Ana Tomovska Misoska[1]

School of Business Economics and Management, University American College in Skopje

Laura Taylor Jocelyn Dautel Risa Rylander

School of Psychology, Engineering and Physical Sciences, Queen's University in Belfast

[1] Corresponding author email: tomovska@uacs.edu.mk

CONTACT, CONFLICT AND INTERETHNIC ATTITUDES AMONG CHILDREN IN NORTH MACEDONIA[2]

Improving interethnic relations in conflict-affected societies is a difficult task, as a complex repertoire of mutual views and reactions is developed. Furthermore, the experiences of the children in such situations have rarely been taken into perspective. Therefore, this study tries to address this research gap by using data from the Republic of North Macedonia, where interethnic tensions are still present between ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians, although the violent outburst of the conflict ended in 2001. The paper is focused on perceptions of contact and conflict among primary aged children, and their relations with the outgroup attitudes such as liking, trusting, and wanting to play with children from the outgroup. A total of 194 children aged 6 to 11 (*M* = 8.4) participated in the research, filling play-like items using Qualtrics. The sample was taken from two schools with a mixed language of instruction and was balanced for ethnicity (45.9% Macedonian, 54.1% Albanian) as well as gender (57.7% female, 42.3% male). The results of the series of regression analyses show that the contact quality and a number of outgroup friends are significantly correlated with outgroup liking, willingness to play, and outgroup trust, while the perception of conflict is negatively correlated with outgroup trust. The interaction between age and the contact quantity is a significant predictor of willingness to play with the outgroup, while the interaction between majority status and contact quantity is a significant predictor of outgroup trust. The study highlights the need for a meaningful contact between children from both ethnic groups for improvement of interethnic relations.

Key words: contact, conflict, intergroup attitudes, primary aged children

Introduction

Promoting intergroup understanding and improving intergroup attitudes is paramount for societies faced with violent outbursts of the interethnic conflict. The authors have pointed out that an important precursor for a change is changing the reactions of the groups towards each other (Bar-Tal, 2013). Keeping in mind that children start developing their ethnic identity early on (Nesdale, Durkin, Maass, & Griffiths, 2004), and even become aware of intergroup relations starting to develop prejudice (Aboud et al., 2012), it is very important to try to understand their experiences with the other groups, and the mechanisms through which positive intergroup relations can be promoted. This is especially important in societies faced with the conflict, as in such situations the children develop a repertoire of reactions towards the other group at a very young age (Bar-Tal, Diamond, & Nessie, 2017; Connolly & Healy, 2004). To date a number of interventions have been developed to promote such positive changes, and a number of them have been based on the contact hypothesis (Kupermintz & Salomon, 2005). The findings point to the value of contact in improving intergroup relations (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; Pettigrew, Tropp, Wagner, & Christ, 2011), especially in conflict-affected settings (Hughes, Lolliot, Hewstone, Schmid, & Carlislie, 2012; Hughes, Campbell, Lolliot, Hewstone, & Gallagher, 2013). However, most of the studies to date have involved either adults or older children (post-primary), with very few studies looking at the experiences of younger children (Connolly, 2000; Tomovska Misoska, 2013). Therefore, this paper tries to bridge the gap by looking at the relation between conflict, contact, and three outcome variables connected to intergroup relations: trust, outgroup liking, and willingness to play with the outgroup members. This study ultimately aims to understand how contact may help in promoting better intergroup relations in a society that has experienced a violent outburst of interethnic conflicts, and still experiences division.

North Macedonia Context

To understand the relation among these variables, data from children aged 6 to 11 from the Republic of North Macedonia have been used. The Republic of North Macedonia is inhabited by people from different ethnic backgrounds, with the majority being Macedonians, and the largest minority being Albanians, followed by Turks, Roma, and Serbs (The State Statistical Office, 2005). Communication between the two biggest groups is fairly limited, and the interethnic dialogue is marked by intolerance, suspicion, and mistrust (Myhrvold, 2005). These tensions resulted in a violent conflict outburst in 2001, which ended with the signing of the Ohrid Framework Agreement granting more rights to the ethnic minorities in the country. However, the perceptions and interpretations were clearly ethnocentric by both ethnic groups (Petroska-Beska & Najcevska, 2004). Most of the studies conducted after the signing of the Ohrid Framework Agreement still show

consistent favourable perception of the author's own ethnic group, and a mostly negative perception of the other ethnic group (Jasari et al., 2005; Petroska-Beska, 2012; Petroska-Beska & Kenig, 2002). Although there has been an improvement over time, a certain degree of mistrust still persists among the members of both ethnic groups. Both Macedonians and Albanians have reported that they would not send their children to a school where another ethnic group is a majority (Maleska, 2010). This tension spans across generations, and even young people in the country show low levels of trust in the other ethnic group and high levels of social distance (Topuzovska Latković, Borota Popovska, Serafimovska, & Cekić, 2013).

The educational system has been both a product and a *de facto* contributor to ethnic separation in the country. Given the opportunity, minority students attend classes in their mother language, resulting in a very limited contact between Macedonian and Albanian pupils (Myhrvold, 2005). In ethnically mixed municipalities, some schools have only one language of instruction (some only have Macedonian and some only Albanian), and even in schools with multiple languages of instruction, there are still numerous ways to keep the pupils separate, such as splitting students into different buildings or different shifts. These arrangements have left Albanian children most isolated from the other ethnic groups (Petrovska-Beska, Najcevska, Kenig, Ballazhi, & Tomovska, 2009). The studies have shown that the educational system lacks capacity for promoting more positive mutual interactions, which leads towards the improvement of interethnic relations (Mickovska, Aleksova, & Raleva, 2009; Petrovska-Beska et al., 2009) and that stereotypes about the groups still persist among pupils (Petroska-Beska, 2012). Although teachers, parents, and even pupils are ambivalent towards the mutual contact, viewing it mostly as a source of conflict, many of them are also aware that pupils need to get to know each other and learn how to work with each other, which is only possible through greater mutual contacts (Petroska-Beska, 2012). As a result, there have been a number of efforts through various projects to enhance the capacity of the educational system for improving the intergroup relations, and many projects that encourage organized intergroup encounters have been undertaken. Although these efforts have promoted some movement towards better portrayal of the multicultural nature of North Macedonian society in schools (Petroska-Beska & Osmani, 2014), the experiences of children in North Macedonian primary schools have rarely been explored. Therefore, this study will focus on exploring the experiences of 6- to 11-year-old children. The paper starts by presenting the theoretical basis of the current work.

Contact, Conflict, Children, and Intergroup Attitudes

Children who grow up in a society that has faced violent outbursts of the conflict tend to develop a repertoire of attitudes and behaviors towards the other ethnic group that reflects the views of the community in which they live (Bar-Tal

et al., 2017), even after the height of violence has passed (Ajduković & Čorkalo Biruski, 2008). In such situations, children tend to develop a strong in-group loyalty and lower levels of trust towards the other ethnic group (Ajduković & Čorkalo Biruški, 2008). It has been noted in the conflict-affected settings that more prejudice leads to less desire for a mutual contact, and a greater social distance between the groups (Binder et al., 2009).

An important way of reducing prejudice and promoting better intergroup relations in the conflict-affected settings has been the use of contact interventions. The value of contact was first emphasized by Allport, Clarck, & Pettigrew (1954), and in its original formulation, the contact hypothesis proposed four conditions of contact that should lead to decreased prejudice, not only towards the individuals in the contact situation but also towards the whole group. The four conditions were the following: equal status within the contact situation, common goals, cooperation in the pursuit of those goals, and support for contact from authorities. Later research provided strong support for the value of contact in reducing prejudice and promoting positive intergroup relations in a variety of settings. Though the effects were stronger when the conditions were present, a recent meta-analysis (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006) found positive effects even in the absence of the four conditions, although casual negative contact might lead to heightened negative attitudes towards the outgroup (Pettigrew et al., 2011).

The studies have found that both quantity and quality of contact are important for positive effects to occur (Binder et al., 2009; Hewstone & Brown, 2005; Niens, Cairns, & Hewstone, 2003). However, it has been noted that the quality of contact has stronger influence (Binder et al., 2009; Eller & Abrams, 2004; Tredoux & Finchilescu, 2007). In general, a higher quality contact was found to promote trust and more positive perceptions of the outgroup, and therefore lead to greater reconciliation efforts in two conflict-affected settings—Northern Ireland and South Africa (Tropp et al., 2017). The positive effects of contact extend even beyond the contact situations in predicting future contact intentions, with trust acting as a mediator (Binder et al., 2009; McKeown & Psaltis, 2017).

One of the most important variables being studied and outlined as especially conducive for reducing prejudice and promoting better intergroup relations is the intergroup friendship. Friendship reduces anxiety and promotes empathy and self-disclosure, thus leading to more positive attitudes (Pettigrew & Troop, 2006; Pettigrew et al., 2011; Turner, Tam, Hewstone, Kenworthy, & Cairns, 2013). Such positive effects of contact have been observed among the post-primary pupils in Northern Ireland (Hughes et al., 2013; Turner et al., 2013), where contact in ethnically heterogeneous schools have led to more positive ingroup norms about forming friendships with the outgroup (Hughes et al., 2013). In addition, it has been found that the organized contact have reduced the intergroup anxiety and improved outgroup attitudes, intergroup trust, and tendencies for more contact with the outgroup among the post-primary students in Northern Ireland (Hughes et al., 2012). It has to be noted, however, that certain studies have found differences in the effects of contact

when it comes to the majority/minority status of the participants. In this regard, the studies have found that the associations between contact and social distance are less robust for minority participants (Binder et al., 2009, Tredoux & Finchilescu, 2010). In addition, a meta-analytical study of the contact hypothesis has found a stronger contact-prejudice reduction link for groups with majority status, pointing to the need to explore the issue further and look at the conceptions of contact between the groups (Tropp & Pettigrew, 2005), which might be different between majority and minority groups (Tredoux & Finchilescu, 2010; Uluğ & Cohrs, 2017). When it comes to the age of the participants, most studies point out that the effects of contact are not related to age, and positive effects are noted among all age groups, although most studies have used participants who are adults or young adults (Pettigrew & Troop, 2006; Pettigrew et al., 2011), even in the conflict-affected settings (Cehajic, Brown, & Castano, 2008). There is a lack of studies for gender effects of contact when it comes to interethnic relations.

However, very few studies have looked at the experiences of primary aged children. One meta-analysis (Aboud et al., 2012) has found that contact has beneficial effects on younger children, with contact affecting their attitudes more than their interactions. The effects of contact have been even stronger for children with majority status. Some authors have noted that by the age of eleven, children in societies faced with violent outbursts of the conflict are quite competent in understanding and interpreting the wider context, and that contact interventions need to engage with their understandings in order to be successful (Connolly, 2000; Tomovska, 2010; Tomovska Misoska, 2014). Keeping in mind that by the age of eleven children are already aware of the broader context in which they live, understanding the aspects of contact connected to the outgroup attitudes in younger children is paramount. Age is an important variable, as studies show that children's competence in understanding the differences between the groups in conflict-affected settings increases with age (Bar-Tal et al., 2017; Tomovska Misoska et al., 2019). Therefore, the main goal of the paper is to understand the relations between the gender, ethnicity, and different aspects of contact and the outgroup attitudes among primary aged children in the Republic of North Macedonia.

Based on the literature review, the paper tests the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: Perception of more conflict is related to lower trust, less willingness to play with the outgroup, and less outgroup liking.

Hypothesis 2: More contact is related to higher trust, more willingness to play with the outgroup, and more outgroup liking.

Hypothesis 3: Higher quality contact is related to higher trust, more willingness to play with the outgroup, and more outgroup liking.

Hypothesis 4: More reported outgroup friends are related to higher trust, more willingness to play with the outgroup, and more outgroup liking.

Hypothesis 5: The age and the majority status of the participants have moderating effects on the relationship between contact and outgroup attitudes, trust, willingness to play with the outgroup, and outgroup liking.

Method

Sample and Procedure

The current study was conducted in two schools in mixed municipalities in the Republic of North Macedonia. In one municipality Albanians were the local majority, and in the other municipality Macedonians were the local majority, to balance the potential status differentials between the two ethnicities on a local level. All the results were however calculated based on a country level majority/minority status (this variable was a part of the analysis entered as a dummy variable with 1 being assigned for majority). Both Macedonian and Albanian were languages of instruction in the two schools. In both schools the children were educated in separate classes (due to the opportunities for education in their mother tongue), but they had possibilities to meet members of the other group during casual encounters (school breaks, etc.). Also, some of the children were involved in planned contact encounters.

First, principals provided consent for the research to be undertaken in their schools. Then, parents were approached and asked to provide consent. Participating children also gave written consent before the research commenced. A total of 194 children participated in the research. Ethnic backgrounds of the participants were balanced, with 45.9% of Macedonian participants and 54.1% of Albanian participants. There were 57.5% of female and 42.3% of male children. The age ranged from 6 to 11 with an average age of 8.4 ($M = 8.4$, $SD = 1.4$).

The data were gathered by using play-like tasks that the children completed using iPads via Qualtrics software. The children completed the tasks in a designated quiet area in the 15-minute one-on-one sessions with a trained researcher. Each task began with an introductory slide, where the researcher provided a brief overview of the task, reassured the participant that there were no right or wrong answers, and asked if they had any questions before beginning the section of the game. Throughout the game, participants were rewarded with stickers.

Measures

Contact. Three items were used to measure contact. First, researchers introduced a 5-level clock picture Likert scale to participants and asked them how much time they spent with the outgroup member children; this item was used to measure the quantity of contact (contact quantity). The second item included a scale of four hands indicating a range from thumbs up to thumbs down. Participants were asked how good or bad their experiences were with the outgroup member children; the item was used to measure contact quality. The final item asked participants how many close outgroup member friends they had, utilizing a four-level scale displaying different numbers of people; this was used to measure the friendship aspects of contact (outgroup friends). Higher scores indicated more positive tendencies for contact. The measure was adapted from previous research in Northern Ireland (Tausch, Tam, Hewstone, Kenworthy, & Cairns, 2007).

Outgroup Attitudes. To measure outgroup attitudes, researchers introduced each participant to four fictitious characters from the background opposite that of the participant. Each character had a flag representing their community on their shirt and a name common to the background. Researchers then introduced the accompanying thumb scale and asked three questions about the children's perspectives toward the outgroup: How much do you like them (outgroup liking), how much do you trust them (outgroup trust), and how much do you want to play with them (willingness to play with outgroup). Participants selected one of the four thumbs to indicate their attitudes. In all the scales, higher scores meant more positive outgroup attitudes. The measure was adapted from previous work of Nesdale, Milliner, Duffy & Griffiths (2009). As the contact and outgroup attitude items used scales with different levels, the raw scores for each individual participant was divided by the number of the levels on the scale, so that the results were comparable across all the items used in the research. Thus, all the transformed scores were proportions, and the transformed scales ranged from 0 to 1.

Perception of Interethnic Conflict. To measure the perception of interethnic conflict, the researchers described a cartoon scene to participants, in which two children gender-matched to the participant were struggling over a toy. The researchers introduced this as an example of 'conflict.' Participants were then asked, "*How much conflict do you think there is between Macedonians and Albanians in the country*?". Participants could then respond via a five-level balloon scale ranging from none to a lot. Higher scores meant the perception of more conflict. The measure was taken from previous work by Dautel (2012).

Results

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

The first step of data analyses included calculations of the descriptive statistics of the variables and their correlations. The results of the mean and standard deviation of the variables are given in Table 1.

Table 1
Descriptive statistics of used measures

	Mean	Standard Deviation
Outgroup trust	0.49	0.29
Willingness to play	0.48	0.31
Outgroup liking	0.46	0.31
Perception of conflict	3.28	1.31
Quantity of contact	0.38	0.18
Contact quality	0.35	0.31
Outgroup friends	0.41	0.21

The correlation matrix for the variables included in the hypothesis testing is given in Table 2. As it can be seen, there are statistically significant correlations between the variables. Most notable is that the perception of conflict has only a significantly negative correlation with trust, meaning that those children who have higher perception of conflict also report less outgroup trust. Also, it has to be noted that the majority/minority status of the participant is not significantly correlated to many variables. There is no difference between the minority and majority participants when it comes to their outgroup attitudes (the correlations are not significant and additional t-test are non-significant as well). The only exception is the significant positive correlation between the majority/minority and quantity of contact, meaning that majority children tend to report more contact encounters with their outgroup peers ($M = 0.41$ for majority participants, and $M = 0.35$ for minority participants; $t(179) = 2.25$, $p < .01$). Older children also tend to report higher levels of the outgroup trust, more willingness to play with the outgroup, and more outgroup liking. They also tend to report more frequent contact encounters and more outgroup friends. When it comes to the quantity of contact, it can be noticed that it is not correlated with the outgroup trust and outgroup friendship. It is, however, correlated with other variables and as such it will be included in the regression analysis.

Table 2
Correlations between used variables

	Age	Maj/ Min	Like	Trust	Play	Conflict	Contact Quantity	Contact Quality	Friends
Age	1	-.06	.22**	.16**	.20**	-.02	.23**	.06	.26**
Majority/ Minority		1	.06	-.01	-.10	-.07	.17**	.02	.03
Liking			1	.39**	.42**	-.03	.16*	.41**	.32**
Trust				1	.42**	-.18**	.08	.27**	.32**
Play					1	-.02	.11	.26**	.23**
Conflict						1	-.04	-.01	-.09
Contact Quantity							1	-.06	.29**
Contact Quality								1	.17*
Friends									1

Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Hypothesis Testing

To test the hypotheses, a series of hierarchical regression analyses were conducted with two blocks of variables being entered. The criterion variables were the following: outgroup trust, willingness to play with the outgroup, outgroup liking. In the first block, the predictor variables were contact quantity, contact quality, outgroup friends, perception of conflict, age, and majority/minority status (which was entered as a dummy variable with 1 being majority). In the second block, the interaction between the age and majority/minority status and the rest of the predictor variables were entered as a part of the regression.

The first regression analysis looked at outgroup liking as a criterion variable. Including the predictor variables, the first block of the model explains only 23% of the variance of the variable outgroup liking, and the model is statistically significant, $F(6,174) = 9.99$, $p < .01$. The results of the model testing are presented in Table 3. The results also show that only contact quality and the number of outgroup friends are statistically significant predictors of outgroup liking. When the interaction variables are added to the model in the second block, the model explains 22% of the variance of the criterion variable, and it is statistically significant, $F(14,166) = 4.69$, $p < .01$, while the change in the F statistic is significant. None of the interaction between the variables is statistically significantly linked to outgroup liking.

Table 3
Results of multiple linear regression for outgroup liking

	β	t	p	Zero order correlations
Step 1				
Conflict	.00	0.01	.99	-03
Contact quantity	.09	1.25	.21	.16
Contact quality	.37	5.51	.00	.41
Outgroup friends	.19	2.76	.01	.32
Age	.12	1.78	.08	.22
Majority status	.04	0.58	.56	.06
Step 2				
Majority contact quantity interaction	-.05	-0.25	.80	.12
Majority contact quality interaction	-.13	-1.04	.30	.25
Majority outgroup friends interaction	.21	1.22	.22	.22
Majority conflict interaction	.31	1.59	.11	.07
Age contact quantity interaction	.49	1.10	.27	.21
Age contact quality interaction	-.08	-0.17	.86	.42
Age outgroup friends interaction	-.15	0.33	.75	.33
Age conflict interaction	-.25	0.57	.57	.07

Note. β – standardized coefficients; *t* – value of t-test; *p* – level of significance.
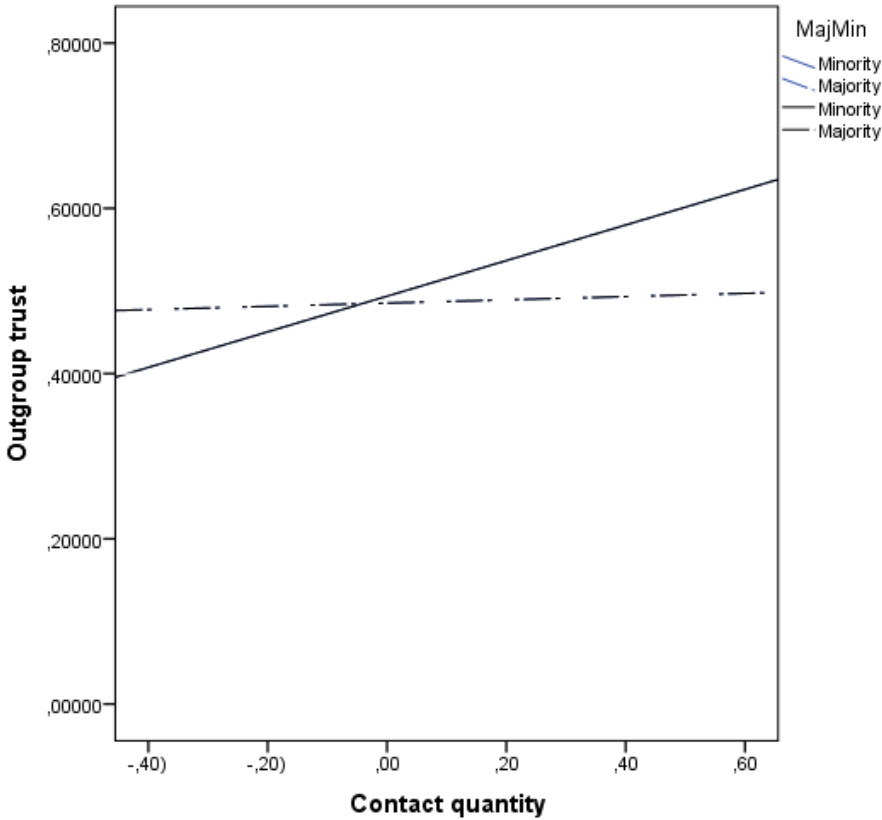
Another multiple regression model was run to test for outgroup trust as a criterion variable. The results in Table 4 show that the model is statistically significant, $F(6,174) = 6.32$, $p < .01$, and explains 15% of the variance of outgroup trust. The regression coefficients show that contact quality and a number of outgroup friends are statistically significant predictors of outgroup trust at the more stringent level, having a positive impact on outgroup trust. Perception of the conflict, on the other hand, is negatively related to outgroup trust at the level $p < .05$. When the interaction effects are included in the regression model, the model explains 18% of the variance, the model is statistically significant, $F(14,166) = 3.83$, $p < .01$, and the change in the F statistic is significant. The only significant predictor is the interaction between the majority status and contact quantity.

Table 4
Results of multiple linear regression for outgroup trust

	β	t	p	Zero order correlations
Step 1				
Conflict	-.16	-2.28	.02	-.18
Contact quantity	-.01	-0.12	.91	.08
Contact quality	.22	3.14	.00	.27
Outgroup friends	.24	3.25	.00	.32
Age	.09	1.17	.24	.16
Majority status	-.02	-0.31	.76	-.01
Step 2				
Majority contact quantity interaction	-.43	-2.11	.04	.00
Majority contact quality interaction	.06	0.43	.67	.18
Majority outgroup friends interaction	.29	1.67	.09	.16
Majority conflict interaction	.01	0.03	.98	-.06
Age contact quantity interaction	.55	1.17	.24	.12
Age contact quality interaction	-.59	-1.26	.21	.27
Age outgroup friends interaction	.72	1.55	.12	.33
Age conflict interaction	-.61	-1.36	.17	.11

Note. β – standardized coefficients; *t* – value of t-test; *p* – level of significance.

The results in Graph 1 show that this is especially important for children with minority status, as for them more contact is connected to higher levels of trust.

Graph 1. Interaction effects of contact quantity and majority/minority status for outgroup trust
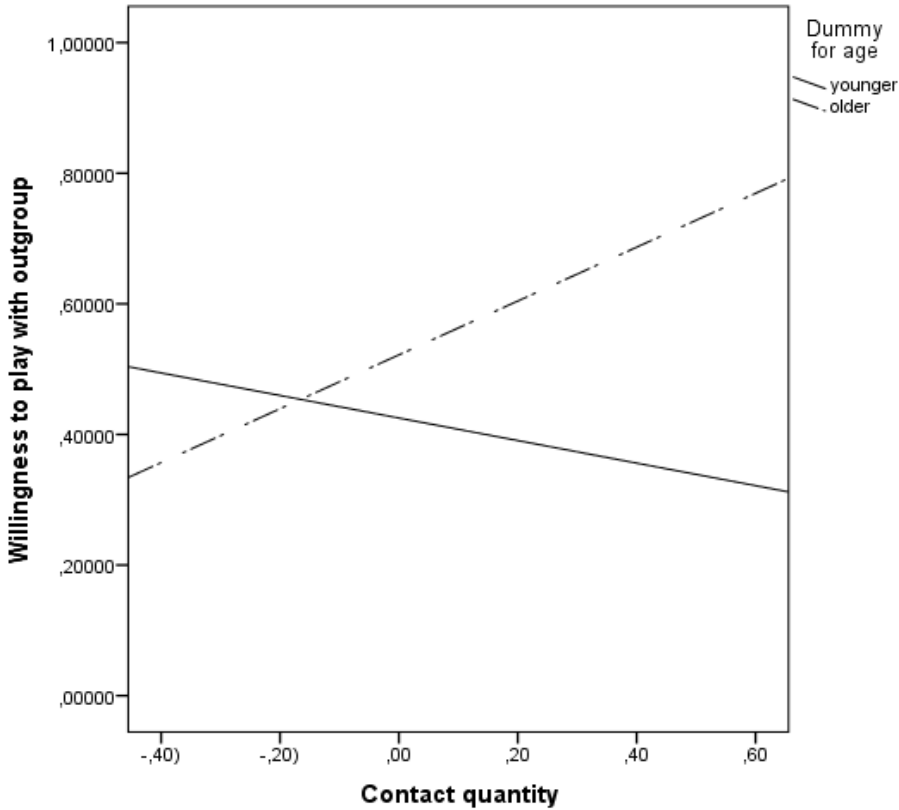
The last multiple linear regression included willingness to play with the outgroup as a criterion variable. The results of the first model are displayed in Table 5. As it can be seen, the model explains 9% of the overall variance and is statistically significant, $F(6,176) = 4.13$, $p < .01$. The perceived quality of contact and a number of outgroup friends are statistically significant predictors of willingness to play with the outgroup. When the interaction variables are entered in the model, it predicts 14% of the overall variance, and the model is statistically significant, $F(14,166) = 3.13$, $p < .01$. The change in the F statistic is also significant, and the prediction is improved in the second model. Only the interaction between age and the contact quantity is a significant predictor of willingness to play with the outgroup ($p < .01$).

Table 5
Results of multiple linear regression for willingness to play with the outgroup

	β	t	p	Zero order correlations
Step 1				
Conflict	.00	0.02	.98	-.02
Contact quantity	.06	0.74	.46	.11
Contact quality	.23	3.17	.00	.26
Outgroup friends	.13	1.27	.04	.23
Age	.14	1.88	.06	.20
Majority status	-.02	-0.34	.73	-.01
Step 2				
Majority contact quantity interaction	-.37	-1.82	.07	.23
Majority contact quality interaction	.17	1.29	.20	.21
Majority outgroup friends interaction	.25	1.41	.16	.13
Majority conflict interaction	.15	0.75	.45	.00
Age contact quantity interaction	1.29	2.79	.01	.18
Age contact quality interaction	.48	1.02	.31	.29
Age outgroup friends interaction	-.13	-0.28	.78	.25
Age conflict interaction	-.49	-1.08	.28	.06

Note. β – standardized coefficients; *t* – value of t-test; *p* – level of significance.

The results displayed in Graph 2 outline that older children who report more contact with the outgroup tend to display more willingness to play with the outgroup. For younger children, less reported contact is linked to more willingness to play with the outgroup.

Graph 2. Interaction effects of contact quantity and age for willingness to play with the outgroup

The results of the multiple regression models offer only a partial support for the Hypothesis 1. More specifically, perception of more conflict has a statistically significant negative relation to outgroup trust, and not to the other criterion variables. Therefore, it can be concluded that the perception of more conflict between the two ethnic groups lowers the outgroup trust. There is no support for Hypothesis 2, so that hypothesis is rejected. There is a full support for Hypothesis 3, as higher perceived quality of contact has a statistically significant positive link to outgroup liking, outgroup trust, and willingness to play with the outgroup. This means that perceiving a better quality of contact is linked to higher liking, trust, and willingness to play more with peers from the other ethnicity. Hypothesis 4 also receives a full support. This means that having more friends from the other ethnicity is linked to greater liking, trust, and willingness to play with peers from the other ethnicity. The age of the participants and their majority/minority status are not significant predictors of outgroup attitudes on their own. Hypothesis 5

receives a partial support as only some of the interactions are statistically significant. Namely, none of the interactions are statistically significant predictors of outgroup liking, only the interaction between the majority status and contact quantity is a significant predictor of the outgroup trust (with more contact being linked to the higher outgroup trust for majority participants), and only the interaction between age and contact quantity is a significant predictor of willingness to play with the outgroup (with more contact being linked to higher willingness to play with the outgroup for older participants, and less contact being linked to more willingness to play with the outgroup for younger children).

Discussion

This paper aims to understand the relationship between perception of conflict, contact, and outgroup attitudes among 6- to 11-year-old Macedonian and Albanian children from the Republic of North Macedonia. Previous studies have shown the potential of contact in promoting more positive intergroup relations in the societies faced with violent outbursts of the conflict. However, the views of children living in these societies have rarely been taken into perspective in the previous literature. By investigating the perspective of children, this study makes a valuable contribution to understanding the mechanisms of improving intergroup relations in such settings.

The findings of the study point to the importance of quality of contact and a number of outgroup friends for building more positive outgroup attitudes. Specifically, those two variables have a statistically significant positive relation to outgroup trust, willingness to play with the outgroup, and outgroup liking. These results are in line with the previous findings (Binder et al., 2009; Hewstone & Brown, 2005; Hughes et al., 2012; Niens et al. 2003; Pettigrew et al., 2011; Tropp et al., 2017). In addition, the results show a statistically significant negative relation between perception of the conflict and outgroup trust, which is in line with the previous findings (Ajduković & Čorkalo Biruški, 2008). This means that offering children opportunities for meaningful contact interactions with their peers from the other ethnicity could serve as a mechanism for improving the intergroup relations between the two groups in the context of North Macedonia. The contact encounters should tend to promote building of friendships, as friendship has been pointed out as an important factor in improving the outgroup attitudes on the individual level (Hewstone & Brown, 2005; Hughes et al., 2012; Niens et al., 2003; Pettigrew et al., 2011; Tropp et al., 2017). In addition, the contact encounters should engage with children's understanding of conflict, and help them understand how it affects relations between the groups and their own relations, trying to overcome the negative effects of the conflict on their mutual relations.

The study has not found a statistically significant relation between the contact quantity and outgroup attitudes, which is not in line with some of the previous

studies (Binder et al., 2009; Hewstone & Brown, 2005; Niens et al., 2003). The findings might differ from the previous studies, as this is one of the few studies done with primary aged children, since he other studies have either used high school or adult populations. Other studies note that as children get older, their understanding of group symbols and interpretations of intergroup relations improves and gets more nuanced (Bar-Tal et al., 2017; Tomovska Misoska et al., 2019). The results might also be due to the fact that in both schools in which children study, they have opportunities for mutual interactions and meeting each other during breaks, which are not planned or controlled, and which might not even offer the possibility to get to know each other better as they are brief casual encounters. Therefore, for the children, the number of times they meet each other might not be connected to their outgroup attitudes. The results of the contact quantity however should not be looked at in isolation. The study has found a statistically significant relationship between the age of the participants and contact quantity, when it comes to willingness to play with the outgroup, although age on its own is not a statistically significant predictor of the outgroup attitudes. This means that the older children who report more contact with the outgroup are also more willing to engage in future positive mutual encounters, such as play, which again supports the notion that as they mature, their understanding of interethnic relations gets increasingly individualized and based on their own actual experiences (Connolly, 2000; Tomovska, 2010; Tomovska Misoska, 2013). It has to be noted that there is no difference in the outgroup attitudes between the majority and minority participants. However, the interaction between the majority status and contact quantity is a significant predictor of outgroup trust, which additionally explains the role of contact quantity in improving the outgroup attitudes. Namely, the participants coming from the minority ethnic group (Albanians), who also report more contact encounters, tend to express higher trust towards the other ethnic group (Macedonians). This finding is not in line with some other findings (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006), but it might be due to the Albanian children having less chance for contact with their Macedonian peers (in line with the findings of Petroska Beska et al., 2009), thus providing more opportunities for contact is important for them. This again shows that there also might be different conceptions and experiences of contact (Tropp & Pettigrew, 2005) between the minority and majority groups and that this is an issue that needs to be explored further. All in all, the results show that children should be provided with more chances for mutual encounters, as more contact might be especially beneficial in improving the intergroup attitudes as children get older, as well as for the majority children. Also, other aspects of contact, such as the perceived quality of the contact encounters and their potential to offer chances for development of friendships, are even more important.

Although the study is limited in scope, and focuses on only two schools coming from the mixed areas in the country, the findings are valuable as they are some of the few focusing on such a young age. Therefore, future research in the field is needed. Future studies should broaden the research in different areas of the

country with different ethnic mixes and different types of schools to see what happens with children who do not have opportunities to casually meet each other in schools. In addition, qualitative insight into the experiences of children during their contact is necessary to understand the effects of the variables of the study deeper. The findings of the study point to the importance of contact for improving intergroup attitudes among primary-aged children. The study accentuates that the children should be provided with more opportunities for mutual contact encounters, which might be especially beneficial for older children and those coming from the majority. However, contact interventions must be carefully planned and designed in a manner that will allow the children to have positive fulfilling experiences with their peers from the other ethnic group, as the quality of contact seems to be an important aspect for the improvement of intergroup relations. In addition, children need to be given opportunities to develop friendships with their peers from the other group, as that is an important aspect in developing more positive outgroup attitudes through personal ties and opportunities for deindividuation. This means that contact encounters must be planned in a manner that will enable children to engage in pleasant mutual encounters focusing focus on discussing topics of interest to them (Tomovska, 2010; Tomovska Misoska, 2013), in the atmosphere that will enable development of closeness and friendships, but also engage with their understanding of the intergroup conflict, and the contested issues, offering alternative explanations, as well as deconstruction of the relations between the two groups to help building higher trust and improve the intergroup relations.

References

Aboud, F. E., Tredoux, C., Tropp, L. R., Brown, C. S., Niens, U., Noor, N. M., & Una Global Evaluation Group. (2012). Interventions to reduce prejudice and enhance inclusion and respect for ethnic differences in early childhood: A systematic review. *Developmental Review, 32*(4), 307–336. doi:10.1016/j.dr.2012.05.001

Ajduković, D., & Čorkalo Biruški, D. (2008). Caught between the ethnic sides: Children growing up in a divided post-war community. *International Journal of Behavioral Development, 34*(4), 337–347. doi:10.1177/0165025408090975

Allport, G. W., Clark, K., & Pettigrew, T. (1954). *The nature of prejudice.* Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Bar-Tal, D. (2013). *Intractable Conflicts: Socio-Psychological Foundations and Dynamics.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bar-Tal, D., Diamond, A. H., & Nessie, M. (2017). Political socialization of children in intractable conflicts: Conception and evidence. *International Journal of Behavioral Development, 41*(3), 415–425. doi:10.1177/0165025416652508

Binder, J., Zagefka, H., Brown, R., Funke, F., Kessler, T., Mummendey, A., Maquil, A., Demoulin, S., & Leyens, J. P. (2009). Does Contact Reduce Prejudice or Does

Prejudice Reduce Contact? A Longitudinal Test of the Contact Hypothesis Among Majority and Minority Groups in Three European Countries. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 96*(4), 843–856. doi:10.1037/a0013470

Cehajic, Brown, S. R., & Castano, E. (2008). Forgive and Forget? Antecedents and Consequences of Intergroup Forgiveness in Bosnia and Herzegovina. *Political Psychology, 29*(3), 351–367. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9221.2008.00634.x

Connolly, P. (2000). What now for the contact hypothesis? Towards a new research agenda. *Race, Ethnicity and Education, 3*(2), 169–193. doi:10.1080/13613320050074023

Connolly, P., & Healy, J. (2004). *Children and the conflict in Northern Ireland: The experiences and perspectives of 3-11-year olds*. Belfast: Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister.

Dautel, J. (2012). The cost of conflict: Children's reasoning about ethno-religious identity in Northern Ireland. *Perspectives on Europe, 42*(2), 74–78.

Eller, A., & Abrams, D. (2004). Come Together: Longitudinal Comparisons of Pettigrew's Reformulated Intergroup Contact Model and the Common Ingroup Identity Model in Anglo-French and Mexican-American Contexts. *European Journal of Social Psychology, 34*(3), 229–256. doi:10.1002/ejsp.194

Hewstone, M., & Brown, R. (2005). An integrative theory of intergroup contact. In M. P. Zanna (Ed.), *Advances in experimental social psychology* Vol. 37 (pp. 255–343). Oxford: Elsevier Academic Press.

Hughes, J., Campbell, A., Lolliot, S., Hewstone, M., & Gallagher, T. (2013). Intergroup contact at school and social attitudes: Evidence from Northern Ireland. *Oxford Review of Education, 39*(6), 761–779. doi:10.1080/03054985.2013.857595

Hughes, J., Lolliot, S., Hewstone, M., Schmid, K., & Carlislie, K. (2012). Sharing classes between separate schools: A mechanism for improving inter-group relations in Northern Ireland? *Policy Futures in Education, 10*(5), 528–539. doi:10.2304/pfie.2012.10.5.528

Jasari, H., Kadriu, V., Pajaziti, A., Piperkoska, B., Mahmudi, S., & Murati, H. (2005). Presentation of the other in the media. In S. Markovska, V. Davcev, & D. Kolar-Panov (Eds.), *Researching otherness: Aspects of otherness from the perspective of certain higher education disciplines in the Republic of Macedonia* (pp. 389–447). Skopje: Foundation Open Society Institute Macedonia.

Kupermintz, H., & Salomon, G. (2005). Lessons to be learned from research on peace education in the context of intractable conflict. *Theory into Practice, 44*(4), 293–302. doi:10.1207/s15430421tip4404_3

Maleska, M. (2010). Interethnic relations in Macedonia: People centered analysis. *New Balkan Politics, 12*. Retrieved from: http://www.newbalkanpolitics.org.mk/cat/issue-12-2010/140

McKeown, S., & Psaltis, C. (2017). Intergroup contact and the mediating role of intergroup trust on outgroup evaluation and future contact intentions in Cy-

prus and Northern Ireland. *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology, 23*(4), 392–404. doi:10.1037/pac0000275

Mickovska, G., Aleksova, A., & Mickovska Raleva, A. (2011). *Report of the baseline study*. Macedonian Civic Education Center.

Nesdale, D., Durkin, K., Maass, A., & Griffiths, J. (2004). Group status, outgroup ethnicity and children's ethnic attitudes. *Applied Developmental Psychology, 25*(2), 237–251. doi:10.1016/j.appdev.2004.02.005

Nesdale, D., Milliner, E., Duffy, A., & Griffiths, J. (2009). Group membership, group norms, empathy and young children's intentions to aggress. *Aggressive Behavior, 35*(3), 244–258. doi:10.1002/ab.20303

Niens, U., Cairns, E., & Hewstone, M. (2003). Contact and conflict in Northern Ireland. In O. Hargie & D. Dickson (Eds.), *Researching the troubles: Social science perspectives on the Northern Ireland conflict* (pp. 123–139). Edinburgh: Mainstream.

Myhrvold, R. (2005). *Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia: Education as a political phenomenon*. Oslo: Norwegian Centre for Human Rights. Retrieved from: https://www.jus.uio.no/smr/english/about/programmes/nordem/publications/2005/0405.pdf

Petroska-Beska, V. (2012). *Baseline research regarding the interethnic integration in education*. Retrieved from: http://pmio.mk/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/IIEP-BASELINE-STUDY_ENG.pdf

Petroska-Beska, V., & Kenig, N. (2002). The image of the ingroup and the other ethnicity of the students at the faculty for education in Skopje. *Annual Compilation of the Faculty of Philosophy University "SS Cyril and Methodius" in Skopje*, *55*, 105–124.

Petroska-Beska, V., & Najcevska, M. (2004). *Macedonia: understanding history, preventing future conflict*. Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace. Retrieved from: https://www.usip.org/publications/2004/02/macedonia-understanding-history-preventing-future-conflict

Petroska-Beska, V., & Osmani, S. (2015). *Report from the electronic survey on the implementation of IIEP*. Retrieved from: http://pmio.mk/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/electronic-survey-report-2015-en.pdf

Petroska-Beska, V., Najcevska, M., Kenig, N., Ballazhi, S., & Tomovska, A. (2009). *Multiculturalism and inter-ethnic relations in education*. Skopje: UNICEF Country Office.

Pettigrew, T. F., & Tropp, L. R. (2006). A meta-analytic test of intergroup contact theory. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 90*(5), 751–783. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.90.5.751

Pettigrew, T. F., Tropp, L. R., Wagner, U., & Christ, O. (2011). Recent advances in intergroup contact theory. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 35*(3), 271–280. doi:10.1016/j.ijintrel.2011.03.001

Tausch, N., Tam, T., Hewstone, M., Kenworthy, J., & Cairns, E. (2007). Individual-level and group-level mediators of contact effects in Northern Ireland: The

moderating role of social identification. *British Journal of Social Psychology, 46*(3), 541–556. doi:10.1348/014466606X155150

The State Statistical Office. (2005). *Census of population, households and dwellings in the Republic of Macedonia 2002 - book XII*. Retrieved from: http://www.stat.gov.mk/pdf.kniga_13.pdf

Tomovska Misoska, A. (2014). Giving children space to express themselves: Exploring children's views and perspectives of contact programmes in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Macedonia. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education, 44*(5), 778–800. doi:10.1080/03057925.2013.792665

Tomovska, A. (2010). Contact as a tool for peace education? Reconsidering the contact hypothesis from the children's perspectives. *Journal of Peace Education, 7*(2), 121–138. doi:10.1080/17400201.2010.498993

Tomovska Misoska, A., Taylor, L. K., Dautel, J., & Rylander, R. (2019). Children's understanding of ethnic group symbols: Piloting an instrument in the Republic of North Macedonia. *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*. Advance online publication. doi:10.1037/pac0000424

Topuzovska Latković, M., Borota Popovska, M., Serafimovska, E., & Cekić, A. (2013). *Youth study Macedonia 2013*. Skopje: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung. Retrieved from: http://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/1017981/8586048/Ex-rep-yug-Macedoine-FES.pdf/6525abd1-f1db-4848-9a5b-a29ee884edb9

Tredoux, C., & Finchilescu, G. (2007). The Contact Hypothesis and Intergroup Relations 50 Years On: Introduction to the Special Issue. *South African Journal of Psychology, 37*(4), 667–678. doi:10.1177/008124630703700401

Tropp, L. R., Hawi, D. R., O'Brien, T. C., Gheorghiu, M., Zetes, A., & Butz, D. A. (2017). Intergroup contact and the potential for post-conflict reconciliation: Studies in Northern Ireland and South Africa. *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology, 23*(3), 239–249. doi:10.1037/pac0000236

Tropp, L. R., & Pettigrew, T. (2005). Differential relationships between intergroup contact and affective and cognitive dimensions of prejudice. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 31*(8), 1145–1158. doi:10.1177/0146167205274854

Turner, R. N., Tam, T., Hewstone, M., Kenworthy, J., & Cairns, E. (2013). Contact between Catholic and Protestant schoolchildren in Northern Ireland. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 43*, E216–E228. doi:10.1111/jasp.12018

Uluğ, Ö. M., & Cohrs, J. C. (2017). "If we become friends, maybe I can change my perspective" Intergroup contact, endorsement of conflict narratives, and peace-related attitudes in Turkey. *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, *23*(3)*, 278–287. doi:10.1037/pac0000216

Ana Tomovska Misoska

Visoka škola za poslovnu ekonomiju i preduzetništvo, Univerzitet američki koledž u Skoplju

Laura Taylor Jocelyn Dautel Risa Rylander

Visoka škola za psihologiju, inženjerstvo i prirodne nauke, Kraljičin univerzitet u Belfastu

KONTAKTI, KONFLIKTI I MEĐUETNIČKI STAVOVI KOD DECE IZ SEVERNE MAKEDONIJE

Pospešivanje odnosa među etničkim grupama koje imaju istoriju uzajamnih sukoba predstavlja težak zadatak, s obzirom na postojanje zamršenog repertoara uzajamnih neusklađenih procena i reakcija. Osim toga, iskustva dece koja odrastaju u takvim okolnostima retko su uzimana u obzir kroz istraživanja. Shodno tome, ovo istraživanje nastoji da upotpuni korpus nalaza o pomenutom problemu, fokusirajući se na međuetničke tenzije između Makedonaca i Albanaca koji žive u Republici Severna Makedonija, iako su nasilni sukobi među ovim etničkim grupama okončani 2001. godine. U radu je stavljen akcenat na relacije između percepcije kontakata i konflikata između dece nižeg osnovnoškolskog uzrasta i njihovih stavova prema deci druge nacionalnosti izraženih kroz naklonost, poverenje i spremnost na zajedničku igru. Podaci su prikupljeni na uzorku od 194-oro dece uzrasta od 6 do 11 godina (M = 8.4) primenom zadataka u formi igara koje su deci prezentovane preko tablet računara i platforme Qualtrics. Uzorak je prikupljen u dve škole i ujednačen je u pogledu etničke pripadnosti (45.9% dece makedonske nacionalnosti, 54.1% dece albanske nacionalnosti) i pola (57.7% devojčica). Rezultati serije regresionih analiza pokazuju da kvalitet međuetničkog kontakta i brojnost prijateljstava sa decom iz druge etničke grupe ostvaruju značajnu povezanost sa naklonošću, poverenjem i spremnošću za igru sa decom druge nacionalnosti, dok percepcija konflikata negativno korelira sa poverenjem prema deci koja pripadaju drugoj etničkoj grupi. Interakcija starosti dece i učestalosti kontakata predstavlja značajan prediktor spremnosti za igru sa decom iz druge etničke grupe, dok je interakcija statusa većinskog stanovništva i učestalosti kontakata značajan prediktor poverenja prema deci iz druge etničke grupe. Nalazi studije ističu važnost podsticanja konstruktivnih kontakata među decom dveju etničkih grupa u cilju poboljšanja međuetničkih odnosa.

Ključne reči: kontakt, konflikt, međugrupni stavovi, osnovnoškolski uzrast