

# Study finds quality interaction eases refugee prejudice

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Murdoch University-led research has found that quality interaction, not length of interaction, is the key to reducing anxiety about, and prejudice toward, refugees.

The study by Katrine Turoy-Smith and Associate Professor Anne Pedersen from Murdoch's School of Psychology and Exercise Science and Dr Robert Kane from Curtin University asked 1000 households in four metropolitan suburbs about the nature, amount, context and quality of their contact with refugees and Indigenous Australians.

While quantity and quality interaction reduced prejudice against Indigenous people, quantity alone was not enough to ease people's

anxiety about refugees.

"Considering the past and present portrayal of asylum seekers and refugees as a threat to national security and sovereignty by some Australian politicians and [media outlets](#), this finding of anxiety by the mainstream is understandable," Ms Turoy-Smith said.

"While the study asked for experience from direct contact, close to 20 per cent of respondents gave voice to things they hadn't experienced themselves, most of which related to negative stories from the media."

Ms Turoy-Smith said a number of false beliefs came up, including that refugees were 'illegals', that they had a great deal of money, that they received a large amount of government assistance and were queue jumpers.

Researchers also reported that many respondents were unsure about how and what a refugee actually was, and confused them with immigrants, asylum seekers, Muslims and 'ethnic people'.

"High levels of false beliefs have been shown to be strongly correlated with prejudiced attitudes," Ms Turoy-Smith said.

Researchers said people were wary because they felt physically or economically threatened by newcomers to Australia. They indicated that the government needed to offer better and more in-depth information to the public about what refugees contribute to the nation and promote [positive contact](#).

The study showed that [negative perceptions](#) were overcome in work settings or social situations involving family and friends, leading to empathy for the challenges and difficulties faced by refugees.

"This need for quality contexts indicates that we cannot simply expect that having different groups living together in the same neighbourhoods and cities will eventually lead to improved relationships," Professor Pedersen said.

"More intimate and positive contact is required in appropriate, supportive settings. Our research shows that quality interaction leads to a decrease in prejudice toward both [refugees](#) and Indigenous Australians.

"This in turn leads to support for legislation to ensure all Australians have an equal opportunity to succeed and have a place within an accepting, multicultural society."

Provided by Murdoch University

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