

Conspiracy theories negatively affect their targets, new research shows

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New research from the University of Nottingham and Northumbria University has found that conspiracy theories about social groups can have significant negative effects on their members.

In a series of empirical studies, Dr. Daniel Jolley, from the School of Psychology, along with Dr. Jenny Paterson and Dr. Andrew McNeill from Northumbria University, examined how [conspiracy theories](#) about Jewish people impact Jewish people's emotions and behaviors.

Published in [The British Journal of Psychology](#), the studies revealed that perceiving Jewish conspiracy theories to be popular is linked with Jewish people feeling threatened, angry and anxious.

These conspiracy beliefs are also linked to Jewish people being more avoidant of non-Jewish people—in both their intentions and in their actual behaviors. In addition, the studies found that perceived conspiracy popularity can increase group solidarity by increasing intentions to support fellow Jewish people.

Acknowledging that previous research has tended to focus on those who believe in conspiracy theories, Dr. Jolley emphasized the importance of shifting focus to the impact of conspiracy beliefs on targeted groups.

"Our work stresses the importance of focusing on the targets of conspiracy theories rather than solely on the believers. While exploring the consequences for conspiracy theory believers is crucial, our research provides novel insights into how targeted group members feel and respond."

Dr. Jolley added, "While our research specifically examined Jewish conspiracy theories, we believe that our findings extend beyond the Jewish community. As conspiracy theories can target many different groups, from health care workers and scientists to entire [social groups](#), similar impacts, such as feeling threatened, angry, and anxious and a desire to avoid others, are likely observed in a wide range of targeted groups."

The research team hopes that their work acts as a catalyst for exploring the impact of perceived [conspiracy](#) popularity in other groups and that such work can provide important insights that can be used to support those who are targeted.

More information: Daniel Jolley et al, The impact of conspiracy beliefs on a targeted group: Perceived popularity of Jewish-targeted conspiracy beliefs elicits outgroup avoidant behaviours, *British Journal of Psychology* (2023). [DOI: 10.1111/bjop.12690](https://doi.org/10.1111/bjop.12690)

Provided by University of Nottingham

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