација, семејни норми