

Peace & Recovery

Evidence for Stability



PHOTO MARIAJOSE SILVA VARGAS

Most of the world's low-income population live in fragile states, yet rigorous evidence on how to build peace and stability is still limited.

By the year 2030, [roughly two thirds](#) of the world's population living in extreme poverty could be in fragile settings. Innovations for Poverty Action's Peace & Recovery Program (P&R) aims to improve outcomes for conflict- and crisis-affected populations by building the evidence base on reducing violence and fragility, promoting peace, and preventing, managing, and recovering from crisis. The program prioritizes studies that develop, illustrate, or test fundamental theories of peace, violence, and recovery, especially those that are highly policy-relevant, challenge common beliefs, pioneer innovative interventions, and produce evidence where little currently exists.

Key Policy Lessons

1. In post-conflict and fragile settings, relatively inexpensive interventions, including reconciliation programs and intergroup contact, have the potential to increase trust and social links between groups¹.
2. Some programs aimed at helping communities heal should be redesigned to avoid unintended negative effects, such as an increase in violence².
3. Interventions seeking to build social cohesion after conflict may have stronger impacts on behaviors than on personal beliefs, at least in the short-term³.
4. Interventions that target the highest-risk individuals may effectively contribute to reducing violent behavior in high-crime or conflict settings⁴.

Policy Impact

Inter-Religious soccer leagues foster social cohesion in Iraq
(Researcher: Salma Mousa)

P&R supported a randomized evaluation of inter-religious soccer leagues with displaced and returnee Muslims and Christians in a formerly ISIS-occupied area of Iraq. Results revealed that inter-ethnic community programs, like soccer leagues, can foster local-level social cohesion. Encouraged by this evidence, the Ninewa Province Council (the region where the intervention took place) decided to include inter-ethnic programming as part of their reconstruction and development plan for the city of Mosul. They will also support the set-up of inter-ethnic soccer leagues in camps for displaced populations in the region.

1. Cilliers, Dube, & Siddiqi (2016), Mousa (2020), Paluck (2009)
2. Paluck (2010), Cilliers, Dube, & Siddiqi (2016) and Blattman, Hartman, & Blair (2014)
3. Mousa (2020), Paluck & Green (2009) and Scacco & Warren (2018)
4. Blattman, Hartman, & Blair (2014), Heller et al. (2017)

Key Findings

IPA has worked with researchers on more than 80 studies related to peace and recovery. Explore some of our key findings below, or explore more results at poverty-action.org/peace.

Inter-religious soccer leagues in formerly ISIS-affected areas of Iraq can improve tolerance between teammates in post-conflict settings, but these effects do not generalize to strangers from the outgroup.

Iraqi Christians assigned to mixed teams were more likely to train with Muslims six months later and to vote for a Muslim player (not on their team) to receive a sportsmanship award. People who were exposed to the league—either by living within walking distance of a league field, having a family or friend competing, or by attending the final game upon the research staff's invitation—demonstrated more tolerant views. Personal beliefs were harder to modify. This intervention is currently being replicated with NGO partners in Lebanon. [Read more here »](#)

Alternative dispute resolution (ADR) led to less violent conflict resolutions in Liberia.

Communities that attended dispute resolution workshops learned how to resolve disputes with less violence, although the frequency of disputes did not change. Researchers suggest the program might have helped individuals internalize

non-violence norms, in particular in dealing with emotions. However, the program might have encouraged other forms of violence, like violent strikes and protests.

[Read more here »](#)

In Turkey, a program that encourages students to consider others' perspectives increased social cohesion between host and refugee children.

Students who participated in the program demonstrated a 0.27 standard deviation increase in their ability to understand others' perspectives. The program was successful in decreasing the incidence of peer violence and in reducing ethnic segregation. Students who participated in the program also demonstrated more socially positive behaviors, including trust, reciprocity, and altruism, and improvements in their language skills.

[Read more here »](#)

Behavioral therapy and cash transfers reduced criminal behavior among high-risk urban young men in Liberia.

Receiving cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) with or without cash reduced the likelihood of aggressive and criminal



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behavior among participants and improved some measures of self-control and self-image. CBT plus cash amplified and prolonged these benefits. Cash alone reduced crime in the short-run, but effects dissipated within a year. [Read more here »](#)

A community-level truth and reconciliation program increased forgiveness, but worsened mental health in Sierra Leone.

A community-based reconciliation program increased forgiveness toward perpetrators of crimes and significantly increased trust in ex-combatants, but it also worsened psychological wellbeing—increasing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and anxiety. [Read more here »](#)

Sources

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2. Giliars, Jacobus, Oeindrija Dube, and Bilal Siddiqi. "Reconciling after civil conflict increases social capital but decreases individual well-being." *Science* 352, no. 6287 (2016): 787-794. <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.aad9682>
3. Heller, Sara B., Anuj K. Shah, Jonathan Guryan, Jens Ludwig, Sendhil Mullainathan, and Harold A. Pollack. "Thinking, fast and slow? Some field experiments to reduce crime and dropout in Chicago." *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 132, no. 1 (2017): 1-54.
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Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA) is a research and policy non-profit that discovers and promotes effective solutions to global poverty problems. IPA designs, rigorously evaluates, and refines these solutions and their applications together with researchers and local decision-makers, ensuring that evidence is used to improve the lives of the world's poor. Our well-established partnerships in the countries where we work, and a strong understanding of local contexts, enable us to conduct high-quality research. This research has informed hundreds of successful programs that now impact millions of individuals worldwide.

