

# Grounded in experiences: Understanding intergroup contact and prejudice



## RESEARCH

‘Equality revisited: A cultural meta-analysis of intergroup contact and prejudice’

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## Background

Across the globe, contact between members of different groups is unavoidable with increasing levels of multiculturalism. However, increased diversity is often associated with greater conflict and prejudice. One strategy to reduce prejudice has been to promote more contact between different ethnic and cultural groups. This has been applied across the world as a way to curb these problems.

However, little is known about whether the larger cultural context may affect how people experience intergroup contact and whether intergroup contact always reduces prejudice. One of the preconditions of contact interventions is equality of status between groups. Yet, cultures differ substantially in their levels of social hierarchies and how they treat equality.

To overcome these limitations, it is important to consider all the research evidence. Professor Ronald Fischer of The Centre for Applied Cross-cultural Research, part of Victoria University of Wellington, contributed to a meta-analysis that examined how culture may influence contact effects on prejudice.

## Main research findings

This study focused on the influence of cultural levels of equality, hierarchy, and social dominance values on contact effects on prejudice.

Across 660 samples in 459 studies in 36 countries, increased intergroup contact was associated with reduced prejudice overall.

However, in cultures with higher levels of egalitarianism, this association was stronger. In contrast, in cultures with higher levels of hierarchy the association was weaker. These findings demonstrate that the larger cultural context has an impact on social interventions designed to reduce prejudice.

Other cultural values did not show similar effects. For example, collectivism (the level of group orientation) did not modify contact effects. Situational variables such as anti-immigrant attitudes and income inequality (GINI index) also had no effect on this association.

Together, these results highlight the importance of the cultural context and in particular a culture’s level of equality values, for possible strategies to increase intergroup harmony.

As Aotearoa New Zealand is becoming increasingly multicultural, different groups are interacting more often and individuals may experience prejudice. As New Zealand is a particularly egalitarian country, intergroup contact is likely an effective way to reduce any experienced prejudice.

## Relevance of findings to New Zealand

When trying to reduce prejudice, experiences that allow for intergroup contact should be encouraged and facilitated.

However, people moving from New Zealand to countries that are more hierarchical and less egalitarian will likely not benefit as much from increasing intergroup contact to decrease any experiences of prejudice that they may experience.

Thus, in situations involving intergroup interactions, people should be mindful of the larger cultural context that contact may take place in as this will influence how groups interact and may both facilitate or protect against higher levels of prejudice.