**A uni-national intervention program fostering Emotional Intelligence and Empathy, to improve the attitudes and relationships of Jewish and Arab adolescents with members of the other ethnic group: Implementation and initial outcomes**

**Abstract**

The Arab-Israeli intractable, violent and lengthy conflict has significant and extensive effects on the relationships between Israeli Jews and Arabs. In recent decades, various intervention programs have attempted to deal with the conflict through direct contact between Jews and Arabs in Israel – with inconsistent effects.. The current study examined a unique uni-national only intervention program for Jewish and Arab adolescents (separately), which focused on cultivating emotional intelligence skills and empathy. The basic research hypothesis was that following the intervention, an improvement will be found in Empathy and relationships with members of the other national group (Arabs/Jews). 287 adolescents aged 16-17 (115 Jews and 172 Arabs) participated in the program and the study which assessed its initial effects. All participants completed self-administered questionnaires and observations and focus groups were conducted by the researcher. The findings showed improvement among Arab participants in Emotional Intelligence, Empathy towards Arabs and Jews, and their relationships with Israeli Jews. Among the Jewish participants, although no change in emotional intelligence was observed, there were positive changes in Empathy, as well as relationships with Israeli Arabs. These effects were stronger among Arab participants. In addition, for Arab participants, positive correlations were found among Emotional Intelligence, Empathy towards Arabs and Jews and relationship with Israeli Jews. These findings support the theoretical underpinning of the effects of Empathic skills on inter-group relationships, but extend existing knowledge by showing that these skills can improve the attitudes and feelings towards members of another national group they are in conflict with, and the relationships between them. Operational recommendations towards developing future intervention programs were derived from insights gained in the preset study.

**Introduction**

The violent intractable long lasting conflict between Israel, neighboring Arab countries and the Palestinians (who gradually developed national aspirations over the years) (Bar-Tal, & Teichman, 2005; Teichman, Bar-Tal & Abdolrazeq, 2007) - has extensive effects on many aspects of the Israeli society and demand a substantial material and psychological investment (Kreisberg, 1993; Kupermintz, Rosen, Salomon & Rabia, 2007; Rouhana & Bar-Tal, 1998). Even though the basis of this conflict resides in the relationship between Jews living in Israel and Arabs living in countries outside its borders (or in the west bank & Gaza), it has a significant impact on the Jews-Arabs relationship inside the state of Israel. Because Israel is defined as a Jewish state, Arabs - who constitutes a minority, are often discriminated against in many aspects of their lives (e.g. occupation, health, education) and are denied access to influential positions. In addition, Israeli Arabs struggle with defining their identity – the extent they identify with the Israeli or the Palestinian ethos (Ghanem, 1998). This issue differentiates between them and Jewish Israeli citizens and makes it harder for the Jews in Israel to see the Arabs as Israelis like them and not as a threat in case of an all inclusive conflict (Ghanem, 1998; Yephthal, 1993).

In the last few decades, several initiatives have attempted to cope with the reality of the Israeli-Arab conflict while reducing its negative effects on all Israeli citizens and increasing their co-existence (Agmon, Sagy & Shneider, 2005; Bar-Tal & Rosen, 2009; Biton & Salomon, 2006; Oppenheimer, 2006). Most of these were based on the "Contact Theory" that states that direct personal encounters between Jews and Arabs -are needed in order to improve mutual understanding, perceptions and attitudes and encourage relationships between individuals in the two groups (Pettigrew, 1998;l Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Previous such interventions (e.g. "Neve Shalom" or "Givat Haviva") – that focused these encounters on open communication between participants - had inconsistent effects. At times they contributed to a reduction of stereotypes and a better relationship between Jews and Arabs in Israel (Maoz, 2000). But at other times these programs resulted in radicalizing the national narrative of each group and strengthening the conflicted atmosphere between them (e.g. Pilecki & Hammack, 2014).

In light of these findings, the present intervention was conducted separately for each national group (Jews and Arabs) and focused on cultivating emotional skills (Emotional Intelligence and Empathy) and not on discussion related directly to the conflict. The aims of the intervention program were: to improve intra-, inter- personal and between-group relationships; to improve Empathy towards members of the other national group (Arabs/Jews); to reduce stereotypes towards minorities in general and towards Israeli Arabs/Jews in particular; and to improve social relationships between members of different groups in Israel (including Arabs/Jews).

In light of the extensive and severe effects the Israeli-Arab conflict has on Israeli residents, it is crucial to change the relationships between Jews and Arabs living in Israel and improve mutual negative attitudes and prejudice - for the benefit of all its citizens and the country's future prosperity.

**Background**

**Israeli-Arab conflict Intervention programs according to the "contact theory"**

According to the "Contact theory", in order for encounters between individuals from different groups to succeed two conditions need to be met: equal status to all participants (Jews and Arabs) during the encounter and the program should include working towards joint goals through cooperation (and not competition) between members of both national groups. When these principles are adhered to – the encounter between members of different national groups might: improve mutual recognition, understanding and acceptance; limit bias and seeing members of the other national group as an enemy and help create meaningful social relationships between them (Ben-Ari, 2004; Emerson, Kimbro & Yancey, 2002; Pettigrew, 1998; Pickett, Baker, Metcalfe, Gertz & Bellandi, 2014; Schroeder & Reisen, 2014). These positive effects result from the encounters' emphasis on the human and universal characteristics of all participants, while avoiding any controversial issues – like their different national identity or the discrimination against Israeli Arabs (Ben-Ari, 2004; Emerson, et al.; Maoz, 2011; Pettigrew, 1998). One of the most influential aspects of these encounters is exposure to personal stories of members in the other national group – a process intended to give them "faces" as real people. Such exposure was found to increase the understanding and identification of all participants with the personal difficulties, suffering and coping of the other national group's members– a step that promotes emotional closeness and reduces prejudice and negative attitudes towards them (Maoz, 2011; Ron & Maoz, 2013).

One of the most significant population participating in such interventions, and that will be included in the present study, are adolescents. This population was chosen on the basis of a core belief that only by changing the socio-psychological foundation that nourishes the intractable Jewish-Arab conflict, through education for peace, will allow real change. Education for peace focuses on learning and practice of skills that can support making peace and reducing conflict as: critical and reflective thinking, tolerance, Empathy towards members of other groups, awareness and sensitivity to human rights and conflict settling tactics (Ramsy & Latting, 2005). This type of education can also include learning about other social groups in the Israeli society

(Bar-Tall, Rosen & Nets-Zehngut, 2010) and changing the way the students see members of a rival group by humanizing its members and legitimizing their needs and wishes (Bar-Tal & Rosen, 2015).

Several disadvantages were found to conducting direct encounters between Israeli Jews and Arabs. First, the power differences between Jews and Arabs inherent in the Israeli society makes it difficult to create a balanced ground when conducting these encounters – which makes it harder to allow a real dialogue between members of the two groups (Maoz, 2000; Sagy, 2002; Suleiman, 2004). Also, when security incidents related to the Jewish-Arab conflict occur during encounters (Halabi & Sonnenschein, 2004) – it often results in radicalization of each national narratives and the perception of members of the other national group as an enemy with illegitimate demands (Pickett, et al., 2014; Pilecki & Hammack, 2014). Under such conditions its very difficult to have an open and direct dialogue between the members of the two parties and make them closer to each other. Another factor that influences the success of direct encounters between Jews and Arabs, is the fact that most of them are initiated by Jewish people and as such are conducted according to the Jewish culture and norms which are often not aligned with the Arab culture. And so, a built-in bias in favor of the Jewish participants is created, which reduces the efficiency of these encounters (Suleiman, 2004).

One of possible ways to overcome these difficulties is conducting uni-national encounters – separately with Jewish and Arab participants in order to increase their openness and willingness to have a relationship with members of the other national group. A number of previous programs included such uni-national encounters as a preparation step at the start of their intervention program– before conducting direct encounters between Jewish and Arab participants. For example, Bar-Gal & Bar (1992) conducted such a process finding that it improved the self esteem and degree of openness towards members of the other national group – among all participants. Another program that included a combination between uni- and bi- national encounters in order to improve the relationships between Jews and Arabs in Israel is "Sadaka Ruth". This program was conducted over two years with university students. During the first year, mostly uni-national encounters (of Jews or Palestinians) were conducted, in combination with a limited number of bi-national encounters during special activities. During the second year of the programs, direct Israeli-Palestinians encounters were conducted. It was found that initially conducting uni-national encounters allowed participants to increase their awareness and understanding of the life circumstances of members of the other national group and what motivates them – a process that set the stage for the joint encounters (Ross, 2013).

**Effects of Emotional Intelligence and empathy upon inter-group relationships**

The intervention program in the current research has focused on providing Jewish and Arab adolescents emotional skills and capabilities, in the hope to bring about an improvement in the relationships between Jews and Arabs in Israel. This focus stemmed from previous research findings which had showed that the inherent, mutual hate, anger and fear rooted in the relationships between Jews and Arabs - were one of the major obstacles to improving it (Halperin, 2014). Specifically, the program will include cultivating Emotional Intelligence and Empathy. Emotional Intelligence is defined as the ability to process your own and others peoples' emotional information accurately and efficiently. Emotional Intelligence includes four ingredients: using emotions to promote thinking, understanding (your own and others') feelings, perceiving and exhibiting emotions (by identifying and registering verbal and nonverbal emotional information) and emotional regulation (Salovey, Bedell, Detweiler & Mayer, 1999; Salovey, Bedell, Mayer & Detweiler, 2000; Salovey, Woolery & Mayer, 2001). No previous studies have examined the effects of an intervention program that focused on cultivating Emotional Intelligence – on intergroup relationships, as was done in the current study. However, one can learn on this issue from previous studies that showed that the existence of Group Emotional Intelligence (the ability of the group to identify the emotions of its members, to regulate and manage them in a way that will not interfere with its work) encourages relating to the emotions, needs and concerns of members of another group and creating positive relationships between them (Druskat & Wolf, 2008). Empathy is defined as the ability to identify and understand another person's emotions and to personally experience his/her inner world - as your own (Davis, 1983; Golman, 2002; Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Empathy was previously found as having a bi-directional relationship to Emotional Intelligence (Miville, Carlozzi, Gushue, Schara & Ueda, 2006; Schutte, et al., 2001). The Empathy model the current research was based on, which is called RRR distinguishes between three stages: Resonance (the ability to experience the same emotional experiences and emotions the other person feels), Reasoning (understanding the thoughts and emotions the other person is having, thinking of the reasons for them and concluding what they were a result of) and Response (behavior the manifests Empathy) (Zisman & Kupermintz, in preparation). A number of studies showed that Empathy towards a member of another group (especially following a request to examine the issue through the eyes of that person) reduces prejudice and stereotypes against his/her group members, increases the motivation to help them and improves relationships with them (Batson, et al., 1997; Dovidio, et al., 2010; Eisenberg, Eggum & Giunta, 2010; Hannigan, 1990; Husnu & Crisp, 2014; Shih, Wang, Bucher & Stotzer, 2009; Zisman, 2009). Specifically, an experimental intervention in which Israeli Jewish participants experienced a joint emotional response (to a described event) towards a specific Israeli Arab or to Palestinians in general (by exhibiting graphically their responses to that event) – resulted in a higher rate of attributing humanity to Israeli Arab/Palestinian and to expressing more significant support to a tolerant policy towards them (McDonald, et al., 2015).

**Emotional skills interventions**

During the last few years, educational institutions around the globe have implemented interventions of Social and Emotional Learning with the aim to cultivate Emotional Intelligence and Empathy. This type of program including cultivating: 1. Self awareness: identifying, naming and evaluating emotions and examining what are their causes and consequences. 2. Self management: emotion regulation when coping with stress or conflict while controlling impulses and expressing emotions appropriately. 3. Social awareness: an ability to see things from the view point of another person, to express Empathy towards him/her and to identify and evaluate the similarities and differences between myself and another person. 4. Relationship management: creating and preserving healthy and satisfying relationships that are based on cooperation, adaptive nonviolent interpersonal conflict management and resolution. 5. Making responsible decisions with the aim to contribute to the welfare of the person and taking into account the possible ramification of the chosen act (Castillo, Salguero, Ernandez-Berrocal & Balluerka, 2013; Elias, Bruence-Butler, Blum & Schuyler, 2000; Kunnanatt, 2004; Payton, et al., 2008). Among adolescents, these programs resulted in improved social relationships between class students, in Empathy towards each other's feelings and pro-active behaviors and in a reduction in anti social and violent behaviors as well as prejudice and stereotypes against members of other groups (Castillo, et al., 2013; Garaigordobil, 2004; Kessler, 2000 ; McWilliam & Hatcher, 2004 ; Rea & Pedersen, 2007; Roffey, 2006 ). One of the prominent researcher in this field, Khuri (2004), designed an intervention plan that aimed to promote the dialogue between Israeli Jews and Arabs through learning emotional, interpersonal and communication skills (e.g. sharing personal experiences with others, listening non judgmentally to others). In the evaluation research that followed her program, all of the participants – changed the way they perceived the members of the other national group (following their participation) and were able to see them more as humans with their own needs and emotions (Khuri, 2004).

**Methods**

**Theory behind the intervention program**

The current research presents a unique uni-national only intervention program – that was built based on an extensive literature review. The guiding principles of this program were: first, one needs to create a safe and trusting environment where participants can learn and implement different skills which are relevant to the relationships between members of the two national groups. The group moderator needs to have a non-judgmental empathic stance which reflects understanding, support, respect and curiosity. It is also important to build the program around a structured activity process which will gradually build the trust and cooperation of the participants while establishing open and free dialogue between them (Bar-Tal, et al., 2010; Khuri, 2004). In addition, it is important that these encounters will not include any direct reference to any issues pertinent to the conflict itself – its reasons, history, costs or the different national identities (Bar-Tal, et al., 2010; Ramsey & Latting, 2005). The rational of this approach is that the skills and communication methods learned in a uni-national environment will be generalized to the attitudes and relationships between participants of different national group. In other words, that as a result of this process, participants will better understand: what motivates them and effects their relationships with other people in general and with members of other national groups in particular and as such will be more open towards their suffering and pain. As a results their mutual prejudice and negative attitudes will diminish and they will be able to become closer.

**Participants**

The uni-national program was delivered to 287 junior and senior high school students (115 in four Jewish groups and 172 in five Arab groups) at their school in northern Israel. Among the participants in the Jewish groups: 36.6% were boys and 63.4% were girls; 93.8% were Jewish, 2.5% were Arabs (3.8% defined themselves as belonging to another national group). Among the Arab groups: 33.1% were boys and 66.9% were girls; all defined themselves as Arabs.

**Intervention program**

 The program included 12 hour and a half encounters focusing on the following skills: 1. Emotional Intelligence: management and regulation of emotions; expressing emotions in a focused and clear manner; identifying the emotions and needs of other people and how to appropriately react to them. 2. Empathy: mirroring the emotions of others; active listening; giving an empathic and sensitive response to others without judgment or interpretation; coping with critical or judgmental message directed towards them. The program implemented different methods including: use of arts (drawing, sculpture, drama –simulations and role playing, photography); movie viewing; exposure to personal stories (of mothers in the other national group) and discussions. The combination of different methods enabled exposing the students to different aspects of themselves and other people around them (including members of other groups) and as such increased their openness to the group process and created a more in depth learning process. A similar intervention program found that combining different activities increased the program's effects on the participants (Garaigordobill, 2002). Group moderators were school counselors in other schools, who were also trained as group moderators. The Jewish groups had one Jewish and one Arab moderators and the Arab groups had one Arab moderator. The structure and specific methods used in each encounter were preplanned. The first encounters emphasized creating a group contract in which all participants determined and committed to the communication and behaviors that are acceptable by all participants during group meetings – such as, active listening, mutual respect, giving feedback, open expression of emotions. This stage established that the group is a safe space for learning and experimenting in emotional skills and allowed the participants to be open without fearing others' reactions

**Research**

The goals of the current research were to examine the implementation and initial effects of the intervention program: changes in emotional intelligence, empathy and relationships with members of the other national group following the intervention, relationships between variables and changes in social relationships between members of the same national group and between groups.

The research design was mixed method – using both qualitative and quantitative tools (Bates-Marom, 2001). Qualitative tools were used in order to examine the program's implementation – how it was perceived by the participants; which aspects of the program worked better for them and which didn't, what did they find hindered the successful implementation of the program and what were its effects on them. In order to answer these questions the following qualitative tools of observations and focus groups were used. First, participant observations were made by the researcher (who was also the group moderator) on 7 Arab groups and pure observations were conducted on 9 other groups (4 Jewish and 5 Arabic). Second focus group were conducted in 3 Jewish groups and 6 Arab groups, with 4 participants in each, who met three times over different points of time during the intervention program and discussed the open questions the researcher presented.

Quantitative tools were used to assess changes in the variables following the program and the relationships between the variables in each group. Data collection of this part included delivering the following questionnaires to all participants:

1. **Demographic information**.

2. **Emotional Intelligence** questionnaire which was based on the Emotional Intelligence model by Salovey & Mayer (1990). The questionnaire included 33 items relating to different aspects of Emotional Intelligence including: evaluation and expression of self and others' emotions, self and others' emotional regulation and use of emotions to solve problems (Schutte, et al., 1998). On each of these items the participants were asked to rate on a five point Likert scale their degree of agreement (from 1 – not at all to 5- highly). The questionnaire had an internal reliability Cronbach alpha of .92 among Jewish participants and .96 among Arab participants.

2. **Empathy towards their own national group:** The questionnaire used in the current research is the Inter-Group Empathy Scale developed by Kupermintz & Zissman (in preparation). This is a 20 item scale examining the three Empathy ingredients: Empathic resonance (e.g.: "I notice when someone tries to conceal their true feelings"); Empathic reasoning (e.g.: "I can usually understand the view of another, even when I don't agree to it") and Empathic Response (e.g. "I become sad

when I see a stranger in a group standing alone"). The Internal reliability Cronbach alpha of this questionnaire was .89 among Jewish participants and .91 among Arab participants.

3. **Empathy towards the other national group**: the same questionnaire mentioned above where subjects were asked to rate the items according to the level of Empathy they have for members of the other national group.

4. **Relationships with the other national group:** this questionnaire included three separate sub scales with separate answering methods. The first section examined **willingness for contact** and social closeness to a member of the other national group (Schwarzwald & Cohen, 1982). Each participant was asked to rate his willingness to do the following activities with an Israeli Arab/Jew: to meet, study together, host in his/her home, live in the same neighborhood and be a friend - on a five point Likert scale between 1 (not at all) and five (definitely). This subscale had among Jewish participants - an internal reliability Cronbach alpha of .94 at the beginning of the study and .76 at its conclusion, and among Arab participants - a Cronbach alpha of .9 was found at the beginning of the program and .81 was found at its conclusion. The second section of this questionnaire which was based on Rosen's study (2006) examined **positive and negative stereotypes and images** of members of the other national group. In this section participants were asked to rate the degree that the item (e.g. smart, brave, stingy, violent) characterizes well members of the other national group (Arabs/Jews) on a five point Likert scale from 1 (not at all) to 5 (definitely). The internal reliability Cronbach alpha of this section in the current study was among Jewish participants - .86 in the beginning of the study and .87 at its conclusion and among Arab participants - .77 at the beginning and .84 at its conclusion. In the third section of this questionnaire, participants were asked to rate the degree they felt certain **positive and negative emotions** (e.g. hate, affection, guilt) towards members of the other national group. In the current research the internal reliability Cronbach alpha was .82 at the beginning of the program and .83 at its conclusion among Jewish participants and .68 at its beginning and .73 at its conclusion, among Arab participants.

**Results**

**Qualitative results**

According to the focused observations and focus groups conducted during the intervention program, participants experienced significant changes as a result of their invovlvement in the program. One of the most prominent changes observed was in the Emotional Intelligence of the participants. In the Jewish groups, before the program the social atmosphere and relationships between class mates were negative and even violent. Following the program the emotional resonance of the participants improved and they were better able to see the desires and needs of the other children in the class, which contributed to a more positive and accepting approach towards the interactions between them. Secondly, following their participation in the program, the Jewish participants learned better ways to regulate their emotions, such that they won't negatively effect other people. For example, at the beginning of the program the research participants (particularly the Jewish ones) expressed strong anger and other negative emotions towards other class mates, the teacher and the school. Later on in the program, it was clear that they learned to cope with these emotions more constructively, express them adaptively and work towards direct conflict resolution, instead of the flight or fight responses they used in the past. One manifestation of this change was an increase in their ability to openly share their thoughts, feelings and personal history self exposure. For instance, one of the students shared about the frequent fights her parents had had when she was a child, which led to their divorce when she was in second grade: "They did not know that my parents are separated and I live with just my father. This was the first time I shared with them information about my family. I was always embarrassed about what is going on in my house and angry at the constant fights between my parents. I used to do everything I can to hide it from my friends. Today I relate to it differently than I used to. I am more open and less reluctant to share. I have enough self confidence to bring up personal matters inside the group and the listening I received from my friends was very supportive". Other students shared the frustration and coping difficulties they had experienced during a social boycott against them or other crises in school. Even students who were at the beginning of the year were shy and refrained from sharing personal information, became more active later on in the discussion and group activities. Evidence of this improvement in self expression, especially the emotional one, following their participation in the program, also came up in the focus groups conducted. In addition, at the conclusion of the program the participants felt more empowered and self confident - believed more in their abilities and exhibited higher self efficacy. Similar processes were found among the Arab participants, though the changes they experienced were smaller since even at the beginning of the program they expressed positive emotions towards other class mates and the class atmosphere was mostly positive and accepting.

Another positive result of the current intervention program was that its participants learned of different groups in the Israeli society and in their school. This led to their understanding that despite possible differences between them and members of other groups, all human being have a lot in common. Specifically, during the program the participants' perceptions of members of the other national group (Arabs/Jews) were improved. At the beginning of the program, the Jewish group members exhibited negative generalized attitudes towards Arabs, saw them as similar to one another and resisted talking about them. During the program, especially after discovering that some of their class mates are Arabs (a fact they were not aware of) and while coping with an Arab moderator, their perception of Arabs has become more expansive and balanced and they started seeing and treating them as human beings like them – in sharp contract to their initial stereotypes against them. This process also came up in the statements made by focus group participants. For example: "I will tell you (the researcher) the truth. I always thought that Arabs are dirty, ignorant and lack any understanding. This is how I was brought up and today I am ashamed of having these thoughts all the time and it was presented in the news and papers"; "At the start of the meeting I admitted that I believed all Arabs are dirty, liars and ignorant and today I see how much I was wrong in this attitude and it is not okay to generalize like that and say that all of them are this or that". One of the processes that especially influenced the program participants' empathy and prejudice towards Arabs in general was the exposure to the personal stories of Arab mothers.

**Quantitative results**

In order to examined the changes experienced by the Jewish and Arab participants following the program, their Emotional Intelligence and Empathy – towards their own and the other national group – were compared using MANNOVA analyses. Table 1 presents the average and standard deviation of each scale among the Jews and Arab intervention participants - before and after the program. Regarding Emotional Intelligence - the changes exhibited by the Arab participants were more significant compared to the Jewish participants (F=8.29, p<.01). Regarding Empathy towards their own national group - all participants exhibited improvements following the program, but these changes were more significant among the Arab participants (F=6.02, p<.05). Regarding Empathy towards the other national group - all participants experienced similar improvements following the program (time effect – F=13.29, p<.001, interaction timeXgroup effect – F=1.15, n.s) but the Empathy levels among the Arab participants was lower both before and after the program (national group effect – F=18.55, p<.001).

In addition, in order to examine the change process the participants experienced following the intervention program, Pearson correlations were used separately among Jewish and Arab participants - to examine the relationships between the main variables. Among the Arab participants, significant relationship were found between levels of Empathy towards Arabs and Empathy towards Jews (r=.44, p<.01), and between Empathy towards Jews and willingness to have contact with them (r=.49, p<.01). Among Jewish participants, a significant relationship was found between Empathy towards Jews and Empathy towards Arabs (r=.50, p<.01), but no significant relationship was found between Empathy towards Arabs and willingness to be in contact with them (r=.17, n.s).

**Discussion**

The current research examined the implementation and initial effects of a unique uni-national only intervention program conducted separately for Jewish and Arab adolescents. The program focused on cultivating Emotional Intelligence and empathy. The evaluation study accompanying it found an improvement in the emotional skills and Empathy of the Israeli adolescents participants towards their own and the members of the other national group (Arabs/Jewish), as well as in their images and feelings towards Israeli Arabs/Jews, following their participation in the intervention program.

These findings support the existing theoretical knowledge regarding the influence of Empathy on inter-group relationships. Viewing reality through the eyes of an out group member and experiencing similar emotions towards him/her, increases how similar to oneself one perceives them and how willing is s/he to have any contact with them – changes which ultimately reduce prejudice and stereotypes. However, the current study broadens existing knowledge by showing for the first time that strengthening emotions and Empathy in general can result in improvement in the emotions and attitudes towards members of their out group – another national group – and to the relationships with its members. In other words, in contrast to previous studies that showed that Empathy towards a member of the out group is only generalized to an empathic stance towards members of that group and not to other groups, the current study showed that there are general empathic abilities, that can be learned. These skills can create better social relationships, co-existence and comradeship between members of different groups, including those who are in a lengthy intractable conflict (like the Jews and Arabs in Israel). In other words, even when there is mutual suspicion, fear and hostility and a long history of violence, a uni-national group, as was done in the previous study, can bring about an improvement in the willingness for contact, the attitudes and the feelings of Jews towards Arabs and vice versa.

In parallel, the current research points to a differentiation between Empathy and Emotional Intelligence in their possible contributions to the improvement of social and inter-group relationships. It was found that fostering Emotional Intelligence – including the ability to identify and understand another person's emotions – can bring about improvement in intra-group social relationships but is not enough to bring about a direct change in the attitudes and emotions towards members of another national group and to create Empathy towards them. However, fostering Empathy – seeing reality through the eye of another person, any other person, can result in improvement of attitudes and feeling towards members of other groups in general.

The current study had a number of methodological limitations. First, the Jewish and Arabs groups different in its moderators. The Jewish groups had two moderators – one Jewish and one Arab while the Arab groups had one - Arab moderator. As a result, the participants in the Jewish group had to not only cope with the intervention itself but also with the implication of interacting with a member of the other national group. In future studies it is recommended to compare the results of interventions conducted with moderators of the same national group as the participants with including moderators from the other national group. In addition, because the study was conducted only with participants living in northern Israel during a specific period of time, it did not allow to examine the effects of specific participant characteristics or certain specific security incidents – on the success of the program. Future studies will be able to better examine the effects of these factors and as such will allow to adapt future programs to its specific participants and circumstances in order to increase its effectiveness.

It is also recommended to conduct several future studies in order to broaden our findings. First, it is important to examine more deeply the effects of specific cultures with different norms (e.g. of emotion expression, self exposure or interpersonal relationships) – on the impact of similar intervention processes. Aside from theoretical understanding, such studies will enable adapting the intervention program to better fit the culture of all participants (even if they come from different cultures). Secondly, it is recommended to conduct longitudinal studies that will examine the long term effects of this type of program (e.g. 3, 6, 12 months post intervention) on the participants' attitudes and feelings towards members of the other national group. This type of research will enable examining to what extent the changes the participants experienced immediately after the program's conclusion would be maintained over time and whether some program effects will only be manifested after some time. Finally, future studies might attempt to locate the most effective and significant elements of such intervention program – those that contribute the most to the Jewish- Arab relationships in Israel – and such, focus on them in optimal future programs.

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