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Report of Research Highlights

This report is created for Peace Players International (PPI) by a team of researchers: Ruth Ditlmann, Research Fellow in the Migration, Integration, and Transnationalization Research Unit at the Berlin Social Science Center (WZB) and Designated Professor of Social Psychology; Cyrus Samii, an Associate Professor of Politics at New York University; and Nejla Asimovic, PhD candidate at New York University. This research was sponsored by a generous grant from the United States Institute of Peace, and reviewed and approved by the New York University Institutional Review Board as protocol number 13-9496. The data analyzed in the study consists of a randomized controlled trial and annual surveys conducted on the groups of Jewish-Israeli and Arab-Palestinian PPI participants (2015-2019).

Communication Highlights

HIGHLIGHT I: Almost all participants have a good experience in the integrated peace-program – even though, for most of them, meeting the outgroup is a byproduct of the program rather than the reason for joining.

Across years, participants rated their experience positively. 96% of participants reported that playing basketball is their favorite activity or that they really love it (75% and 21%, respectively), averaging over the three years in which the question was asked. In 2019, we asked participants about their experiences with coaches and their own approach to program participation. More than 95% of participants reported that their coaches treat everyone with respect and serve as positive role models. Participants have approached their participation with enthusiasm, with 98% of them reporting that they try (always or most of the time) their best and 93% reporting that they have (always or most of the time) a chance to learn from their mistakes. More variation was detected around participants' view of other players, yet the results remain highly positive with 84% reporting that other players show good sportsmanship.

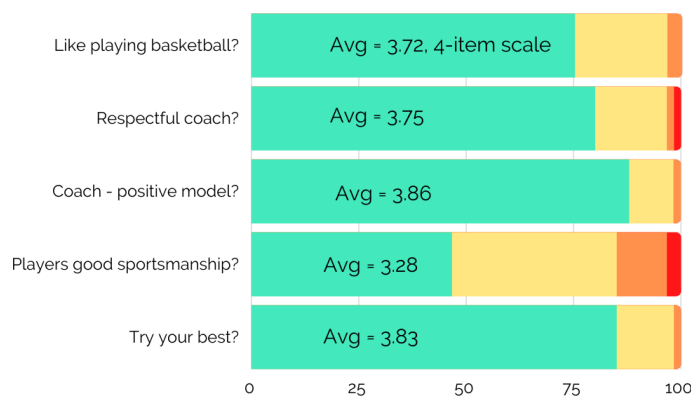


Figure 1: Program Experience - Responses on the 4-item scale (green capturing most positive response, 4, and red capturing the most negative response, 1). First question about playing basketball has been asked across years, so the results come from the sample of 435 participants (2015-2017 surveys); the other four questions are measured in the 2019 survey conducted on 60 participants.

It is particularly notable that most participants enjoyed a program that brings them together with the outgroup, given that an interest in meeting them was not a primary reason for why they joined. As part of our research we asked participants why they joined the program (Figure 2). Their responses clearly suggest that the desire to play sports was the main reason for which participants, both Jewish-Israeli and Arab-Palestinian, chose to join the program, while only a small minority of participants indicated meeting the outgroup as the main reason for participation.

This suggests that the use of sport as a means of bridging divides helps to overcome a bias due to the voluntary self-selection of participants. This is significant since many encounter programs in the Israeli – Palestinian context have been criticized for preaching to the converted (Steinberg, 2002 and Benvenisti, 1998). Since opting in to participate in an intergroup encounter is typically voluntary, participants tend to be open minded, highly motivated to meet the outgroup and open to hear their perspective at the outset. As a result, people with the most negative attitudes are usually not engaged in people-to-people interventions. PeacePlayers has harnessed the tool of basketball largely because of its unique ability to transcend national, cultural and socio-economic divides, enabling the program to attract those who typically do not engage in peacebuilding.

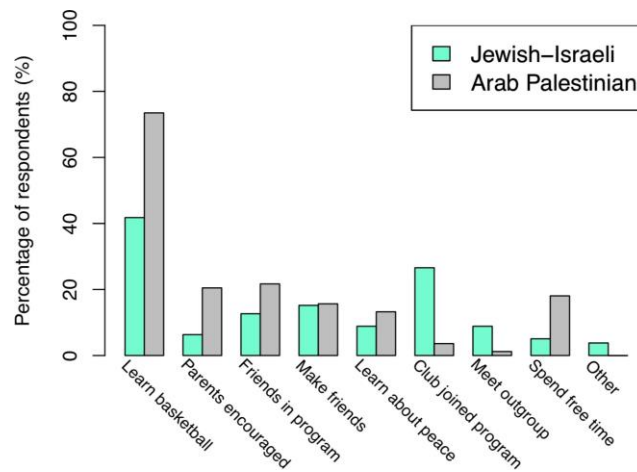


Figure 2: Reasons for joining PPI - Data from the 2017 survey conducted on 162 participants.

The research also captured what participants perceive to be the most effective strategies to advocate for peace (Figure 3). While all of the proposed options – being at peace with oneself, role modelling positive relationships, advocating for outgroup’s viewpoint and standing up to injustice – were positively evaluated, the two that were selected by participants as being most effective include being at peace with oneself and role modelling peaceful relationships.

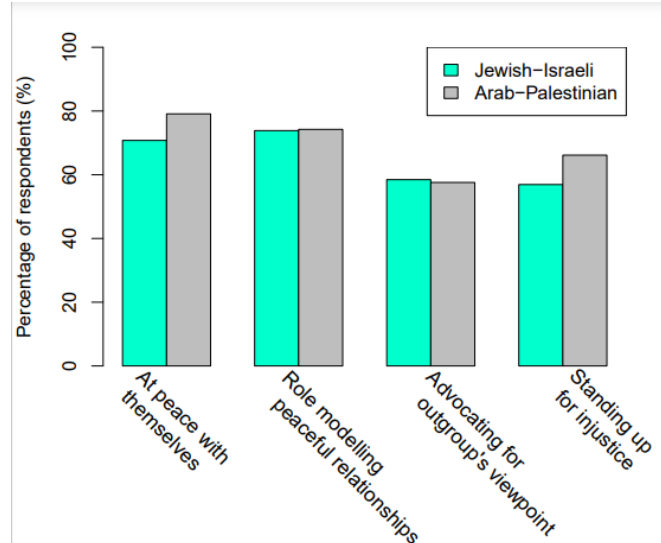


Figure 3: Peace Strategies - Data from the 2016 survey conducted on 136 participants.

TAKEAWAY: PPI succeeds in attracting youth that may not be your "usual suspects" but accept meeting the outgroup as a byproduct of the opportunity to play sports. Even though they inadvertently meet the adversarial other, most participants enjoy their experience in the integrated program.

HIGHLIGHT II: Participants in the Leadership Development Program have a high capacity to act as ambassadors of peace (lower prejudice, high resources, high motivation to influence in-group peers).

LDP participants’ (from both groups) willingness to share different life spaces with the outgroup is high in absolute terms and relative to the non-LDP participant (measured with the social closeness indicator, as reported in Figure 4). Their tendency to promote the outgroup perspective is also high relative to the non-LDP participants.

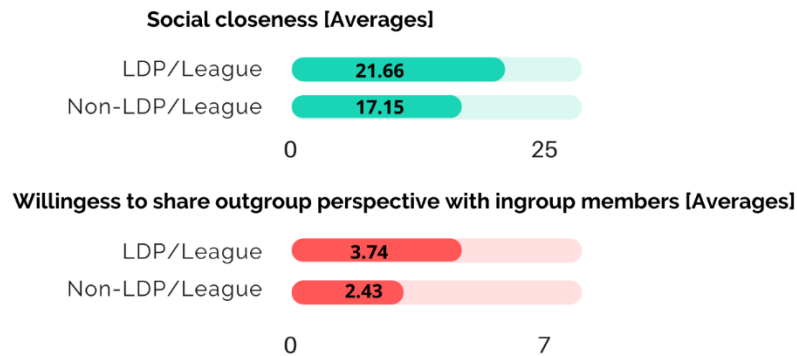


Figure 4: Results from annual surveys (2015-2019) conducted on 170 and 166 participants, for social closeness and willingness/tendency to defend outgroup’s perspective with ingroup members respectively.

While the above data refer to mean scores of each sample, data collected in 2013-2014 comparing social closeness results between new participants (first-year participants) and veteran participants (4+ years of participants). In addition to longer term participation, the veterans group also experienced higher frequency of intergroup contact than the new participants. As presented in Figure 5, 53% of first-year participants were willing to engage in social contact with the outgroup compared to 96% of long-time participants.

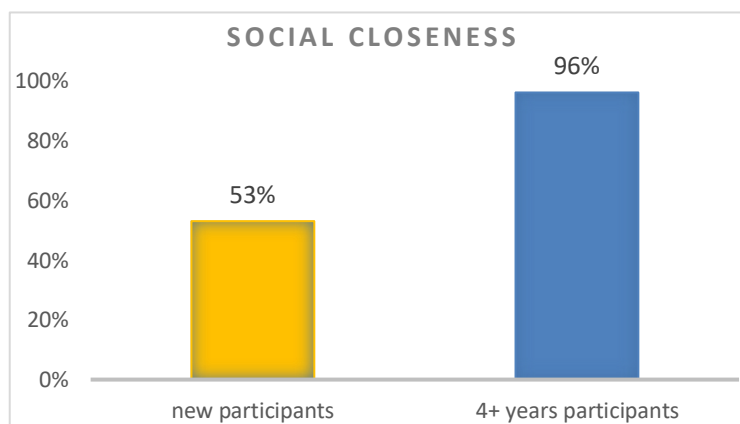


Figure 5: Data on social closeness collected during 2013-2014 programming year comparing new participants, who have been in the program less than one year to veteran participants, who have been in the program for at least four years.

As presented in figure 6, participants were more likely to engage in ingroup policing over time. Policing refers to intervening when an ingroup member behaves aggressively toward an outgroup member, with long-time participants reporting an average of (M=5.6) on a 7-point scale versus newer participants reporting an average of (M=2.3). Newer participants engaged in the first program component that included a maximum of 7 joint activities per year. Long-time participants engaged with the outgroup on a regular basis up to 4 times per week for joint league competition and leadership development programming. This further suggests that positive impact increases with sustained interaction and increased frequency of contact.

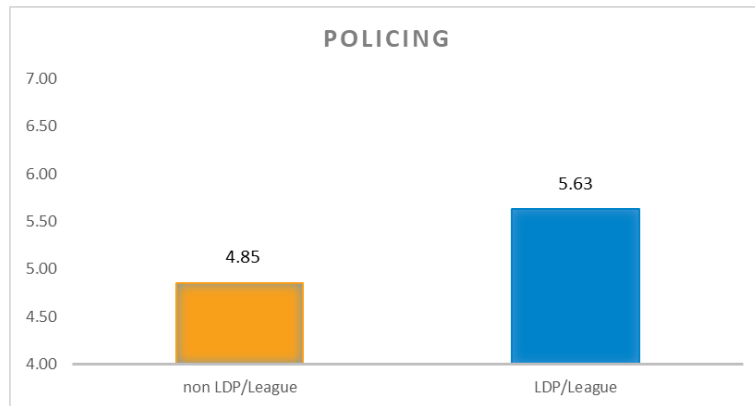


Figure 6: Compares scores of veteran participants ages 14 and up who have had longer term and more frequent exposure to newer participants under the age of 12, who have had shorter and less frequent exposure. Data collected 2017 to 2019.

The leadership capacity of LDP participants, in terms of the confidence to serve as community and program leader, is high across both groups.



Figure 7: Results from participants in the Leadership Development Program across years (2017-2019), conducted on 51 participants (16 are Arab-Palestinian and 35 Jewish-Israeli). Responses on a 5-item scale (green capturing most positive response, 5, and red capturing the most negative response, 1)

TAKEAWAY: Participants in PPI’s LDP program constitute a group of young Arab and Jewish Israelis that show a great potential to effect social change.

HIGHLIGHT III: On average, more than half of PPI participants make an outgroup friend in the program. A comparison between first-year and long-time participants illustrates the changes that happen over time, with nearly all long-time participants developing friendships across divides.

Potential for friendship formation is among the most important condition for intergroup contact to work (Northcutt Bohmert and DeMaris, 2015; Page-Gould, Mendoza-Denton, and Tropp, 2008).

Across multiple years, we also asked participants if they had made an outgroup friend in the program, with 62% participants across both groups responding affirmatively. 19% were unclear if they had made a friend and 18% reported that they had not made a friend. We detect a similar pattern of friendship formation across the two ethnic groups (Figure 8).



Figure 8: Results from annual surveys (2016-2019) capturing friendship formation, conducted on a sample of 250 Arab-Palestinian participants and 240 Jewish-Israeli participants.

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The data presented on figure 8 refer to mean scores for each group. From data collected in 2013-2014, we compared data on cross-community friendships (Figure 9), with 20% of first-year participants reporting making an outgroup friend versus 96% of long-time participants.

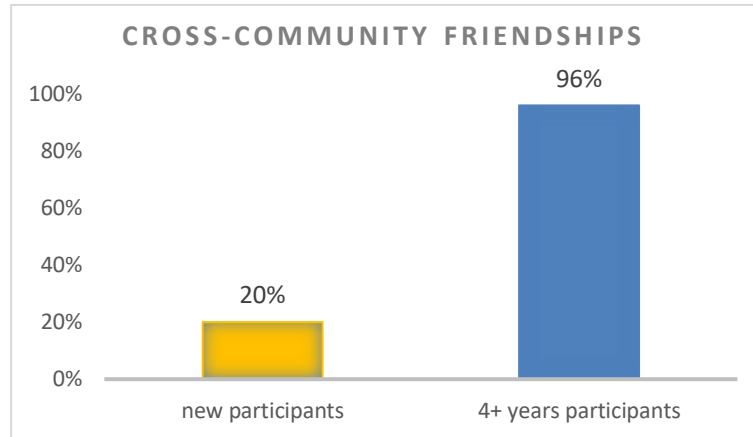


Figure 9: Data on cross-community friendships collected during 2013-2014 programming year compares new participants, who have been in the program less than one year to veteran participants, who have been in the program for at least four years.

TAKEAWAY: PPI manages to build friendships across adversarial groups, even within the context of one of the most polarized conflicts in the world. These data support the notion that long-term participation and increased frequency of contact leads to increased cross-community friendships.

HIGHLIGHT IV: Most PPI participants are positive about the other group and willing to cooperate across group cleavages.

82% of participants across both ethnic groups report being more positive about the outgroup than before they participated in PPI. Similarly, 80% of participants across both ethnic groups report being more willing to work with the outgroup on common issues than before they participated in PPI.

TAKEAWAY: A large percentage of participants have the impression that the program improved their attitudes towards the other. This impression may well translate into actual cooperation.

HIGHLIGHT V: PPI participants talk about PPI

More than 80% of participants report sometimes or all the time speaking about PPI with friends, family and other people they know. Past research suggests that intergroup contact can have indirect effects on others, who themselves do not meet the other group but learn that their friends have contact with the outgroup (Zhou et al., 2019). By talking about PPI, participants can have such indirect effects on their friends and families.

TAKEAWAY: The fact that so many PPI participants talk about their experience in the program suggests that the program has a ripple effect on the family and friends of their participants.

HIGHLIGHT VI: PPI’s program has a positive causal impact on the ingroup-regulation behavior of Jewish participants.

Perspective sharing increases among Jewish participants within one year of program participation. This result is important and exciting because perspective taking is one of the most effective strategies for combating prejudice (Broockman and Kalla, 2016; Galinsky and Moskowitz, 2000). PPI causes Jewish participants to share the perspective of Arabs with their peers – a difficult endeavor in the midst of an intractable conflict. Among Jewish participants (and especially for Tal Shazar boys) this trend continues and intensifies with multi-year exposure (2-3 years) to the program (Figure 10).

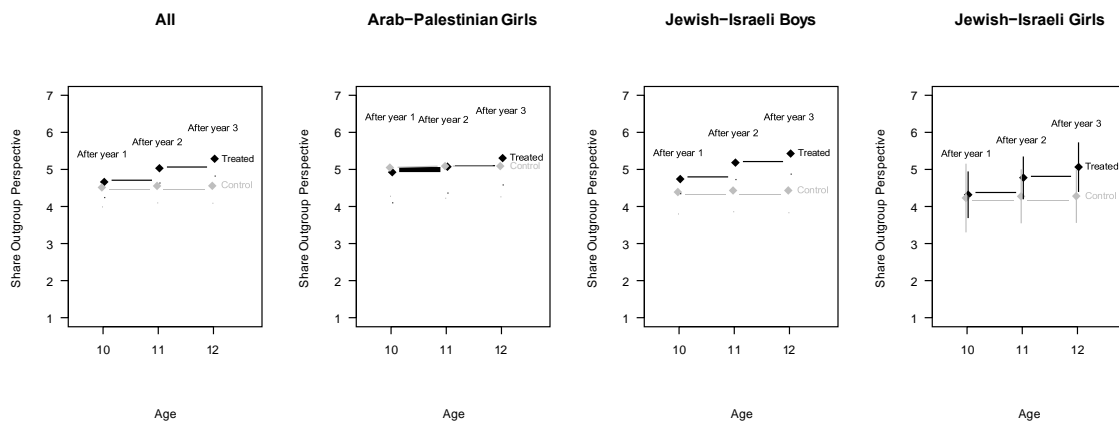


Figure 10: Results from the analysis capturing the effect of the program on participants’ willingness to share outgroup perspective, obtained through an analytical approach that combines the RCT and the survey data across years.

Our pilot study showed that both Jewish and Arab participants in 2012 – 2013 program year increased ingroup censoring (admonishing ingroup members for aggressive behavior towards the outgroup). A similar but weaker trend appeared for participants with multiple-year exposure that were 10-12 years old between 2015 – 2018.

TAKEAWAY: Jewish PPI participants consistently engage their peers in ways that spread PPI’s peace message. The exact behavior that they use varies with time and sample. For Arab participants, a similar

trend was visible in the pilot-study but the quantitative evidence is inconclusive at this point. However, PPI has qualitative research (anecdotes) that suggests that, despite the challenges, some Arab participants do make an effort to engage their peers.

HIGHLIGHT VII: PPI program has a positive causal impact on the prejudice levels of Jewish participants.

Across the pilot study and the current RCT, Jewish participants slightly decrease their prejudice towards Arabs after one year of program participation. They reduce their prejudice more dramatically with multiple-year exposure. Arab participants do not show the same trend (Figure 11).

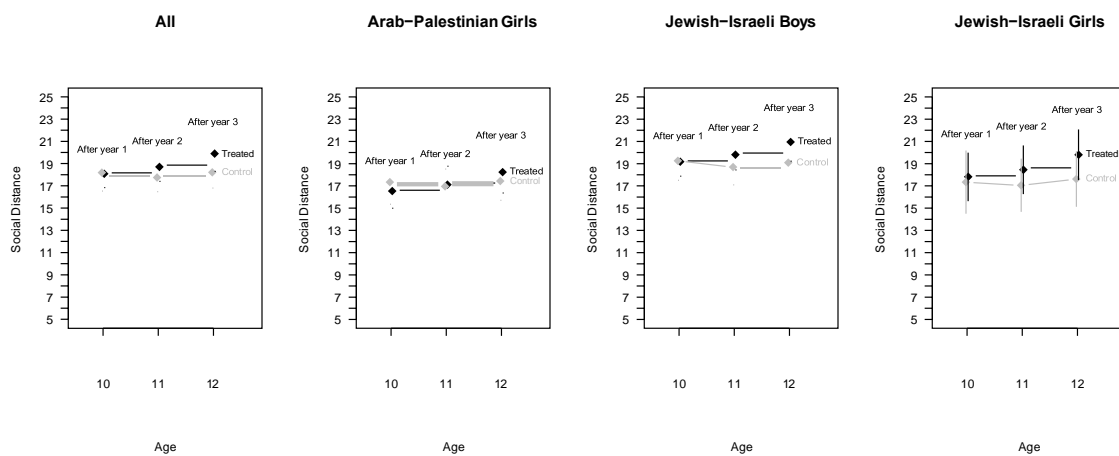


Figure 11: Results from the analysis capturing the effect of the program on participants' levels of willingness to engage with the outgroup, obtained through an analytical approach that combines the RCT and the survey data across years. Maximum score is 25, and higher values are associated with more positive attribution.

This is consistent with the intergroup contact literature that shows that while intergroup contact works to reduce the prejudice of majority groups, it does not work as well for minority groups (Tropp and Pettigrew, 2005). Some scholars also argue that prejudice of minority members is not really the problem (Dixon et al., 2012) since they don't have power to harm the majority group – but of course the Jewish-Arab Israeli relationship is more complex than traditional majority-minority relations, e.g. in the US.

TAKEAWAY: Coupled with takeaway VI, these results show that PPI has a high-level, causal impact at least on some program participants. Such impact is difficult to achieve, especially in a conflict setting. Importantly, PPI's intuition that kids should stay with the program for many years is confirmed by the finding that multiple-year exposure produces stronger results.)

Food for Thought

In what ways do young Arab girls benefit?

In the field, it seems clear that young Arab girls benefit from the program. Yet, we have not found the right instrument to capture this benefit. It is possible that the way in which instruments defined various aspects of attitudinal and behavioral change do not correspond with culturally dependent experiences. Perhaps PPI can go back to the drawing board and have conversations with this group to learn what the biggest positive program impact is for them?

How can PPI help participants when they deviate from their group's norms?

One of the biggest challenges that Peace Players face is taking the program's message back to their communities. Many of them appear to do that at least in terms of talking about their experiences in PPI with their friends and families. It may be worth thinking about programming elements that can help the participants anticipate that and prepare them for it psychologically. Perhaps the planned transnational exchange between sites can help here? Peace Players at all locations probably face the same challenge and could support each other in this aspect.

Research Scope Does Not Reflect the Scope of PeacePlayers Programming

The rigorous RCT methodology limited the number of PeacePlayers participants who could take part in the research. The RCT participants were recruited from among children who had never participated in PeacePlayers but were interested in doing so. Therefore, RCT participating communities needed to include enough potential new PP participants in order to form both experimental and control groups. This limited the selection to only one age group, and restricted the number of participating communities to three (one Jewish girls' team, one Jewish boys' team, and one Arab girls' team), out of a total of 20 in which PeacePlayers operates. Each community has very different circumstances in terms of baseline conditions and the quality of implementation. Each demographic group came from single communities. This serves to meet the RCT conditions but does not represent the full diversity of PPs communities and also could have been influenced by factors that impact these communities differentially.

Secondly, the RCT examined the first layer of PP's program model (the Twinning program), which has the lowest frequency of contact, less consistency (than league and LDP) and the shortest intervention periods. In addition, the RCT examined participants after only one year of participation. PP employs a long-term model, guided by the assumption that several years of deep engagement is necessary for significant change and impact, something that is supported by the annual survey data and the fusion analysis.

Cultural Differences and or Power Dynamics Could Impact Peer Regulation Potential

Jewish-Israeli society is more individualistic than Arab-Palestinian society, which tends to be more collectivist. This could offer a possible explanation regarding the inconclusive results surrounding peer regulation for Arab girls. In a collectivist society, it may be less acceptable to speak up against popular opinion, especially if the speaker is of an older generation. Gender may come in to play here as well, and prevailing gender norms may make Arab girls even more hesitant to speak up against injustice. Another plausible explanation is that Palestinian requires more personal resources to speak up giving that they are in their weaker position in the power dynamic.

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