

PERSONAL NETWORKS, SOCIAL MEDIA, AND COMMUNITY COHESION IN THE STRATEGIES OF PEACE-BUILDING AGENTS IN COLOMBIA TO COUNTERACT THE SEGREGATION OF DISPLACED POPULATIONS

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Abstract

As part of the “Colombian Peace Process,” victim assistance programs, actions for the reincorporation into civilian life of ex-combatants, and demobilized persons of the armed conflict have been developed as well as innovative instances of intervention in cases of posttraumatic stress. In this study, we surveyed 143 community leaders from the Department of Atlántico (Colombia), participants in a program for capacity building in rehabilitation and mediation strategies. With a mixed design in which we combine the analysis of personal networks, psychometric scales, and qualitative interviews, we describe the use that community mediators make of their personal skills, their personal network, and social media in their actions to confront social trauma and promote coexistence in the local community. The results show a significant relationship between the density of personal networks and the psychological sense of community. Paradoxically, the high social cohesion of the communities of people displaced by political violence seems to pose objective difficulties in reducing trauma. In the discussion, we indicate that the sociogeographic segregation derived from housing policies becomes an obstacle to the effective functioning of the coexistence and reintegration programs of victims and demobilized persons of the armed conflict. In this context, social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp are little used by community mediators in the development of their activities, which they perceive as reinforcing largely the dynamics of segregation of the displaced population.

Keywords

Colombian peace process, Community cohesion, Personal networks, Social media, Trauma