

Beta Masih Takut: The Story of Forgiveness and Intergroup Anxiety from Post-Conflict Survivors

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Abstract. The prolonged conflict in the Moluccas from 1999 to 2003 continues to induce anxiety today, particularly among survivors. Fear is centered on affective aspects, such as the onset of anxiety and worry, leading to avoidance of other religious groups within their in-group. This is referred to as intergroup anxiety. Based on the results of a literature review, one of the factors that can influence the reduction of intergroup anxiety among post-conflict survivors is forgiveness. The aim of this study was to investigate the impact of forgiveness on intergroup anxiety. This study is a quantitative research project. Participants in this study were survivors of the Moluccas conflict, totaling 165 respondents who were selected using snowball sampling techniques. The study utilized the TRIM (Transgression Related Interpersonal Motivation Inventory) instrument and the intergroup anxiety scale. The data were analyzed using a simple linear regression test, resulting in a p -value of 0.731 ($p > 0.05$). These results indicate that forgiveness does not necessarily alleviate intergroup anxiety. There was no observed effect of forgiveness on intergroup anxiety among postconflict survivors of the Moluccas. Demographic variables, such as religion and the impacts of conflict, also did not influence or differentiate the emergence of anxiety between groups.

Keywords: forgiveness; intergroup anxiety; moluccas conflict

Inter-group conflict is a condition that indicates a dispute and misunderstanding between two or more people or between one group and another. From a psychological perspective, a conflict between groups is a mismatch of values and goals between two or more individuals, which arises due to the classification of individuals as members of different social groups (Bohm et al., 2020). Inter-group conflict is a frequent phenomenon in Indonesia. It is a consequence of its plurality based on social identity, be it different tribes, ethnicities, cultures, languages, and religions. This plurality, on the one hand, can have vast potential, while on the other hand, it also presents conflict vulnerability to the threat of disintegration (Susanto, 2019). Conflicts in Indonesia are mainly based on conflicts and differences in Ethnicity, Religion, Race, and Inter-group (SARA).

One of the most significant conflicts that ever occurred in Indonesia was the conflict in Ambon-Moluccas from 1999 to 2003. This conflict is modern Indonesian history's greatest and most

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devastating human tragedy. The impact of the tragedy is the occurrence of tremendous destruction, both casualties and property losses as well as the experience of psychological problems. Furthermore, the conflict also caused the Moluccans to experience salient social segregation between Islamic and Christian groups. After evacuating, people face traumatic realities and fear of returning to their homes and meeting their previous neighbors from different religions. Generally, they perform in-group homogeneity and settle in settlements where the society is homogeneous or one group with them. Christians returned to predominantly Christian settlements, as did Muslim groups who began building their homes in predominantly Muslim settlements. Some refugees also barter housing with people of different religions to obtain settlements that are homogeneous or of the same religion as them (Ernas, 2018).

The social segregation created in Ambonese society is quite significant. Settlements built on homogeneous and exclusive group identities are certainly not suitable for intergroup relations because they can lead to the maintenance and even more prominent prejudice in intergroup relations (Al Ramiah et al., 2011; Barlow et al., 2009; Hogg & Abrams, 2007; Mähönen et al., 2013; Schmid & Hewstone, 2011; White & Abu-Rayya, 2012). However, data shows that Ambon is included in the top five categories as the most tolerant city in Indonesia (Institute, 2020). Other studies also explain that after the conflict, relations between elements of Ambonese society, which are different religions, are still limited in terms of interaction. They tend to distance themselves from intense intergroup friendships, lack of cooperation, and difficulties in intergroup integration until they become uneasy when living with people of different religions (Sapulette, 2019). Other studies also show that social segregation policies to avoid inter-group conflicts in other regions in Indonesia and other parts of the world make them more sensitive to diversity issues and strengthen the degree of anxiety and in-group favoritism (Abduh & Kamal, 2023; Borinca et al., 2021; Susanto, 2019).

This condition shows that 20 years after the conflict in Ambon Moluccas, people still experience intergroup anxiety. According to W. G. Stephan (2014), intergroup anxiety is a feeling of anxiety and discomfort experienced by individuals when interacting with other groups. Intergroup anxiety has three interrelated components and has the potential to arise when individuals interact with different groups, namely (1) affective components, feeling worried, depressed, and anxious when interacting between groups; (2) cognitive component, whereby individuals judge that interaction with the out-group will have negative consequences for themselves and their in-group; (3) physiological component, when individuals feel intergroup anxiety, there is a body response in the form of increased blood pressure and cortisol (C. W. Stephan & Stephan, 2017; W. G. Stephan, 2014; W. G. Stephan & Stephan, 1985). These three components are closely related, where affective and cognitive components can provide negative stimuli for physiological components. For example, a person will become very angry if he anticipates encountering discriminatory behavior from another group. Because the individual's mind has attached negative prejudice against other groups, individuals tend to be sensitive and anxious when receiving treatment from other groups. Intergroup anxiety can cause biases between groups and negative attitudes towards other groups, resulting in avoidance of other groups and reluctance to help other groups (Ampuni & Irene, 2020).

Previous literature found several factors that make individuals experience intergroup anxiety when interacting between groups (Hopkins & Shook, 2017; Irene & Ampuni, 2020; Laura et al., 2015; Rosenthal et al., 2016; C. W. Stephan & Stephan, 2017; Yustisia & Hudijana, 2021), namely: personality traits and characteristics, attitudes and related cognitions, personal experience, and situational factors. These situational factors can vary, such as age, social identity, past experiences, and permeability factors in intergroup relations (Critcher et al., 2013; Delgado Rodríguez et al., 2017; Muraovs et al., 2015; West et al., 2017; Wolfer et al., 2019). In other research, it is also explained that religious identity can moderate the factors of intergroup anxiety (Beck, 2014).

Other studies have also shown attribution complexity and empathetic ability to be negatively correlated with intergroup anxiety (Vezzali et al., 2010). That is, the lower the attribution and empathy, the higher the level of anxiety between groups experienced by individuals and vice versa. Individuals with low attribution and empathy tend to have more difficulty understanding other people or members of other groups. In the context of conflict in Moluccas, individuals as conflict survivors who exhibit low levels of empathy are more likely to experience intergroup anxiety. It can result in the perception of individuals with a negative view of groups in conflict.

Empathy is one of the characteristics of individuals who have a positive relationship and the ability to forgive. Research conducted by Fehr et al. (2010) using a meta-analysis method states that empathy is the only variable with a strong positive correlation to forgiveness. According to McCullough (2001), forgiveness is a series of changes in prosocial motivation that occur after someone makes a mistake, and there is an urge to avoid revenge. Five factors affect forgiveness: empathy, attribution, guilt rate, personality characteristics, and relationship quality (Ningsih, 2019).

Forgiveness is an internal process within individuals who have been hurt or conflicted (Wade & Tittler, 2019). This process involves acknowledging and resolving negative feelings and thoughts resulting from conflicts that the individual has experienced. Forgiveness is a willingness to leave hatred, adverse judgments and indifferent behavior and can lead to compassion, generosity, and even feelings of affection for individuals and groups who have been hurt (Ariefka et al., 2018). In particular, forgiveness is a process of change experienced by individuals to be more positive and tends to minimize negative perceptions of others who have done wrong or hurt them (McCullough et al., 2007).

In the case of intergroup conflicts in Moluccas, forgiveness can be interpreted as the attitude of individuals who do not take revenge after being hurt by others. However, on the contrary, there is a desire to reconcile and be kind to others who have been hurt or have been involved in conflict. Intergroup or interpersonal forgiveness is different from individual forgiveness. Inter-group forgiveness is an individual's willingness to forgive mistakes or disputes with out-group members (Leach et al., 2010). The literature shows that an essential predictor of forgiveness between groups, especially for groups in conflict, is how individuals identify with their group (Cakal & Petrovi, 2017). Individuals who identify as group members tend to view other groups negatively and value a conflict or problem as a collective conflict. So that when one member of another group commits a violation, the group will be judged negatively.

Several studies have shown that the ability to forgive (forgiveness) can reduce depression, anxiety, and stress and even improve subjective well-being for individuals (Akhtar et al., 2017). Peterson and Seligman (2004) say individuals with the strength of character forgiveness can forgive others who misbehave with them. Individuals can forget their bad experiences without coercion from others. Forgiveness can bring beneficial changes to individuals who have received unfavorable treatment from others. When a person can forgive others, the primary motivation or tendency of his actions towards others will be more positive (kind, noble, or generous). It will minimize negative behavior (resentment, prejudice, or avoidance). Forgiveness is the only force that can halt negative memories or bad experiences. In line with this, research shows that forgiveness can improve interpersonal relationships and reduce depression, feelings of hostility, and anxiety (Hidayanti, 2019). Another study on intergroup forgiveness behavior conducted by Wade and Tittler (2019) shows that minority groups who experience violations or conflicts related to race and ethnicity will be more burdened and less likely to forgive. In intergroup relationships, Leach et al. (2010) explain that forgiving behavior is given from individual to group, not from individual to individual.

As survivors of conflict, individuals tend to remember negative experiences that have been experienced before. It is rumination, a repetitive and passive thought regarding sadness or problems an individual has experienced (Nolen-Hoeksema et al., 2008). Interpersonally, people involved in rumination will tend to have difficulty maintaining a relationship. Prolonged rumination can make it difficult for individuals to engage in the process of forgiveness. Rumination of mistakes made by others continuously can increase an individual's motivation to avoid others and generate a desire for revenge (McCullough et al., 2007).

We conducted a preliminary study on November 28, 2021, by interviewing three subjects as survivors of intergroup conflict in the Moluccas. The results showed that subjects still experienced rumination even though the conflict had occurred several years ago. The subjects still tend to remember the events that occurred then, primarily when something or an event is related to it. "Yes, if now that incident is still very clear in my memory. Especially when I miss my brother ,who died in front of me during a riot". (female, 41 years old).

For survivors of intergroup conflict, individuals who experience rumination find it difficult to forgive other group members, so it does not rule out the possibility that individuals will experience intergroup anxiety. It can result in relationships between groups in conflict, such as reduced interaction and communication, and even avoidance between group members. We assess that the anxiety felt by the Ambonese people after forgiveness factors cause the conflict. Therefore, this study focused on examining the effect of forgiveness on intergroup anxiety in survivors of intergroup conflict in Ambon-Moluccas, Indonesia. Apart from that, as mentioned above, situational factors are also essential to pay attention to as predictors of intergroup anxiety. Therefore, this research also tries to look at the demographic aspects of the participants, both in terms of cohort, religion, and the impact of the conflict experienced.

Methods

This study used quantitative correlational methods to test forgiveness's ability to predict intergroup anxiety. The sample in this study were post-conflict survivors, people involved in inter-group conflicts that occurred in Moluccas. The sampling technique used is the snowball sampling technique. We set the criteria for participants: (1) survivors of the Moluccas conflict that occurred in 1998-2002; (2) being at least 28 years old, the reason that participants at that minimum age have experienced the impact of conflict in various forms; (3) representing Islamic and Christian groups that have been in conflict. The total respondents in the study were 165 people, with the following details:

Table 1

Participants

Demography	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	98	59.4%
Female	67	40.6%
Age		
28 - 30	21	12.7%
31 - 40	33	20%
41 - 50	63	38.6%
51 - 60	35	21.2%
61 - 70	13	7.9%
Religion		
Islam	115	69.7%
Christian	50	30.3%
Impacts of Conflict		
Social	56	33.9%
Psychological	39	23.6%
Physical	1	0.6%
Economic	14	8.5%
Properties	44	26.7%
Lost Family	28	17%

Research Instruments and Analysis

The research instrument used to measure forgiveness is TRIM (Transgression Related Interpersonal Motivation), adopted from Agung (2015) research. The TRIM scale consists of 17 items arranged based on three aspects: avoidance motivation, revenge motivation, and benevolence motivation, with a Cronbach value of $\alpha = 0.87$. For intergroup anxiety, the scale was adapted from the study of Irene and Ampuni (2020) with a Cronbach value of $\alpha = 0.954$. This scale measures the anxiety that may arise in individuals when interacting between groups, namely fear, doubt, worry, feeling threatened, awkward,

suspicious, uncomfortable (favorable), and friendly, comfortable, trusting, confident, calm, and relaxed (unfavorable). In this case, the study participants were asked to imagine a situation where they had to interact/work with a team of members of a different Muslim/Christian religious group. The narrative conveyed on this scale is "If you are a Muslim/Christian religious group member, and you engage in interactions (interacting with them, working on an activity) with people from an Islamic/Christian group who have conflicted with your group. How do you feel? Share your feedback on the scale below!".

The data that has been obtained is then inputted and processed using the statistical calculation software SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Science), version 25. The analysis stage started with the assumption test and continued with the data normality and heteroscedasticity tests. Then, the hypothesis test was carried out using regression analysis. After that, the researchers also carried out an analysis to see differences in demographic data based on age groups and the perceived impact of conflicts and also carried out a moderation test on religion, which was considered an important variable for the two variables that had been tested previously.

Results

Based on research conducted on 165 subjects who are survivors of the Moluccas post-conflict, the results of forgiveness and intergroup anxiety scores were obtained as follows:

Table 2

Categorization of Variable

Variables	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Forgiveness	High	156 people	94.5%
	Low	9 people	5.5%
Intergroup anxiety	High	120 people	72.7%
	Low	45 people	27.3%

Before testing the hypothesis through regression analysis, we first carried out an assumption test, both a data normality test and a heteroscedasticity test. The following describes the assumption test as a prerequisite for further statistical analysis. Using statistical software, SPSS, we calculated the values for the skewness and kurtosis of the distribution. For the intergroup anxiety variable, the Skewness value was obtained: 0.0497 and Kurtosis: 1.349. Meanwhile, the Skewness value was found in the Forgiveness variable: 1.709 and Kurtosis: 1.257. Thus, it can be concluded that, for these two variables, the data is normally distributed because the values are between (+- 2). Next, a heteroscedasticity test was conducted on the scatter plot visualization below.

Based on a visual test of the residual plot, there is no heteroscedasticity where the scatter plot does not form a particular pattern. It shows that other factors do not influence the residual value.

Figure 1

Heteroscedasticity Test

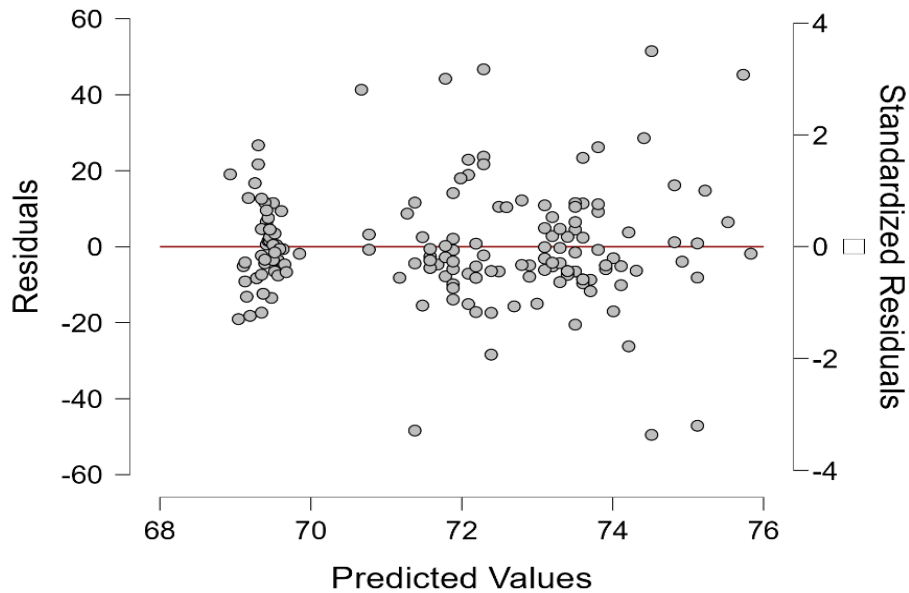


Table 3

Regression Analysis

	<i>B</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>r</i> ²	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i> (sig.)
Forgiveness	-0.027	0.027	0.001	0.119	0.731

*Intergroup anxiety as a dependent variable

Furthermore, we carried out a hypothesis test. The analysis results conducted using a linear regression test showed that forgiveness did not affect the emergence of intergroup anxiety in post-conflict survivors of Moluccas. It can be seen from the value of $p = 0.731$, where the p -value is more significant than 0.05 ($p > 0.05$). Thus, the research hypothesis is rejected. We are concerned with combining all cohorts in regression analysis, especially assuming whether different age groups cause different experiences of intergroup anxiety. Therefore, we conducted further analysis by dividing the age groups 28 - 40 and 41 - 70 years old to be tested using the independent sample t-test.

Table 4

Test of Equality of Variances (Levene's)

	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Intergroup Anxiety	2.145	1	163	0.145

Based on Levene's test on the age variable, the result was $p = 0.108$ or p greater than 0.05 ($p > 0.05$). So, the age variable has homogeneous data. Furthermore, the results of the independent sample t-test on the intergroup anxiety variable with demographic variables in age group 1 (28-40 years) and age group

2 (41-70 years) showed that there was no difference, $p = 0.487$ ($p > 0.05$). In addition, researchers also conducted an analysis related to the demographic data obtained. One of the demographic data tested was to place religion as a moderator variable between forgiveness and intergroup anxiety.

Table 5

Moderation Analysis

	<i>B</i>	<i>R</i>	r^2	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i> (sig.)
Forgiveness*Religion	0.135	0.119	0.014	1.157	0.317

The results of the moderation test analysis showed that religion was not a moderator variable between forgiveness and intergroup anxiety. In addition to religious data, researchers also conducted a comparative analysis (one-way ANOVA) on demographic data, such as the impact of conflict on intergroup anxiety.

Table 6

One-way ANOVA Analysis

	<i>Df</i>	<i>p</i> (sig.)
Impacts of Conflict	6	0.725

Based on the difference test using non-parametric tests, the p -value = 0.725 ($p > 0.05$) means that there is no difference between variants of the impact of conflict experienced by individuals on intergroup anxiety.

Discussion

This study shows that forgiveness cannot predict intergroup anxiety in post-conflict survivors of Moluccas. Thus, the hypothesis in this study was rejected. We consider forgiveness no longer a benchmark for the emergence of intergroup anxiety in survivors after the Moluccas conflict. The descriptive analysis of these two variables shows that the level of forgiveness owned by individuals is in the high category. However, on the other hand, the level of intergroup anxiety possessed by the majority of survivors ($N = 120 / 72.7\%$) was also in the high category. It means that despite feeling forgiven for past conflicts, survivors still have high anxiety when interacting with out-groups. This result differs from previous studies that explain that forgiveness can be used as a modality and form of intervention to reduce intergroup anxiety in groups that are or have been in conflict (Christ & Kauff, 2019; Stathi et al., 2017). Unfulfilled conditions, such as equal group status and intense inter-group contact, are considered essential factors why forgiveness still presents intergroup anxiety in this study (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2011). As a result, the feeling of having common goals and recategorizing identities to be more inclusive does not work well (Tripathi et al., 2024), resulting in a lack of trust and high anxiety felt in the relationship between in-group and out-group (Brik et al., 2024).

McCullough (2000) states that one of the factors that cause individuals willingness to forgive is the quality of interpersonal relationships. Most people in Moluccas have forgiven other groups because the two parties (Islam and Christianity) had good family and kinship relations in the past. That is why intrapersonal forgiveness is more manageable, even though intergroup anxiety is still felt in post-conflict relationships. Previous research also explained that in inter-group relations, they may have forgiven each other but still caused secondary emotional effects from conflicts. Forms of secondary emotions include distrust and intergroup anxiety. Especially if they are competitive and segregated (Folmer et al., 2021), they experience cognitive dissonance to relate positively (Takaku, 2001).

The Moluccas conflict that occurred in 1999 had many impacts on the lives of the Moluccans people, both in socio-cultural, educational, economic and political aspects. Various parties, including the government of the Republic of Indonesia, have pursued various conflict resolution efforts. One of the policies carried out by the government is to segregate settlements, which places population groups in one particular location homogeneously without interference by other groups (Ismail, 2017). This condition makes group exclusivity more prominent in post-conflict community life. Pamungkas (2017) states that this segregation is a manifestation of an exclusionary reaction, where Islamic and Christian communities both show reactions to avoid each other from a heterogeneous settlement condition. Post-conflict conditions with segregated settlements further add to the fear and worry and live full of high suspicion even though everyone knows they are relatives (Ismail, 2017).

In line with policy in Moluccas, segregation has also been carried out in several countries after conflicts between groups, one of which is Northern Ireland. Belfast's level of segregation is at its highest after a protracted conflict. Catholics and Protestants tend to seek settlement separately. Despite living in separate places, the legacy of vengeance and threats of violence continues. It makes people experience intergroup anxiety when passing through several areas considered vulnerable and dangerous because groups occupy them with different backgrounds (Kaplan & Woodhouse, 2004). Segregation that occurs is one of the factors that triggers the emergence of intergroup anxiety. This situation occurred in post-conflict Moluccas society. On the other hand, this is a way to avoid conflict. In the study of intergroup anxiety, the policy includes the factors that cause intergroup anxiety, namely situational factors, salient boundaries, or the unavailability of social facilitation in inter-group interactions, which can trigger intergroup anxiety (Irene & Ampuni, 2020). In particular, situations characterized by competition, unequal ratios between group members and other groups, and differences in status between groups are also the background of the emergence of intergroup anxiety (W. G. Stephan, 2014).

In addition, segregation impacts the lack of active interaction or contact between groups. In this case, contact between groups is active interaction carried out in the community environment in everyday life, such as neighborly life. The lack of contact between groups can impact the emergence of intergroup anxiety. In line with this, Yustisia and Hudijana (2021) research shows that contact between groups is negatively related to intergroup anxiety. It means that the higher the contact between established groups, the lower the intergroup anxiety experienced by individuals. The segregation

factor carried out by the government as an effort to resolve conflicts indirectly impacts the emergence of intergroup anxiety. Resolutions are given only as short-term solutions rather than as long-term solutions. It can be seen from the condition of the community that it has yet to reach the peak of harmonization in integrating between groups. We also assessed this segregation factor, which resulted in no differences in the experience of intergroup anxiety in each cohort studied. They grew up together with other cohorts with traumatic stories in the past.

The results of additional analyses that examined religion as a moderation variable showed that religious background did not influence intergroup anxiety. It shows that religious background is no longer the dominant role in the emergence of intergroup anxiety for survivors after the Moluccas conflict. People have been able to reflect that the cause of conflict is not only about their religion but also complex political factors. In addition, researchers also conducted a comparative analysis of the impact of conflict. Data shows that the impact of conflict experienced by individuals, social, psychological, physical, economic, property losses, and family losses, are not the background of the emergence of intergroup anxiety behavior. It means that the level of loss or impact experienced by the community during conflict does not significantly influence the emergence of intergroup anxiety.

Based on analyses conducted on demographic data, religion and conflict impacts are not causes of intergroup anxiety behavior. It further confirms the prominent role of situational factors, specifically social segregation. In addition, it is undeniable that the interaction gap in Moluccas society cannot be separated from political biases and interests. Several conditions occur in Moluccas society, shown by the pattern of political operations, including identity politics operations in government. It aligns with the demand for a balance of religious or ethnic identity in the symptoms of primordialism carried through religious and ethnic issues in necessary momentum, such as government and legislative elections. Furthermore, some parties still use religious expressions that indirectly cause competition between groups of different religions and tend to exclude groups considered minorities (Ernas, 2018). These things can indirectly strengthen intergroup anxiety and group disintegration tendencies that are dangerous for the peacebuilding process in the future.

Finally, considering that social segregation policies have been implemented in the past, political will is needed from all stakeholders to intensify contact between groups and grassroots groups (Al Qurtuby, 2022). Especially for the younger generation in Maluku, so that they do not ruminate about past conflicts and create more constructive inter-group relations. After the conflict, reaching the level of integration between groups takes work. The conflict that occurred was not an inter-religious conflict, which is the reason why, in this study, religion was unable to moderate forgiveness and intergroup anxiety. Therefore, a peacebuilding process through inter-religious dialogue is needed to support interethnic or intergenerational social equality dialogue (Sienkiewicz, 2022). Several studies state that the massive intensity of post-conflict inter-group contact through various initiatives and sustainable policies can reduce intergroup anxiety (Phillips & Cromwell, 2020; eelj et al., 2017).

Conclusion

This research shows that 20 years after the conflict, forgiveness cannot predict intergroup anxiety in Moluccas conflict survivors. Forgiveness does not necessarily reduce anxiety. External factors, namely social segregation, cause emerging intergroup anxiety. The demographic variable, namely religion, also does not influence intergroup anxiety. Likewise, there is no difference in intergroup anxiety among Moluccas conflict survivors regarding the impacts of conflict experienced.

Recommendation

This research reaffirms the urgent need for more comprehensive and massive inter-group contact in Moluccas. Likewise, policymakers can facilitate activities involving society, especially people with different religious backgrounds or groups. Previous research suggests programmed school-based intergroup contact and inclusive religious and cultural events (Esposito De Vita et al., 2016; Hughes et al., 2016). Apart from that, future researchers need to explore how significant the impact of social segregation is on relations between Islamic and Christian religious groups in the Moluccas 20 years after the conflict, especially on the factors that hinder intergroup integration, including psychological aspects of cognitive, affective, and behavior functions.

Declaration

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Authorss Contributions

MFM: Conceptualization (lead), methodology (lead), writing the draft (lead), review (supporting), editing (supporting), securing funding. SAB: review (supporting), editing (supporting). WHI: Conceptualization (supporting), methodology (supporting), writing original draft (supporting).

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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