

## **Studying Together Affects Perceived Social Distance but Not Stereotypes: Nursing Students' Perception of Their Intergroup Relationship**

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**Abstract :** Social Psychology theories, such as the intergroup contact theory, content that bringing members of different social groups into contact is a promising approach for improving intergroup relations. The heterogeneous nature of the nursing profession generates encounters between members of different social groups .The social relations that nursing students develop with their peers during their years of study, and the meanings they ascribe to these contacts, may affect the success of their nursing careers. Jewish-Arab relations in Israel are the product of an ongoing conflict and are characterized by stereotyped negative perceptions and mutual suspicions. Nursing education is often the first situation in which Jewish and Arab nursing students have direct and long-term contact with people from the other group. These encounters present a significant challenge. The current study explores whether this contact between Jewish and Arab nursing students during their academic studies improves their perception of their intergroup relationship. The study explores the students' perceptions of the social relations between the two groups. We examine attribution of stereotypes (positive and negative) and willingness to engage in social interactions with individuals from the other group. The study hypothesis is that academic seniority (beginning students, advanced students) will be related to perceptions of the relations between the two groups, as manifested in attributions of positive and negative stereotypes and willingness to reduce the social distance between the two groups. Method: One hundred and eighty Jewish and Arab nursing students (111 Jewish and 69 Arab) completed questionnaires examining their perceptions of the social relations between the two groups. The questionnaires were administered at two different points in their studies (beginning students and those at more advanced stages Results: No differences were found between beginning students and advanced students with respect to stereotypes. However, advanced students expressed greater willingness to reduce social distance than did beginning students. Conclusions: The findings indicate that bringing members of different social groups into contact may improve some aspects of intergroup relations. The findings suggest that different aspects of perceptions of social relations are influenced by different contexts: the students' specific context (joint studies and joint work in the future) and the broader general context of relations between the groups. Accordingly, it is recommended that programs aimed at improving relations in a between social groups will focus on willingness to cooperate and reduce social distance rather than on attempts to eliminate stereotypes.

**Keywords :** nursing education, perceived social relations, social distance, stereotypes

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