Reducing fragility and conflict: What we’re learning from rigorous impact evaluations

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Growth in peacebuilding impact evaluations

There has been dramatic growth in rigorous impact evaluations of peacebuilding, conflict prevention, and violence reduction programming over the past decade.

How to apply what we are learning?

• Much of this work evaluates discrete programs and policies to understand their individual effectiveness...
  – But also to test broader hypotheses about how these programs might work
  – And to generate insights into the human behaviour these programs and policies seek to shape

• This research is producing a body of evidence that can help civil society organizations, governments, and donors deliver better strategy and programming in fragile settings
Capturing emerging insights

• This presentation grew out of a 2019 publication focused on capturing emerging insights from across randomized evaluations of interventions focused on conflict and violence reduction.

• What broader lessons can we start to build from a small but growing body of experimental work?
The Governance, Crime, and Conflict Initiative (GCCI)

- Launched in 2017 with funding from DFID, GCCI includes three different experimental research programs:
  - Governance Initiative (J-PAL)
  - Crime and Violence Initiative (J-PAL)
  - Peace and Recovery Program (IPA)

- GCCI is a £12-million investment by DFID that funds rigorous and policy-relevant research to determine what works in improving governance and overcoming crime, violence, and conflict in low- and middle-income countries.
The research we present today was led by...

Chris Blattman  Oeindrila Dube  Sandip Sukhtankar  Jeannie Annan  Julian Jamison  Katherine Casey

Sule Alan  Bilal Sidiqqi  Salma Mousa  Jasper Cooper  Julian Dyer  Alexandra Hartman
What can this RCT research tell us?

• A rigorous impact evaluation will never tell us that a broad-based conflict reduction strategy with many components is going to work in all settings and is ready to scale.

• The work involved in considering how to apply the findings from studies like those we will present today remains after the research is done:
  – Will it generalise to other settings?
  – What are the tradeoffs and opportunity costs?
  – How do these findings fit with the broader literature?
What can this RCT research tell us?

• Instead we can use insights generated from RCTs to assemble programming elements and strategies that are more evidence-based, drawing on findings about what has worked and what principles of programming have shown promise. These insights include:
  – Low-cost programming has the power to shift measures of social capital and cohesion;
  – Interventions that target the highest-risk individuals may be more effective than blanket approaches in reducing violent behavior in high-crime or conflict settings;
  – The identity and the proximity of police can impact what kinds of crime (and with what frequency) individuals report crime
Generating lessons that map to the WBG’s FCV strategy

Figure 5: The Four Pillars of Engagement

1. Preventing violent conflict and interpersonal violence
   - Tackling risks and grievances early on, and strengthening sources of resilience, before tensions turn into crises

2. Remaining engaged during conflicts & crisis situations
   - Building resilience, protecting essential institutions, and delivering critical services like health or education

3. Helping countries transition out of fragility
   - Strengthening the capacity and legitimacy of core institutions, renewing the social contract, and supporting private sector development

4. Mitigating the spillovers of FCV
   - Addressing spillovers such as forced displacement, as well as shocks resulting from climate and environmental challenges

What does this mean in practice?
Emerging insights

I. Restoring social capital, increasing social cohesion

II. Promoting skills and capacities for reducing conflict and criminal behavior

III. Shifting police and community responses to violence and conflict
One goal of peacebuilding programming has been to increase trust between communities and promote social bonds that could potentially play a role in preventing further conflict by:

- Developing prosocial norms within and between groups;
- Increasing the exchange of information;
- Promoting peaceful bargaining; thereby
- Defusing intergroup tensions

Casey, 2018
Community-driven development and reconstruction

• Grant community members a key role in determining how aid is allocated
• When delivered in fragile or post-conflict states, typically aim to contribute to social cohesion and reduce conflict
• RCTs of CDD/R programs have shown disappointing results:
  – While they can contribute to reconstruction and improved service delivery in fragile contexts...
  – They may not improve social cohesion or reduce violence

What other types of interventions may provide a more cost-effective option to achieve this goal?

Casey, 2018
Sierra Leone: Transitional justice

Program: Community-level bonfire ceremonies where victims shared accounts and perpetrators sought forgiveness

Results:
- Increased forgiveness towards perpetrators
- Increased trust of former combatants
- Worsened measures of psychological well being (PTSD, depression, anxiety)

Lessons: Reconciliation programs should be redesigned to maintain societal benefits without imposing psychological costs

Cilliers, Dube, and Siddiqi, 2016
Setting: Erbil and Qaraqosh (Iraq) with significant population of Iraqi Christians displaced by ISIS

Soccer league: Christian members randomly assigned to either an all-Christian team or one mixed with Sunni Arabs
Iraq: Results

- Iraqi Christians assigned to mixed teams were more likely to:
  - Train with Muslims six months later
  - Vote for a Muslim player (not on their team) to receive a sportsmanship award
- Personal beliefs proved harder to modify

Lessons: Interventions seeking to build social cohesion after conflict may consider aiming to change everyday behaviors rather than personal beliefs

Mousa, 2020
Ongoing research

**Nigeria:** Examining whether inter-dialogues between farmers and herders can mitigate conflict

**Jordan:** Evaluating how contact impacts stereotyping, social norms, trust between groups, and productivity in communities that are hosting Syrian refugees

**Bangladesh:** Evaluating different strategies for facilitating contact between Rohingya refugees and their host communities
Emerging insights

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Can employment programs increase measures of stability?

Theory suggests that labor market programs may increase social and political stability when targeted towards the highest-risk individuals by:

- Raising opportunity costs
- Occupying time
- Improving cognitive and socio-emotional skills
- Reducing grievances
Liberia: Intensive agricultural training

Program: Intensive agricultural training, which provided both human and physical capital and integrated economic and psychosocial assistance.

Results:

• Increased participants’ employment in agriculture and average wealth.
• Decreased amount of time spent in illicit activities (though most did not exit illicit activities entirely).
• No effect on attitudes towards violence and democracy, and little effect on anti-social behavior or community engagement.

Blattman and Annan, 2016
Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is designed to help participants:

• Improve their self-image
• Relate and adapt to their environment
• Slow down their decision-making processes
• Plan ahead

**STYL Program:** 8-week long CBT-inspired program that combined group therapy with one-on-one counseling aimed at improving participants’ self-image and self-control

Blattman et al., 2017
Liberia: Study design

Sample: 999 eligible men from Monrovia

- 8-week CBT (28%)
- $200 grant (25%)
- 8-week CBT Followed by $200 grant (25%)
- Comparison group (22%)

Blattman et al., 2017
Liberia: Results

• Receiving therapy with or without the cash reduced the likelihood of aggressive and criminal behavior among participants and improved some measures of self-control and self-image

• Cash reduced crime in the short-run, but effects dissipated within a year

• Therapy plus cash amplified and prolonged these benefits

• Men did not spend cash on temptation goods

• Findings contribute to arguments that noncognitive skills and preferences are malleable and contribute to antisocial behavior

* Long-term follow-up planned

Blattman et al., 2017
Ongoing research

**Nigeria:** Can equipping youth with foundational skills -- through both apprenticeship and vocational training -- improve youths’ labor market opportunities and reduce their participation in violent activities?

**Sierra Leone:** How can mental health interventions be most effectively delivered to youth facing conflict and adversity?
Emerging insights

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III. Shifting police and community responses to violence and conflict
Shifting police and community responses to violence

- States provide important services in security provision, dispute resolution, access to justice in different ways
- In fragile (and non-fragile) settings, these services may not meet demand for several potential reasons, including:
  - Weak or fledgling institutions;
  - Challenges of security and justice provision in rural settings;
  - Challenges of operating alongside customary or traditional authorities; and
  - Failure to meet the needs of particular populations

How can state and community-level interventions effectively complement one another in building resilient communities?
Four studies that shed light on parts of the answer to these questions

1. **Kenya**: Effects of increased non-police security provision

2. **Bougainville, PNG**: Response to a new community policing presence in rural areas

3. **Liberia**: Alternative dispute resolution training to reduce violence

4. **Turkey**: Schools as a site for increasing cohesion and reducing violence
Kenya: Gains from an increased non-police security presence

Program: Randomly allocated increased farm protection across 600 farmers by facilitating hiring of watchmen in rural SW Kenya

Results:

- Increased perceived security of farmers and reduced reported farm theft
- Increases investment by farmers and value of farm sales
- Reduces disputes between neighboring farms
- No evidence of spillovers of crime to other farms

Dyer, 2020
Bougainville, PNG: Community policing

**Program:** Randomly assigned communities with little history of state presence to receive “community auxiliary police officer”

**Results:**

- Police presence stimulated increased demand for both police and customary authorities, but widened existing gap along gender lines in appraisals of the police, with men preferring to call on customary authorities and women the state
- The presence of community police (particularly female officers) increased reporting of VAW
- Also reduced the perceived prevalence of violence against women, property crime, and alcoholism (but not actual reported incidence)

Cooper, 2020
Bougainville, Papua New Guinea: Community policing

In your recent experience, when you or a man / woman like you take a problem to the police, do they...

- explain how they will deal with the issue?
- listen to what you have to say?
- seem concerned about your feelings?
- treat you politely?
- take your problem seriously?
- treat you the same as they would a woman / man?
- appear to know what they are doing?

Cooper, 2020
Liberia: ADR training for resolving land disputes

Program/Context: In 2010, 20% of Liberians reported a dispute over land or other real property; 10% reported that the dispute led to violence

• UNHCR Liberia and the Justice and Peace Commission (JPC) partnered to promote non-violent dispute resolution and inter-group reconciliation

• ADR training (8 day-long sessions over 2 months):
  – Taught skills to strengthen community members’ dispute resolution abilities (emphasis on interpersonal and land disputes)
  – Men and women participated in lectures, group discussion, and role-playing

Goal: To reduce tension and violence around property rights, seen as a trigger for a return to conflict

Blattman et al., 2014; Hartman et al., 2018
Results: Intervention has no impact on the incidence of disputes, but large impacts on the rate of resolution of disputes

- 3 years after intervention, violence associated with the disputes had dropped
- Evidence of persistent change in skills related to managing emotions and avoiding violence
- But… difficult to view the intervention as cost-effective. Researchers estimate the program cost $946 for every act of property destruction or interpersonal violence avoided
- Some indications that the intervention improved tenure security only for those with more established land claims, and increases in extrajudicial punishment
Turkey: Teaching children perspective-taking

**Program:** Children in Turkish schools with high levels of Syrian refugees were taught a curriculum on perspective-taking (2hr/wk x 16 wks) aimed at reducing violence and building inter-ethnic cohesion.

**Results:**

- The curriculum reduced violence in treated schools and risk to children of being a victim of violence.
- Reduce ethnic segregation in the classroom, particularly increasing inter-ethnic friendship for refugee children.
- Led students to exhibit more trust towards one another.

Alan et al., 2020
Insights for programming

These studies offer evidence of the following principles for programming on designed to reduce fragility, conflict and violence:

• Community-level programming can offer a complement to state security responses;
• Some elements of a community’s capacity to manage disputes can be shaped & improved;
• Socially disadvantaged groups may be more likely to take up state services for dispute resolution and security provision more than others; and
• Teaching children to develop perspective-taking in schools can help reduce violence and build greater inter-ethnic cohesion.
Ongoing research

Pakistan: Can providing positive information about effectiveness of state justice institutions increase uptake and improve perceptions of the state?

India: Can women’s help desks in police stations, staffed by more female officers, improve police responsiveness to women and crime reporting by women?

India: Can increased quantity and quality of police presence help curb street harassment?

Colombia: What strategies work to shift governance away from criminal groups and increase state legitimacy?
Concluding thoughts
Open questions

Rigorous experimental evidence in this field remains limited. Areas where we believe randomized evaluations can add valuable insights include:

- Participation and organization of violence
- Security provision and efficacy of the justice sector
- Refugees and internal displacement
- Building and maintaining stability after violence
- Preventing and countering violent extremism
- Crisis prevention, response, and recovery

Where do other evidence gaps exist?
COVID-19: Adapting to phone surveys

**Colombia**: Observing how gangs and organized criminal groups are adapting and responding to the pandemic

**Pakistan**: Examining the downstream effects of a community policing intervention on citizen trust and willingness to comply with restrictions on movements and gatherings

**Peru**: Understanding the impact of COVID-19 related restrictions on intimate partner violence and intra-household conflict and evaluating an SMS intervention designed to help men manage emotional regulation

**Uganda**: Testing how graduation-style interventions can help refugees improve nutrition, food security, and self-reliance and cope with extreme economy-wide shocks
Want to learn more?

Contact us:
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Read the evidence review:
povertyactionlab.org(review-paper/governance-
crime-and-conflict-initiative-evidence-review

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Lessons from randomized evaluations on managing and preventing crime, violence, and conflict
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References: Restoring social capital, increasing social cohesion


References: Promoting skills and capacities for reducing conflict and criminal behavior


**References:** Shifting police and community responses to violence and conflict


