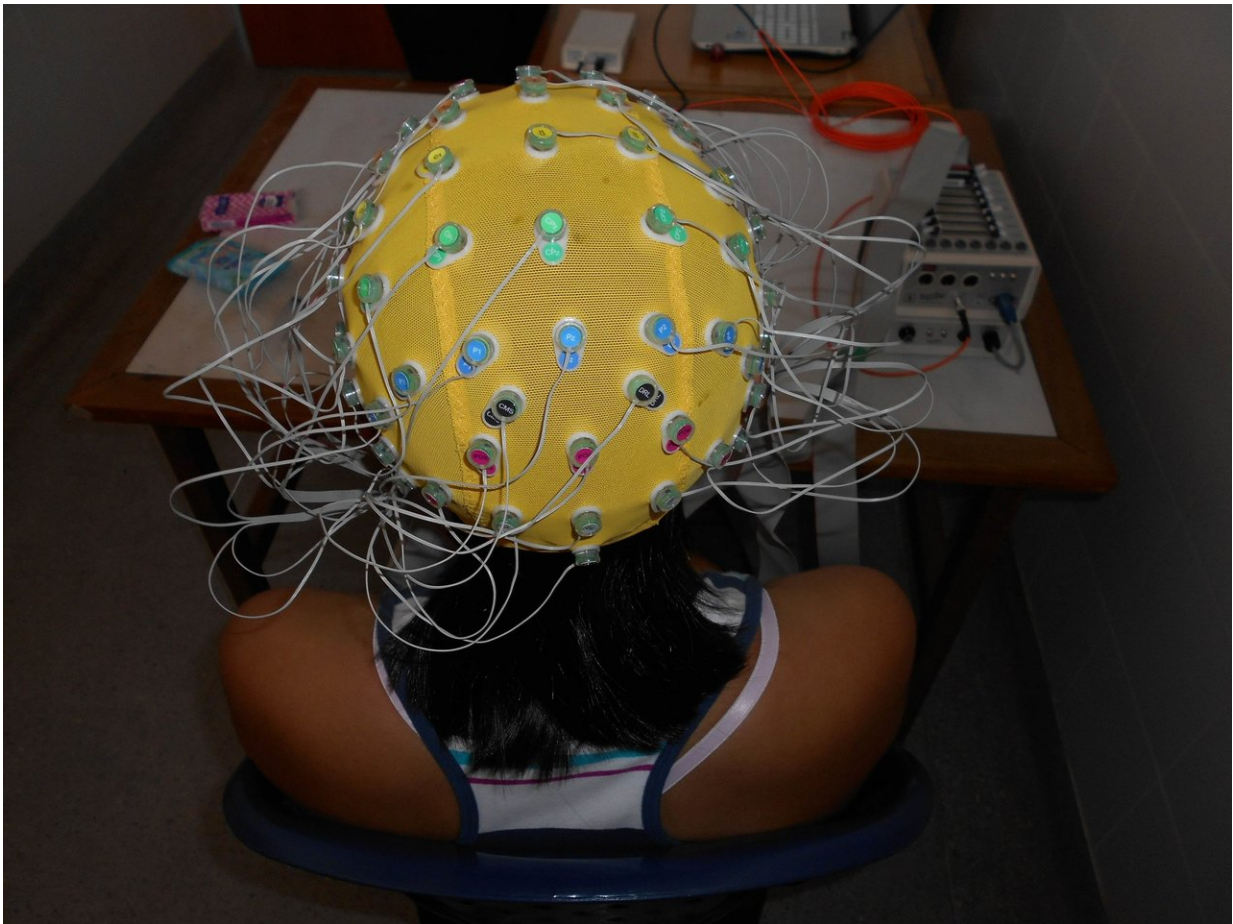


# Psychological training to improve social integration and reduce aggressiveness of ex combatants in armed conflicts

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Equipment used during the research. Credit: University of Granada

The Demobilization, Disarmament and Reintegration (DDR) policies implemented by the international community aim to facilitate the process of returning to civilian life for participants in armed conflicts. With this same goal, a study led by the University of Granada (UGR, Spain) and the University of Antioquia (Colombia), proposes a new psychological intervention method, called social cognitive training (SCT), consisting of 12 to 14 sessions aimed at improving the integration of ex-combatants.

The study, published in the journal *Frontiers in Psychology*, has been carried out by a team of researchers from the UGR, the University of Antioquia and the Autonomous University of the Caribbean (both Colombian), the University of Maastricht, and the Heriot-Watt University of Edinburgh. The researcher from the UGR is Sandra Trujillo, doctoral candidate of the Department of Experimental Psychology.

This proposal of a psychological training is aimed at ex-combatants who participated in the [armed conflict](#) in Colombia, former members of illegal groups such as the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC, from its name in Spanish) and the National Liberation Army (ELN), as well as paramilitary groups that emerged to fight against the two previous guerrilla organizations.

Currently, these ex-combatants are working toward adaptation to daily activities and environments. They suffer from conditions like [post-traumatic stress disorder](#) and depression.

However, the conventional method is less effective than the one now proposed by the researchers. After dividing the ex-combatants into two groups, one of them received the usual treatment, while the other was treated with social cognitive training.

SCT differs from other methods in the employment of three axes of treatment: basic emotions, social skills and theory of mind.

"Participants were evaluated before and after the treatment through a series of psychological tests and computerized tasks on the recognition of emotions, in which the electrical activity of the brain and the response of these people to emotional images were recorded," said Sandra Trujillo, main author of the study.

Through this evaluation method, it was also possible to assess the difference between conventional training and the one designed in the UGR research.

Ex-combatants receiving SCT experienced a significant reduction of aggressive attitudes and significant improvements in the recognition and adoption of complex social attitudes.

The ex-combatants acquired better strategies to identify their emotions and were more able to properly adapt to their social environment. Trujillo points out that "these changes were not observed in those ex-combatants who were evaluated with the same protocol but who continued receiving the conventional [treatment](#)."

The researchers hope that the SCT may be implemented in former combatants throughout the Colombian territory, so that the results of their study "contribute to the improvement of psychological treatments for this population and promote their integration process in their communities," consequently "promoting peace in regions affected by armed conflicts for more than half a century in Colombia."

**More information:** Sandra Trujillo et al. Social Cognitive Training Improves Emotional Processing and Reduces Aggressive Attitudes in Ex-combatants, *Frontiers in Psychology* (2017). [DOI](#):

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