





## EMPIRICAL ARTICLE

# Why step in? Shifting justifications for bystander behaviors through interventions with youth in the Middle East

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## Abstract

Research shows positive bystander intervention effectively mitigates bullying experiences. Yet, more evidence regarding bystander responses to bias-based social exclusion (BSE) is needed in intergroup contexts, especially in the majority world and in areas of intractable conflict. This study assessed the effectiveness of skills and skills+contact-based interventions for BSE among 148 Palestinian Citizens of Israel ( $M_{\text{age}} = 10.55$ ) and 154 Jewish-Israeli ( $M_{\text{age}} = 10.54$ ) early adolescents (Girls = 52.32%) in Tel Aviv-Yafo. Bystander responses were assessed by participants' reactions to hypothetical BSE scenarios over three time points. Repeated measures ANOVAs revealed both interventions significantly increased positive and decreased negative bystander responses, with changes maintained at the follow-up. The opposite result pattern emerged for the control group. Findings suggest that both interventions can effectively encourage youth to publicly challenge BSE, even amidst intractable conflict.

## KEYWORDS

bias-based social exclusion, bystander response, Jewish-Israeli, Middle East, Palestinian citizens of Israel, prejudice-reduction interventions, social-cognitive/emotional skills

## INTRODUCTION

Palestinian and Jewish-Israeli children and adolescents have been forced to endure yet another extreme escalation of violence—the War in Gaza. Palestinian and Jewish-Israeli children and adolescents are among the many thousands of civilians killed and taken hostage in Hamas' terrorist attack in southern Israel on October 7, 2023, and the ensuing retaliation and escalation into war characterized by unrelenting air and ground attacks by the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF). At least 30 Jewish-Israeli youth were taken hostage, and an unknown number of over 1400 deaths on October 7th, 2023 were of Jewish-Israeli babies, children, and adolescents; within 3 weeks, over 3600 Palestinian babies, children, and adolescents were killed by IDF attacks in Gaza (Debre & Shurafa, 2023)—a number that reached almost 8000 by December 12, 2023, and has only continued to grow (HRW, 2024). Speaking to Congress on November 7, 2023, U.S. Representative Rashida Tlaib (2023) exclaimed, “The cries of the Palestinian and Israeli children sound no different to me...We cannot lose our shared humanity.” It is with Palestinian and Jewish-Israeli youth that we believe it is possible to find our shared humanity and empower youth to

treat the other justly with respect, dignity, and compassion and intervene when the other is victimized in any way. In an earlier statement on the War in Gaza, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation CEO and President Richard Besser (2023) asserted, “[We must] tear down the barriers that have been intentionally built to keep us divided, and to name and confront the deeper root causes of violence. These barriers are not stronger than the core value we share—to live in a world where all communities are safe and free from violence.” Below, we present our study as well as a brief (and insufficient) account of some of the nuanced and conflicted history of this region and these peoples—a history that has led to these divisive barriers and that sheds light on those deeper root causes of intergroup victimization.

Interventions that are mindfulness and compassion-based, social-emotional and social-skills-based, and contact-based have all successfully reduced prejudice and stereotyping among Palestinian Citizens of Israel (PCI)<sup>1</sup> and

<sup>1</sup>The term Palestinian Citizens of Israel (PCI) is used when describing Palestinians who live as citizens in the state of Israel. The term Palestinian is used when referring to Palestinians who live in present-day Palestine/Palestinian Occupied Territories, a combination of Palestinians and PCIs, or the Palestinian people prior to the establishment of the state of Israel.

Jewish-Israeli youth in the Middle East amid intractable conflict (Berger, Brenick, Lawrence, et al., 2018; Berger, Brenick, & Tarrasch, 2018). Additionally, such interventions have promoted moral reasoning about intergroup relations (PCI & Jewish-Israeli: Brenick et al., 2019). This shift is facilitated by increased outgroup empathy and concerns for fairness and equity. However, interventions have yet to be studied in relation to bystander responses to bias-based social exclusion (BSE), when an individual is excluded simply due to their social identity.

## THE ROLE OF BYSTANDERS

The Social Domain Model (Turiel, 2015) provides a framework to examine youth's evaluations of social issues, such as the role of the bystander in BSE. This model proposes social reasoning reflects moral considerations of justice, welfare, and equality; societal conventions, social expectations, and group norms; and psychological constructs of personal preference or choice. When evaluating BSE, the prioritization of these domains determines how individuals rate the acceptability of victimization and what—if any—bystander response should be used to address it (see Brenick & Halgunseth, 2017; Palmer et al., 2022).

A witness—or bystander—is present in over 85% of bullying or victimization incidents (Jones et al., 2015; see Lapidot-Lefler, 2017, for Mid-East data). Bystanders can respond in various ways—both negative and positive. Despite evidence that positive intervening behavior can stop victimization within 10 s and mitigate its myriad short- and long-term consequences (Hawkins et al., 2001), positive bystander intervention only occurs in approximately 10–25% of victimization situations (Thornberg & Jungert, 2013).

A positive bystander—sometimes called a “defender of the victim” (Salmivalli, 2014)—supports the victim and/or challenges the victimizer; both behaviors are highly effective in stopping victimization. In contrast, a passive bystander (an outsider) ignores the situation, supporting neither the victim nor the victimizer. Finally, a negative bystander actively *joins in* with the victimizer (assist) or otherwise encourages the victimization (reinforce, Salmivalli, 2014).

When promoting positive and reducing negative bystander behavior, the type of victimization must be considered. Social exclusion is ubiquitous in adolescence but often viewed as less serious than other forms of victimization (e.g., physical bullying) and thus negatively associated with bystander intervention (U.K. sample: Bauman et al., 2020). Still, few studies have examined *bystander* responses specifically in BSE (e.g., U.S. southeastern region samples: Gönültaş & Mulvey, 2020; Cypriot, non-Cypriot Immigrant sample: Palmer et al., 2022).

Youth look to their salient groups, such as peers and parents/family, for (perceived) norms when interpreting BSE; they also tend to be more accepting of BSE in the family

context (e.g., the family home; Arab- & Jewish-Americans: Brenick & Romano, 2016). To date, few studies have examined these evaluations within contexts of intractable intergroup conflict (Palestine, Israel: Brenick et al., 2010, 2019), where outgroup BSE is not only a typical and frequent occurrence but also often supported by group, family, and societal norms (Saudi Arabia: Alsamih & Tenenbaum, 2018; Brenick & Romano, 2016). Furthermore, these studies have not yet assessed bystander interventions for BSE.

In the current study, we assessed bystander responses of PCI and Jewish-Israeli 5th-grade students when confronted with intergroup BSE and examined how bystander behavior differs when peers or parents motivate the BSE. We also compared the effectiveness of skills and combined skills and intergroup contact-based interventions as means to increase youth's positive and reduce negative bystander responses in hypothetical interethnic BSE scenarios.

## Individual and contextual variables related to bystander responses

### Individual variables

A significant challenge faced by interventionists is that young bystanders may choose not to intervene in acts of victimization for a number of reasons (e.g., group membership, gender, and age effects). For example, minoritized youth more frequently view BSE by the majority group not just as interpersonal, but also discriminatory, requiring bystander intervention (Germany: Brenick et al., 2012; U.S.: Gönültaş & Mulvey, 2020). In addition, girls in early- to mid-adolescence are more likely than boys to interpret victimization as emergent and necessitating bystander responses (U.S. rural, low S.E.S.: Jenkins & Nickerson, 2017; Iran, China, & Canada: Shohoudi Mojdehi et al., 2019), and are more willing to engage in positive bystander responses (The Netherlands & India: Pronk et al., 2017). Boys, however, tend to distance themselves and do nothing or respond confrontationally (Malta: Hunter & Borg, 2006; Western Canada: Trach et al., 2010).

Important developmental variation exists too; at approximately 10–12 years of age, youth offer increasingly sophisticated bystander strategies overall (Trach et al., 2010), but are also decreasingly likely to report the use of positive bystander responses (U.K.: Palmer et al., 2017; Italy, Singapore: Pozzoli et al., 2012; Trach & Hymel, 2019). This age-related shift coincides with an acceleration of ethnic-racial identity development (see Umaña-Taylor, 2023) coupled with the amplified influence of group norms, which can lead to identity-driven outgroup negativity, greater acceptance of BSE, and lack of positive bystander response to intergroup victimization (see Brenick & Halgunseth, 2017). Concurrently, adolescents are better able to formulate nuanced sociopolitical attitudes and peer intergroup dynamics, leaving it a prime developmental period to facilitate positive intergroup beliefs and behaviors (see Verkuyten, 2022).

## Contextual variables

Bystander responses are also related to perceptions of the salient aspects of the larger victimization context. BSE, in general, is viewed as less severe than other types of victimization, such as physical victimization, and thus viewed as less warranting bystander intervention (Bauman et al., 2020; Taiwan: Chen et al., 2015). Among U.S. youth, BSE is often not even viewed as victimization or recognized as legitimate, harmful, and warranting intervention—unlike the same social exclusion victimization between two individuals of the same ethnicity (see Brenick & Halgunseth, 2017). In the current study, this is heightened as PCI and Jewish-Israeli identity narratives center the fundamental idea of victimhood at the hands of the other; thus, the outgroup is delegitimized, dehumanized, and considered beyond moral consideration and unworthy of positive bystander intervention (Nasie & Bar-Tal, 2020).

## The Palestine-Israel context

The early adolescents in our study were born into a region steeped in intractable conflict—a context critical to understanding the backdrop of our current research. Following World War I, Palestine was placed under British mandate. British control established independent political, economic, and administrative rule for the Palestinian and Jewish residents—the latter of which grew in numbers through return migration and settlement because of the rampant persecution and forced displacement throughout Europe. This population growth, coupled with growing Palestinian national consciousness, led to violent clashes. A theme of segregation persists throughout the region's history; in peace negotiations, the 1947 United Nations Resolution 181 proposed the land be divided equally into independent Arab (Palestine) and Jewish (Israel) states—despite two-thirds of the population then being Arab Palestinians (Schenker & AbuZayyad, 2019). When efforts to broker peace failed, the State of Israel was established in 1948 by David Ben-Gurion. This led to the Arab-Israeli War, known as the War of Independence in Israel because it is considered to be a liberation of their ancestral land (Rouhana & Bar-Tal, 1998) and al-Nakba (i.e., the catastrophe) by Palestinians due to the mass uprooting of Palestinians along with the subsequent erasure of historic Palestine (Masalha, 2012). This exemplifies the dual narratives that characterize the history of this region and these peoples.

After the war, Palestinians who remained within the newly defined Israeli borders (PCI), were granted Israeli citizenship but constituted a minority of the population and were subjected to military rule with restricted rights until 1966 (Beinin & Hajar, 2014). Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza Strip have long withstood and fought military occupation and restricted rights of movement. Palestinians, PCI, and Jewish-Israelis have all

experienced violent attacks in their homes, in public, and at religious and holy sites—often during times of great religious importance. While Israel and its Jewish citizens have been targets of smaller scale terror attacks and rocket-fire from neighboring Arab countries (e.g., Lebanon in 2023), Palestinians have been subjected to bulldozing of and eviction from homes, expanding occupation, and brute force from a larger, better funded, and stronger armed military. Inequitable power dynamics between Palestinians, PCI, and the Israeli government persist, as is replicated in the War in Gaza.

Presently, PCI and Jewish-Israelis live overwhelmingly segregated and unequal lives. Political and mainstream representation is lacking, so neither PCI nor Jewish-Israeli youth see many representations of Palestinians—especially depicted as non-threatening—or positive intergroup relations between Palestinians and Jewish-Israelis (Sales, 2016). Most PCI and Jewish-Israelis live in separate or segregated cities. This geographic divide is accompanied by a split public education system with Arab and Hebrew “streams” separated by religion and ethnicity (Robinson, 2023; Sales, 2016). Both streams are taught specialized content (group-specific culture, language, and history) in addition to the standard (common) curriculum. PCI schools are funded 20%–40% less than Jewish-Israeli schools, have less paid teacher training, and have fewer and poorer quality resources (Gad, 2021). The disparate funding for schooling drives persistent achievement gaps between PCI and Jewish-Israeli youth, which results in Palestinian underrepresentation in Israeli universities as well as poorer job prospects (Zeedan & Hogan, 2022). Palestinian youth are significantly more likely than Jewish-Israeli youth to grow up in poverty and in families suffering from unemployment (Zeedan & Hogan, 2022). These disparate lived experiences can be a source of conflict, creating intergroup tensions (Robinson, 2023) and fueling narratives of intergroup victimhood and delegitimization (Nasie & Bar-Tal, 2020).

## Intergroup norms: Peer and family influences

The aforementioned intergroup dual narratives are often developed through the internalization of ingroup normative beliefs and actions (see Tadmor et al., 2017). Peer- and family-based social groups are of the utmost importance during adolescence (McGrath et al., 2009; McKeown & Taylor, 2018). Throughout adolescence, parents communicate ingroup norms about victimization, generally, and BSE, specifically. Adolescents often adhere to familial norms and behave in an identity-congruous manner—even if this means engaging in BSE (Saudi Arabia: Alsamih & Tenenbaum, 2018; Arab- & Jewish-American: Brenick & Romano, 2016). This is especially true in cultures or societies that emphasize deference to authority and religion (e.g., Alsamih & Tenenbaum, 2018), such as the current sample.

At the same time, peer influence and peer group norms become increasingly salient in adolescence (McKeown & Taylor, 2018); adolescents worry more about the repercussions of acting against peer group norms (e.g., becoming a victim; embarrassment for “overreacting”) and are less likely to intervene on behalf of victims because of their increasing awareness of peer group dynamics (Bauman et al., 2020). Adolescents' evaluations of BSE also differ across peer and family contexts (PCI, Jewish-Israeli: Brenick et al., 2019; Brenick & Romano, 2016), such that perceived intergroup norms of parents and peers vary in salience and influence on one's evaluations based on the BSE context. Still, little is known about how youth bystander responses vary when a parent is the reason for the BSE versus a peer and if interventions will affect bystander responses in both contexts similarly.

## INTERVENTIONS TO PROMOTE POSITIVE BYSTANDER RESPONSES TO BIAS-BASED VICTIMIZATION

### Social-emotional skills training

Interventions targeting the development of social-emotional skills are well-suited to promote positive and decrease negative bystander responses. Social-emotional skills interventions increase perspective-taking ability among adolescents which strengthens empathy, facilitates intergroup understanding, and reduces outgroup victim blaming (Vescio et al., 2003), prejudice, and aggression (PCI, Jewish-Israeli: Berger, Brenick, Lawrence, et al., 2018; Brenick et al., 2019). Moreover, understanding others' feelings is associated with significantly higher odds of bystanders intervening positively (Trach & Hymel, 2019).

### Intergroup contact

Intergroup contact also promotes positive bystander responses to BSE. Allport (1954) hypothesized that contact between members of different social groups reduces prejudice when conditions of equal group status, common goals, intergroup cooperation, and shared support of authority or customs are met. Pettigrew (1998) posited further that contact must provide the time and opportunity for individuals to develop intimate relationships characterized by reciprocal disclosure that fosters stereotype reduction and reduces discriminatory behaviors. Individuals with frequent intergroup contact and who develop intergroup friendships have decreased negative outgroup attitudes (Titzmann et al., 2015) and intergroup bias, as well as increased outgroup empathy (Berger, Brenick, Lawrence, et al., 2018) and prosocial attitudes toward victimized outgroup peers (Brenick et al., 2019). These factors are linked with fewer aggressive and more assertive bystander response behaviors, particularly in older adolescents (U.K.: Palmer et al., 2017).

### Skills + contact intervention

An integrated skills + contact-based approach is used in intractable conflict areas to avoid potential worsening impacts of sub-optimal contact. Contact-based interventions with group members who are severely distressed by conflict can be challenging and even provocative (Guffler & Wagner, 2017). This can happen when societal group status inequality is replicated in the contact setting. A further impediment arises when the majority status group works toward their own conceptualization of positive intergroup relations to the exclusion of the needs of minoritized group members. Additionally, if contact is not maintained over the long term, participants return to segregated and polarizing communities (see Guffler & Wagner, 2017). When intergroup contact is not feasible (e.g., segregated schools, extreme conflict), then skill-based interventions can be effective. If communities and schools are committed to desegregation, skill-based interventions can support positive contact experiences when implemented together and can help reduce any potential negative effects of intergroup contact in high conflict situations (Brenick et al., 2019).

### Current study

The current study addresses multiple gaps in the extant literature. First, research on bystander behaviors in response to BSE with groups in intractable conflict, is needed. This is particularly the case when examining how bystander behaviors are influenced when BSE is carried out by peers as compared to parents. Although previous studies have addressed intergroup scenarios, samples were primarily Black and White youth in the U.S. and immigrant and non-immigrant background groups in Europe. The current study expands the literature by including real-life scenarios of PCI and Jewish-Israeli youth—grossly understudied populations from the majority world, with data that were collected during the “*Habba*” or “*Intifada* of Individuals,” a time of increased violent conflict, including civilian targeted shootings, stabbings, car attacks, lockdowns, fatal arson (2015–2016; Beaumont, 2016; Benoist, 2016), and deaths by Israeli security forces—some determined to be unlawful killings (Amnesty International, 2015).

Additionally, whereas skills and contact-based interventions have been studied independently, the interventions have yet to be comparatively evaluated for promoting positive and reducing negative bystander responses. The current study explores the impacts of skills and skills+contact-based interventions on adolescents' bystander behaviors in PCI and Jewish-Israeli interethnic contexts. Specifically, we hypothesized that: (1) skills or skills+contact-based intervention participants would select (a) more positive bystander responses and (b) fewer negative bystander responses after the interventions; (2) social studies control group participants would remain constant in their selection of bystander responses across all three timepoints (pre-test, post-test,



follow-up); and (3) the skills or skills+contact-based intervention participants would (a) increase moral domain (e.g., empathy) and (b) decrease societal domain (e.g., social conventions, stereotypes) justifications for their responses. Across interventions, we hypothesized that: (4) girls would select more positive bystander responses than boys; and (5) PCI and Jewish-Israeli youth would select more positive bystander responses in the peer context than in the family context.

## METHODS

### Setting

This study took place in Yafo/Jaffa, the oldest part of Tel Aviv-Yafo/Jaffa, with a total population of 55,000 people: 20,000 PCI and 35,000 Jewish-Israelis. The program was presented to, and approved by, the Education Department of the municipality of Tel Aviv-Yafo/Jaffa, who, with local approval, granted access to public schools. Additionally, the Department of Education in the municipality invited the Arab-Jewish Community Center (AJCC) to create a program to help diffuse the tension between PCI and Jewish-Israeli students in this environment. The study was conducted over one entire academic year in the participating schools and the AJCC (for the contact intervention only) from September to June, with a 6-month follow-up assessment after the interventions and the school year was complete. Three PCI elementary schools and three Jewish-Israeli elementary schools ( $n=6$  schools) in Yafo/Jaffa were chosen to participate based on their similar socioeconomic statuses (established based on the Ministry of Education's index, which comprises parents' education, per capita income, school periphery, and country of origin). Additionally, these schools were selected because each school was required to have two, and only two, 5th grade classes for consistency to match the schools. Each of the three PCI schools and the three Jewish-Israeli schools were randomly assigned to receive one of the three conditions: skills intervention, skills+contact intervention, or the control condition. The 5th grade was selected because of recent findings that suggest that youth at this age are particularly responsive to prejudice reduction and anti-racism—such as actively responding as a positive bystander against bias-based bullying (see Verkuyten, 2022). The schools were statistically comparable to those that did not participate in the study in terms of location, socioeconomic status, and ethnic makeup of students.

### Participants

Participants ( $N=302$ ) included 5th grade students from six schools. Classes were randomly assigned to the skills training group (skills;  $N=103$ ,  $M_{\text{age}}=10.55$ ,  $SD=0.26$ , girls=52.43%), combined skills+contact training group (skills+contact;

$N=102$ ,  $M_{\text{age}}=10.53$ ,  $SD=0.26$ , girls=50.98%), or the control group (control;  $N=97$ ,  $M_{\text{age}}=10.57$ ,  $SD=0.26$ , girls=53.60%). Students' ages ranged from 10.10 to 11.10 years old. All participants provided consent from their parents; consent forms were sent to the parents and returned through the teachers. Six students were dropped from the study for failing to complete the questionnaires. No significant differences emerged at baseline between students who completed the study and those who dropped out.

### Implementation of interventions

The program rationale was presented to the homeroom teachers of participating classrooms. Teachers also received specific instructions based on their class's group assignments. All interventions consisted of 12 semi-monthly sessions that took place in the students' schools or in the AJCC. A team of trained PCI and Jewish-Israeli external facilitators administered all interventions to standardize program delivery (please see Appendix S1 for full description of implementation and interventions).

### Measures

Paper and pencil surveys were administered three times: immediately before and after the intervention administration and 6-months after the intervention completed. Bystander response behavior was measured by participants' selected responses following each of two scenarios depicting BSE. Having participants respond to hypothetical but plausible vignettes is a well-established methodological approach to assess social and moral beliefs about complex social situations that inform our behavioral responses (Bechler et al., 2021). The present scenarios were adapted from highly similar vignettes used and validated in a large international body of work on youth BSE (e.g., Alsamih & Tenenbaum, 2018; Brenick et al., 2019; Gönültaş & Mulvey, 2020) and reflect real life BSE experiences and potential bystander responses drawn from the extant literature and culturally specific pilot testing. Scenario one (peer scenario) depicted an outgroup member who was excluded from socializing/playing a game with a group of peers and scenario two (home scenario) described an outgroup member who was excluded by one's parents from an event in one's family home (see Table S1 for full scenarios & questions). The ethnicity and gender of the excluder in the scenarios were always matched to participant ethnicity and gender.

### Bystander responses

Participants were then asked what they would do if they were the bystanders in the scenario (bystander response) and selected from six potential bystander responses. The responses were categorized as positive, passive, or negative. Positive

responses involved supporting or defending the victim, such as “tell[ing] the excluding kid that this is not fair.” Passive responses involved not doing anything to support the victim or the victimizer, such as “do nothing, this is the decision of the person who organizes the game/group.” Negative responses involved encouraging the victimizer, such as, “support the kid who excludes.”

Finally, participants reported the reason why they selected their response (justification). Justifications were categorized according to extant research on youth BSE and Social Domain Theory (Turiel, 2015), as follows: (1) social conventional (e.g., the outgroup won't fit in with the ingroup), (2) stereotype (e.g., the ingroup and outgroup youth cannot be friends with each other), (3) personal choice (e.g., the excluder gets to decide whom should be included or excluded), (4) empathy for victim (e.g., the victim may have their feelings hurt), and (5) empathy for excluder (e.g., the excluder may feel bad about it later).

## Plan for analyses

A 2 (gender of participant: boys, girls) × 2 (ethnicity of participant: PCI, Jewish-Israeli) × 3 (treatment group: skills, skills + contact, control) × 3 (bystander response: positive, passive, negative) × 2 (scenario: peer, home) × 3 (time: pre-test, post-test, follow-up) ANOVA with repeated measures on the last three variables was conducted to assess whether the skills or skills + contact based interventions would increase positive and reduce negative bystander responses in comparison to the control group. Next, A 2 (gender of participant: boys, girls) × 2 (ethnicity of participant: PCI, Jewish-Israeli) × 3 (treatment group: skills, skills + contact, control) × 5 (justification: social convention, stereotype, personal choice, empathy for victim, empathy for excluder) × 2 (scenario: peer, home) × 3 (time: pre-test, post-test, follow-up) ANOVA with repeated measures on the last three variables was conducted to assess whether the skills or skills + contact based interventions would increase moral and decrease societal domain justifications for bystander responses in comparison to the control group. Significant effects were followed up with post-hoc univariate ANOVAs, dependent samples t-tests, or pairwise comparisons with Bonferroni adjustments for multiple comparisons, as appropriate.

The authors have interpreted the results of these analyses through their multiple personal and professional lenses (full positionality statements can be found in Appendix A). The first, second, and last authors have direct connections to the region and populations studied, as well as scholarly expertise in the research area and methodology. Zureiqi is a Palestinian scholar-activist, bilingual in Arabic and English, and though currently an American citizen, has deep familial ties to Palestine. Brenick identifies as a Jewish-American scholar-activist with Palestinian and Israeli family, friends, and colleagues living in Palestine and Israel; Berger is an Israeli-Jewish scholar and clinician,

**TABLE 1** Results of repeated measures anova for bystander response.

	<i>Df</i>	<i>F</i>	$\eta_p^2$	<i>p</i>
Significant within-subjects effects				
Scenario	1	9.07	0.03	**
Scenario × Ethnicity	1	15.45	0.05	***
Scenario × Gender	1	5.18	0.02	*
Error (scenario)	289			
Response	2	21.29	0.07	***
Response × Treatment Group	4	9.11	0.06	***
Error (response)	578			
Time × Ethnicity	2	17.95	0.06	***
Time × Gender	2	3.89	0.01	*
Time × Treatment Group	4	4.56	0.03	**
Error (time)	578			
Scenario × Response × Gender	2	4.66	0.02	*
Error (scenario × response)	578			
Scenario × Time	2	9.95	0.03	***
Scenario × Time × Ethnicity	2	7.93	0.03	***
Error (scenario × time)	578			
Response × Time	4	14.52	0.05	***
Response × Time × Treatment Group	8	11.28	0.07	***
Error (response × time)	1156			
Significant Between-subjects Effects				
Treatment Group	2	5.41	0.04	**

Note: Only significant effects are reported. Ethnicity refers to the ethnicity of the participants. Response refers to bystander response.

\**p* < .05. \*\**p* < .01. \*\*\**p* < .001.

bilingual in Hebrew and English, and lives in Israel. Brenick's expertise is in intergroup victimization and inequities; Berger's expertise is in the psychological effects of terrorism. Both work collaboratively in the region with Israeli, Palestinian, Jewish, Muslim, and Christian colleagues and community partners on interventions to promote intergroup social justice. Seraj and Wu have lived experiences as minoritized ethnic and religious identities. Kelly has expertise in social and moral evaluations of intergroup social victimization. We approach this research with sensitivity to promote equity, justice, and inclusion for all those affected.

## RESULTS

### Bystander responses

The repeated measures ANOVA yielded significant main effects for scenario and response (see Table 1). These main effects were qualified by several higher-level interaction effects. Only the interactions including “response” as a variable are relevant to the current study, however, and therefore, will be interpreted. The main effect of response

**TABLE 2** Means, standard deviations, and effect size calculations for time × treatment group × bystander response interaction.

Timepoint	Control		Skills		Skills+contact		$d_{korr}^{ctrl/skills}$	$d_{korr}^{ctrl/s+c}$	$d_{korr}^{skills/s+c}$
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD			
Positive Bystander Response									
Pre-test	0.16	0.22	0.12	0.16	0.19	0.25			
Post-test	0.13	0.19	0.22	0.17	0.29	0.25	-0.76 <sub>pre/post</sub>	-0.61 <sub>pre/post</sub>	-0.02 <sub>pre/post</sub>
Follow-up	0.10	0.18	0.20	0.17	0.28	0.26	0.83 <sub>pre/follow</sub>	0.71 <sub>pre/follow</sub>	0.02 <sub>pre/follow</sub>
Passive Bystander Response									
Pre-test	0.23	0.21	0.25	0.23	0.23	0.22			
Post-test	0.13	0.19	0.22	0.17	0.29	0.25	-0.42 <sub>pre/post</sub>	-0.74 <sub>pre/post</sub>	-0.44 <sub>pre/post</sub>
Follow-up	0.10	0.18	0.20	0.17	0.28	0.28	-0.49 <sub>pre/follow</sub>	-0.83 <sub>pre/follow</sub>	-0.48 <sub>pre/follow</sub>
Negative Bystander Response									
Pre-test	0.22	0.34	0.27	0.34	0.33	0.37			
Post-test	0.22	0.34	0.16	0.28	0.19	0.31	-0.33 <sub>pre/post</sub>	-0.41 <sub>pre/post</sub>	-0.09 <sub>pre/post</sub>
Follow-up	0.27	0.36	0.17	0.29	0.17	0.30	-0.45 <sub>pre/follow</sub>	-0.60 <sub>pre/follow</sub>	-0.17 <sub>pre/follow</sub>

Note: M = mean; SD = standard deviation. Control = Social Studies Control Group; Skills = Skills Treatment Group; Skills + Contact = Combined Skills and Contact Treatment Group. Klauer's  $d_{korr}$  (2001; Morris, 2008);  $d_{korr}^{ctrl/skills}$  = Effect size comparing pre-test to post-test (pre/post) and pre-test to follow-up (pre/follow) scores for Control and Skills groups.  $d_{korr}^{ctrl/s+c}$  = Effect size comparing pre-test to post-test (pre/post) and pre-test to follow-up (pre/follow) scores for Control and Skills + Contact groups.  $d_{korr}^{skills/s+c}$  = Effect size comparing pre-test to post-test (pre/post) and pre-test to follow-up (pre/follow) scores for Skills and Skills + Contact groups.

was qualified by the following interpretable interactions: “response by treatment group” and “response by time”; both were further qualified by “response by time by treatment group” and “scenario by response by gender” higher order interactions.

### Time x treatment group × bystander response interaction – positive bystander responses

The primary result of interest in this study is the response by time by treatment group interaction. To follow-up this interaction, the dataset was split by treatment group and separate repeated measures ANOVAs were run by treatment group for each response type by the within subjects variable, time. Significant main effects of time were explored for responses within each treatment group via pairwise comparisons with Bonferroni adjustments (see Table 2 for all means, standard deviations, & effect sizes). The follow-up results show that skills group participants ( $F(2, 204) = 28.99, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = 0.22$ ) used significantly more positive bystander responses at post-test and follow-up ( $ps < .001$ ) than pre-test. Similarly, skills + contact group participants ( $F(2, 202) = 17.57, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = 0.15$ ) used significantly more positive responses at post-test and follow-up ( $ps < .001$ ) than pre-test. Conversely, control group participants ( $F(2, 192) = 8.91, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = 0.09$ ) used significantly fewer positive bystander responses at follow-up than at pre-test ( $p < .001$ ) or post-test ( $p < .01$ ). Cohen's  $d$  values assessing the magnitude of effect of the treatment groups compared to the control group, yielded moderate to large effect sizes. There were no differences in effect sizes between the two treatment groups (Table 2 for all means, standard deviations, & effect sizes).

### Time × treatment group bystander response interaction—passive bystander responses

Skills group participants decreased their selection of passive bystander responses over the three time points, though at non-significant levels. Skills + contact group participants selected more passive bystander responses in post-test than pre-test, and this non-significant trend was maintained at follow-up. However, control group participants ( $F(2, 192) = 11.91, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = 0.11$ ) used significantly fewer passive bystander responses from pre-test to post-test ( $p < .01$ ) and follow-up ( $p = .001$ ), and then again from post-test to follow-up ( $p < .01$ ). Cohen's  $d$  values revealed moderate effect sizes for the skills group and large effect sizes for the skills + contact group, both in comparison to the control group. This difference yielded small effect sizes when comparing between the two treatment groups (Table 2 for all means, standard deviations, & effect sizes).

### Time × treatment group × bystander response interaction—negative bystander responses

The skills ( $F(2, 204) = 12.94, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = 0.11$ ) and the skills + contact ( $F(2, 202) = 13.70, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = 0.12$ ) groups were significantly less likely to use negative bystander responses from pre-test to post-test ( $p_{skills} = .001; p_{skills+contact} = 0.01$ ), with this effect being maintained at follow-up ( $p_{skills} = .01; p_{skills+contact} = .001$ ). However, the participants from the control group used more negative responses in follow-up than both the pre-test and the post-test ( $p = .01$ ). Cohen's  $d$  values assessing the magnitude of effect of the treatment groups compared to the control

**TABLE 3** Means, standard deviations, and effect sizes for the gender  $\times$  scenario  $\times$  bystander response interaction.

Context	Positive				Passive				Negative			
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Effect Size <sup>a</sup>		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Effect Size <sup>a</sup>		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Effect Size <sup>a</sup>	
<b>Girls</b>												
			<i>d</i> <sub>cohen</sub>	CLES			<i>d</i> <sub>cohen</sub>	CLES			<i>d</i> <sub>cohen</sub>	CLES
Peer	0.23	0.21	0.29	0.58	0.18	0.22	-0.28	0.58	0.19	0.33	-0.01	0.50
home	0.20	0.21	0.35	0.60	0.20	0.23	-0.13	0.54	0.22	0.34	-0.34	0.60
Effect size <sup>b</sup>	<i>d</i> <sub>cohen</sub>	<i>CLES</i>			<i>d</i> <sub>cohen</sub>	<i>CLES</i>			<i>d</i> <sub>cohen</sub>	<i>CLES</i>		
	-0.14	0.54			0.11	0.53			0.08	0.52		
<b>Boys</b>												
Peer	0.17	0.20			0.24	0.22			0.20	0.35		
home	0.13	0.18			0.23	0.22			0.35	0.42		
Effect size <sup>b</sup>	<i>d</i> <sub>cohen</sub>	<i>CLES</i>			<i>d</i> <sub>cohen</sub>	<i>CLES</i>			<i>d</i> <sub>cohen</sub>	<i>CLES</i>		
	-0.20	0.56			-0.03	0.51			0.40	0.61		

Note: Values represent *M* = mean and *SD* = standard deviation proportion of bystander responses per response type. Peer = with peers scenario, Home = at home scenario. Effect Size<sup>a</sup> = (Comparison of Gender by Response w/in Context); Effect Size<sup>b</sup> = (Comparison of Context by Response w/in Gender). *d*<sub>cohen</sub> (Cohen, 1988); CLES (McGraw & Wong, 1992); Effect sizes are computed for scores averaged across all time points.

group yielded small effect sizes from pre-test to post-test and small to moderate effect sizes from pre-test to follow-up. There were no differences in effect sizes between the two treatment groups (Table 2 for all means, standard deviations, & effect sizes).

### Scenario $\times$ gender $\times$ bystander response interaction

The second significant interpretable interaction was scenario  $\times$  gender  $\times$  bystander response (Table 1). We ran a paired sample *T*-test to compare whether the boys' and girls' positive, passive, and negative responses differed by peer and home scenario. The follow-up results revealed that bystander response behaviors changed by scenario based on participant gender. More specifically, boys used fewer positive responses in the peer and home scenarios than did girls. Moreover, boys used a greater number of negative bystander responses in the home scenario than girls, yet boys and girls used similar rates of negative bystander responses in the peer scenario (Table 3 for all means, standard deviations, & effect sizes).

To assess differences in response usage within gender across the scenarios, we split the dataset by gender and ran separate repeated measures ANOVAs for bystander responses by scenario type. The significant main effects of time were explored with pairwise comparisons with Bonferroni adjustments. Girls demonstrated similar frequencies of positive, passive, and negative bystander responses in both scenarios. Boys used significantly more negative responses in the home compared to the peer context ( $t(168) = -4.243, p < .001$ ) and fewer positive responses in the home than the peer scenario ( $t(168) = 3.149, p < .05$ ). Cohen's *d* values comparing the differences between the two scenarios within all-time points, boys' positive and negative responses yielded small to moderate effect sizes (Table 3 for all means, standard deviations, and effect sizes).

### Response justifications

The repeated measures ANOVA for response justification yielded a significant main effect for justification ( $F(4, 1156) = 44.00, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = 0.13$ ). This main effect was qualified by higher level interaction effects of justification by gender ( $F(4, 1156) = 5.11, p < .01, \eta_p^2 = 0.01$ ), justification by ethnicity ( $F(4, 1156) = 16.00, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = 0.05$ ), justification by scenario ( $F(4, 1156) = 12.28, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = 0.04$ ), and justification by time by treatment group ( $F(16, 2312) = 16.79, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = 0.10$ ).

### Gender $\times$ justification

Pairwise comparisons revealed gender differences for three of the five justifications. Boys were significantly more likely than girls to use the stereotyped justification that ingroup and outgroup friendships could not exist ("stereotype;" Boys:  $M = 0.47, SE = 0.03$ ; Girls:  $M = 0.35, SE = 0.03, p < .001$ ) and the social conventional justification that the outgroup member won't fit it ("social conventional;" Boys:  $M = 0.64, SE = 0.03$ ; Girls:  $M = 0.54, SE = 0.03, p < .05$ ). However, girls ( $M = 0.46, SE = 0.03$ ) were significantly more likely to use the justification expressing empathy for the victim than were boys ( $M = 0.36, SE = 0.03, p < .05$ ).

### Ethnicity $\times$ justification

A significant interaction between justification and ethnicity ( $F(4, 1156) = 16.00, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = 0.05$ ) also emerged. Pairwise comparisons revealed differences in the use of three of the five justifications by participant ethnicity. PCI participants were significantly more likely to use the social conventional justification than all other justifications ( $M = 0.66, SE = 0.03$ ;



$p < .001$ ). The stereotype justification that ingroup and outgroup friendships could not exist ( $M = 0.49$ ,  $SE = 0.03$ ;  $p < .001$ ) and personal choice ( $M = 0.43$ ,  $SE = 0.03$ ;  $p < .001$ ) were both used next most frequently, followed by empathy for the victim ( $M = 0.30$ ,  $SE = 0.03$ ;  $p < .001$ ). The empathy for the victim and personal choice justifications did not differ in frequency of use from each other. The empathy for the excluder justification was used significantly less often than all other justifications ( $M = 0.15$ ,  $SE = 0.02$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

The Jewish-Israeli participants were significantly more likely to use social convention ( $M = 0.51$ ,  $SE = 0.03$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and empathy for excluder ( $M = 0.51$ ,  $SE = 0.03$ ,  $p < .001$ ) justifications for bystander responses than the personal choice ( $M = 0.33$ ,  $SE = 0.03$ ,  $p < .001$ ), stereotype justification that ingroup and outgroup friendships could not exist ( $M = 0.25$ ,  $SE = 0.02$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and empathy for the excluder ( $M = 0.51$ ,  $SE = 0.03$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

### Scenario × justification

Scenario differences emerged for three of the five justifications. The stereotype justification that ingroup and outgroup friendships could not exist (Peer:  $M = 0.35$ ,  $SE = 0.02$ ; Family:  $M = 0.47$ ,  $SE = 0.02$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and the social conventional justification that the outgroup member wouldn't fit it (Peer:  $M = 0.54$ ,  $SE = 0.02$ ; Family:  $M = 0.63$ ,  $SE = 0.02$ ,  $p < .001$ ) were used significantly more frequently in the home than in the peer context. However, the justification expressing empathy for the victim was used significantly more frequently in the peer ( $M = 0.46$ ,  $SE = 0.02$ ) than in the home scenario ( $M = 0.36$ ,  $SE = 0.02$ ;  $p < .001$ ).

### Time × treatment group × justification interaction

Follow-up examination of the pairwise comparisons found significant differences between treatment groups across time for all five justifications. There were no significant differences at the pre-test between groups for any of the justifications. However, across the post-test and follow-up, similar patterns of change emerged for the skills and skills + contact groups; these patterns were in the opposite direction of change from the control group.

For the social conventional and stereotype justifications, both skills and skills + contact groups decreased their usage from pre-test to post-test and follow-up (social conventional:  $p$ 's  $< .001$ ; stereotype:  $p$ 's  $< .001$ ), whereas the control group increased usage from pre-test to follow-up (Table 4 for all means & standard deviations). In the skills + contact group, the decreasing effect for the social conventional justification was significant only from pre-test to post-test ( $p < .05$ ). This effect was further evidenced by significant differences in usage between the control group and the skills and skills + contact groups at post-test and follow-up. The skills and skills + contact groups used these two justifications significantly less frequently

TABLE 4 Means and standard deviations for time × treatment group × justification interaction.

Justification type	Control						Skills						Skills+contact						
	Pre-test		Post-test		Follow-up		Pre-test		Post-test		Follow-up		Pre-test		Post-test		Follow-up		
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	
Stereotype	0.40	0.49	0.48	0.50	0.53	0.50	0.48	0.50	0.40	0.19	0.40	0.15	0.35	0.41	0.49	0.25	0.43	0.21	0.41
Social conventional	0.61	0.49	0.68	0.47	0.73	0.45	0.64	0.48	0.38	0.49	0.37	0.49	0.54	0.50	0.44	0.50	0.51	0.50	0.50
Empathy For victim	0.39	0.49	0.35	0.48	0.24	0.43	0.31	0.04	0.67	0.47	0.66	0.48	0.37	0.48	0.59	0.49	0.57	0.50	0.50
Empathy For excluder	0.25	0.43	0.16	0.37	0.13	0.34	0.17	0.38	0.28	0.45	0.25	0.44	0.16	0.37	0.20	0.40	0.18	0.39	0.39
Personal choice	0.40	0.49	0.43	0.50	0.41	0.49	0.37	0.49	0.28	0.45	0.27	0.45	0.39	0.49	0.36	0.48	0.37	0.48	0.48

Note: Stereotype (e.g., the ingroup and outgroup youth cannot be friends with each other); social conventional (e.g., the outgroup will not fit in with the ingroup); empathy for victim (e.g., the victim may have their feelings hurt); empathy for excluder (e.g., the excluder may feel bad about it later); personal choice (e.g., the excluder gets to decide whom should be included or excluded).  $n = 302$ . Abbreviations: M = mean; SE = standard error.

at both post-test and follow-up than did the control group ( $p$ 's < .001). There were no significant differences between the skills and skills + contact groups.

For the empathy for the victim justification, both skills ( $p$ 's < .05) and skills + contact groups increased their usage from pre-test to post-test and follow-up ( $p$ 's < .001; Table 4 for all means & standard deviations). Similarly, the empathy for the excluder justification usage from pre-test to post-test increased significantly for the skills ( $p$  < .001) and skills + contact groups ( $p$  < .05), an effect that was maintained at the follow-up for the skills group ( $p$  < .01). Conversely, the control group decreased usage of empathy for the victim significantly from pre-test to post-test and then again to follow-up ( $p$ 's < .05) and empathy for the excluder from pre-test to post-test and follow-up ( $p$ 's < .05). This effect was further evidenced by significant differences in usage between the control group and the skills and skills + contact groups at post-test and follow-up. The skills and skills + contact groups used empathy for the excluder as a justification significantly more frequently at both post-test and follow-up than did the control group ( $p$ 's < .001). Additionally, the skills group was significantly more likely to use the empathy for the excluder justification at post-test ( $p$  < .05) and follow-up ( $p$  < .01) than the control group. There were no significant differences between the skills and skills + contact groups.

Finally, although there were no significant differences in usage of the personal choice justification bystander response selection over time within each group, there were significant differences at the time points between groups. The control group was significantly more likely to use the personal choice justification than the skills group at post-test and follow-up ( $p$ 's < .05; Table 4 for all means & standard deviations).

## DISCUSSION

First and foremost, this study contributes to the field methodologically because it was carried out with majority world youth living within intractable real-world conflict, including flare-ups in intergroup violence occurring during the intervention. The scope of this study was to assess the effects of two types of longitudinal school-based interventions in PCI and Jewish-Israeli schools on early adolescents' bystander responses to BSE. Additionally, the initial interventions were accompanied by a six-month follow-up assessment, with the intention to determine if, even during conflict, interventions can be implemented in real-life settings, like schools, to produce lasting effects.

The novel contribution of this study revealed the skills and skills + contact-based interventions produced increases in selecting positive bystander responses and decreases in selecting negative responses—effects that were maintained 6 months after the interventions were complete. These findings are especially important given the age of the participants; early adolescents (approximately 10–12 years old) are less likely than children to report the use of positive bystander

responses (Trach et al., 2010; Trach & Hymel, 2019). This was complemented by a parallel shift in justifications given by the skills and skills + contact groups, concurrent with developmental change of early adolescents providing increasingly sophisticated bystander strategies overall (Trach et al., 2010). Despite the ongoing intractable conflict, both groups increased moral justifications prioritizing empathy, and decreased usage of justifications that relied on intergroup stereotypes and social conventions that work against positive bystander intervention in intergroup situations. These findings demonstrate both the two interventions' effectiveness in reducing one's own outgroup prejudice and the potential to change how youth carry out such values in the face of discriminatory social exclusion of the outgroup at the hands of their friends or family. Whereas prejudiced attitudes can be changed without any outward indication to friends or family, taking prosocial action as a bystander and refusing to join in BSE, requires action that is seen by others. In our scenarios, those others are close ingroup members—peers and parents—whose acceptance is highly valued by youth at this age (McGrath et al., 2009).

Furthermore, in the control group, we saw decreased selection of positive responses and increased selection of negative responses in the follow-up assessment. This pattern was accompanied by increased appeals to stereotype and social convention-based justifications and decreased appeals to empathy-based justifications for their selections. Participants in the control group continued to endorse the stereotype that intergroup friendships were not possible and social conventional belief that including outgroup members would disrupt ingroup functioning. Given that our control group received no experimental disruption to their daily lives (i.e., the curriculum “intervention” was what they would have otherwise been taught in social studies that year), findings from this group are a reasonable indicator of the response trajectory one could expect to see of youth growing up at that particular time amidst the heightened ongoing violence should they not receive any intervention. Such development is likely a result of the intractable conflict in the region and escalations in violence over the course of the study. Similar results on evaluations of BSE have been shown in other intervention study control groups (see Berger, Brenick, Lawrence, et al., 2018; Berger, Brenick, & Tarrasch, 2018; Brenick et al., 2019). Moreover, previous research has demonstrated that as youth of this age grow older, particularly when they are developing and socialized in contexts of extreme intergroup conflict, negative intergroup attitudes can become more polarized (see Verkuyten, 2022).

Taken together, the findings from the control and intervention groups are striking; in order to produce the positive outcomes from the intervention groups, the interventions not only needed to improve bystander responses from baseline levels, but also needed to overcome the negative trend in bystander responses toward the outgroup witnessed in the control group participants. The impact of these results is promising in that intervention participants—youth who have never known a life without intractable conflict—now

demonstrated the potential to overcome prevailing societal narratives of intractable conflict and ongoing violence and challenge salient ingroup norms of discrimination. Furthermore, the results are impactful given our participants' developmental stage; ethnic-racial identity development accelerates at this age and is a major developmental task, at the same time, adolescents exhibit heightened attention to peer norms and group dynamics (Umaña-Taylor, 2023) all of which could lead instead to polarizing views of the outgroup (see Brenick & Halgunseth, 2017).

Our findings also revealed that the skills+contact group increased passive response selection over time. Participants in the skills+contact intervention reduced the selection of negative responses, which were replaced sometimes with positive responses but also with passive responses. Passive bystander response selection may reveal that these youth are still conflicted; internally, their prejudiced feelings and thoughts may be reduced due to the interventions, but the discriminatory norms of their ingroup still overwhelm their ability to intervene publicly against BSE (Palmer et al., 2022). However, the passive bystander who does not provide any support to the victim and ignores the situation (Salmivalli, 2014) can be interpreted as implicitly supporting the discriminatory victimization being carried out. For this reason, it is important to emphasize positive responses specifically because they cannot be (mis)perceived as acceptance of the discrimination. Future studies should investigate the mechanism by which passive bystander responses were decreased in the skills group as well as why they increased in the skills+contact group.

One explanation could be that due to the increased conflict in the region, which we see reflected in the control group, the contact between PCI and Jewish-Israeli early adolescents may not have always been positive during the intervention. Previous research has highlighted that negative intergroup contact can lead to an increase of prejudice rather than the opposite, including in the context of Palestinian and Jewish-Israeli youth (Guffler & Wagner, 2017). Continued research is necessary that focuses on the quality of the contact and takes into consideration the fact that this contact occurred amidst escalated violence and enduring conflict.

Finally, the current study found that girls' responses were more consistent across scenarios, whereas boys reported significantly more positive responses when around peers and significantly more negative responses when at home. Previous research shows that youth are affected by the intergroup norms and attitudes of their most salient ingroup in a given context, such as their parents or peers in a home or social outing setting, respectively (e.g., Brenick & Romano, 2016). If they perceive their peers or parents to hold norms of negative outgroup attitudes, then they are more likely to accept social exclusion that targets the outgroup. Moreover, the normative trends in bystander responses differ for boys and girls (e.g., Jenkins & Nickerson, 2017; Trach et al., 2010; Trach & Hymel, 2019), which is reflected in our study's findings that girls have more positive responses than boys in general.

## Limitations and future research

As with all studies, there were some limitations that we must acknowledge. Because the interventions were only provided to 5th grade classes in 6 schools within a unique region of conflict, our study must be replicated with attention to culture and context before assuming generalizability to other populations and settings. Future studies should include multiple or all grade levels to assess replicability with different age groups. Given the present study included only 6 schools, we were unable to assess any direct school/classroom level effects; these should be examined in future studies including more schools. Follow-up assessments can be conducted after 6-months to assess longer-term effects. Also, it is important to note that the interventions were administered by trained research assistants. Future studies should analyze the implementation of the interventions by trained classroom teachers. This will better test the study's scalability since teachers will be tasked with implementation in a real-world integration.

Furthermore, there was no opportunity to assess the communities and parents of the participants to determine how the youth were influenced by sources that are external to the school setting. Previous studies show the important role families and their social ecologies provide for the development of anti-bullying programs, since family cultural group identity and norms affect the messages and attitudes transferred to youth regarding outgroups (Brenick & Romano, 2016; Tadmor et al., 2017). Further research into communities and families is warranted and would enhance our understanding of when, why, and how a bystander intervenes in BSE among youth. This information could be applied to the fine-tuning of interventions that are implemented in schools to maximize their effectiveness.

Additionally, our methodological approach relied on the use of hypothetical vignettes; our participants were asked to respond as if they were the actors in the vignettes, but we did not observe their behaviors directly. As with all studies utilizing this methodology, the results must be interpreted as social-cognitive changes in attitudes about desired behavioral outcomes. There are, however, robust data supporting the attitude-behavior relationship in the adult literature (e.g., Bechler et al., 2021). Additionally, given that the study took place in an intractable conflict zone during a time of heightened violence, it was neither possible nor ethical to recreate BSE in a real-life observational setting for research purposes. Hypothetical vignettes allowed us to provide standardized exclusion scenarios to all participants through which we were able to explore our research questions at the given time. Future studies could utilize other methodologies, such as naturalistic observations, when conditions allow, or retroactive accounts of previous experiences.

Finally, we were focused specifically on the comparison between parent versus peer as a source of BSE; this focus limited the scope of our findings. Future research focused on these two scenarios could assess why boys and girls respond differently to peer and parent norms in their related scenarios and why peers or parents may be more impactful positively or negatively on bystander responses. Furthermore, future research

should include variations of scenarios and the group dynamic (e.g., number of bystanders, public versus private settings), as well as multiple indicators of bystander response.

## CONCLUSION

BSE is a common form of discrimination in adolescence, especially among ethnic groups that are in conflict. As a young bystander, a critical first step toward reducing this form of discrimination is prejudice reduction—changing one's thoughts and feelings about the outgroup (see Breinick & Halgunseth, 2017; Pettigrew, 1998; Verkuyten, 2022). In this phase, one might engage in passive bystander responses, neither defending the victim in a group scenario nor encouraging the victimization. However, it is important for youth to stand up against discrimination in their home and in the presence of their peers. The primary goal is to empower youth to speak up about injustice and directly confront discrimination. The results of our interventions showed increases in positive bystander responses and empathy-based justifications of their responses and decreases in stereotype and social convention-based justifications—even in the midst of ongoing intractable conflict. This suggests that youth were willing to endorse actions that would publicly confront discriminatory victimization of the outgroup at the hands of their peers and parents. These findings show great promise for the potential of anti-discrimination interventions, even with youth who have never known a time without violent intractable intergroup conflict.

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## SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of this article.

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## APPENDIX A

### A.1 | Author positionality statements

Three of the co-authors have direct connections to the population studied as well as the region as well as scholarly content expertise in research area and methodology. **Malak Zureiqi** is a Palestinian scholar-activist, bilingual in Arabic and English. Though currently based in the United States, she has deep familial ties to the ongoing conflict in the Middle East. **Rony Berger** is an Israeli senior clinical psychologist and a family and child therapist who is an internationally recognized expert in dealing with the psychological preparation for and aftermath of terrorism and other major disasters. He lives amidst the intractable conflict and collaborates with Palestinian- and Jewish-Israeli community partners to implement interventions to promote positive youth development, especially mindful empathy, understanding, and non-judgment. **Alaina Brenick** is a white, Jewish scholar-activist based in the United States. She has far-reaching ties to the Palestinian- and Jewish-Israeli communities through family, friendship, and professional collaborations, and has worked collaboratively with these communities for over 20 years. Her work in this area is with Palestinian, Israeli, Muslim, and Jewish colleagues to assess culturally sensitive

intervention programs to promote youth well-being and positive intergroup relations.

Three of the co-authors share minoritized lived experiences with the population studied and scholarly content expertise in the research area and methodology. **Maisha Seraj** is a Bangladeshi-American student, bilingual in Bengali and English, and born and raised in the United States. Her lived experiences as a member of minoritized religious (Muslim), ethnic, and immigrant groups, inform her scholarship and practice in individual and group relations. She is trained in psychology and marriage and family therapy. **Rui Wu** is a woman from a Chinese minority, whose position has shaped her understanding of bullying and bystander intervention based on racial bias. Her identity and related experiences have allowed her to approach this research with sensitivity in order to promote equity, justice, and inclusion for all those affected. She brings multidisciplinary (communications, human development and family sciences) scholarly expertise in discrimination experiences of minoritized groups as well as advanced methodologies and analyses across multiple cultural contexts. **Megan Clark Kelly** is a white, teacher-scholar, raised Catholic in the Northeast of the United States. She is a trained developmental psychologist in youth social and moral evaluations about intergroup social victimization.