Childhood exposure to diversity is best chance for community cohesion in immigration

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New research from the University of Kent reveals social cohesion with immigration is best ensured through childhood exposure to diversity in local neighborhoods, leading to acceptance of other groups.

The research, which is published in *Oxford Economic Papers*, builds on the Nobel Laureate economist Thomas Schelling's Model of Segregation, which showed that a slight preference by individuals and families towards their own groups can eventually result in complete segregation of communities.

Shedding new light on this issue, researchers from Kent's School of Economics have introduced the theory that adaptability to a diverse social environment depends on greater exposure to diversity in childhood years. Following this increased acceptance of other social groups in a community, social diversity and cohesion is then sustainable.

A model of immigration based on this theory shows that fast-paced immigration into a community reduces social cohesion and increases social segregation, which explains the recent evolution of social diversity within UK communities and social attitudes towards other groups. The study also shows a medium pace of immigration is more effective in establishing acceptance of diversity within communities, leading to greater community cohesion over time.

Dr. Zaki Wahhaj, Reader in Economics at the University of Kent and joint author of the paper, said: 'For a long time there has been a blind spot in debates around immigration and the social integration of minority groups: namely, that sustaining social cohesion requires not only adaption by immigrants but also a shift in how majority groups see themselves. We discovered that bringing insights from psychology—that childhood experiences are key to forming identity—easily overturns the predictions of standard economic models for studying social segregation.'

Provided by University of Kent