

# Diverse friend groups promote better social cohesion and well-being, study finds

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New research featuring more than 24,000 people has found that having diverse groups of friends improves well-being and social cohesion, despite people's tendency to gravitate towards people more similar to them.

Led by researchers at the University of Birmingham and published in [\*Psychological Science\*](#), the study used data from 24,726 adults from over 10,000 English neighborhoods to examine the composition of people's social networks according to age, ethnicity, income, and education to understand the implications of homophily (preference for similar people) on [social cohesion](#) subjective well-being.

Dr. Miguel Ramos, lead author on the paper and Associate Professor at the University of Birmingham, said, "With diversity increasing worldwide, citizens in modern nations are encountering ever more opportunities to interact with people of different backgrounds, with different social characteristics. Despite this, people still have the tendency to gravitate towards those similar to themselves.

"Our findings revealed that despite this tendency, people with mixed social networks—comprising both similar and dissimilar people to themselves—reported higher levels of social cohesion within their neighborhoods which was closely associated with increased personal well-being."

The researchers looked at four types of network homophily, race, age, income and education and measured the diversity of respondents' friend groups within these categories on a scale of 0 to 100%, along with life satisfaction levels and feelings about social cohesion.

The researchers found that feelings of social cohesion and satisfaction with life reached it's peak when people had a [friend](#) group with about half (50%) of the members having a difference in age, race, income or education. People feel the most connected and happier when they have a group of friends that is mixed, comprising both similar and dissimilar friends.

The implications of this research extend beyond individual friendships to

broader societal structures. By embracing diversity and fostering inclusive environments, communities stand to benefit from greater social harmony and collective well-being.

The study's findings could inform policies and initiatives aimed at promoting harmony and inclusivity across various spheres of society, including education, workplace, and community settings.

Dr. Ramos continued, "These results underscore the key role of embracing diversity in promoting stronger social bonds and enhancing overall societal cohesion. Having heterogeneous rather than homogeneous social networks is associated with the highest levels of social cohesion, which is a key source of well-being and provides [empirical evidence](#) that people from different groups—regardless of age, income, race, and other characteristics can benefit from living in harmony together."

Matt Bennett, Professor of Social Policy at the University of Birmingham, and co-author on the study, added, "While interacting with people with the same characteristics may offer a sense of familiarity and comfort, our study suggests that embracing [diversity](#) is crucial for fostering resilience and adaptability in an ever-changing world."

**More information:** Miguel R. Ramos et al, Variety Is the Spice of Life: Diverse Social Networks Are Associated With Social Cohesion and Well-Being, *Psychological Science* (2024). [DOI: 10.1177/09567976241243370](https://doi.org/10.1177/09567976241243370)

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