

# Chapter 12

## Observing Stigmatization Attitudes Towards Ex- Combatants in Colombia's Postconflict: An Empirical Approach

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The authors propose a working definition of stigmatization towards ex-combatants from organized armed groups outside the law in Colombia's internal conflict and empirically validate a questionnaire to assess stigmatization. First, they offer a brief review of different concepts of stigmatization, mainly stemming from psychology and sociology. Second, based on the previous review, they will offer a specific definition of stigmatization directed towards ex-combatants in the Colombian internal conflict. This definition encompasses social distance, label attribution, and emotional reactions towards the stigmatized group. Further, they present the validated scale to measure these attitudes in a non-representative sample of 289 people in 34 Colombian counties. Finally, they describe the psychometric properties of this scale as a way to measure stigmatization against ex-combatants in the Colombian internal conflict to be used in interventions aimed at attenuating this stigmatization and favoring their return to civilian society.*

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-6960-3.ch012

## **INTRODUCTION**

Stigmatization and its consequences have been a long-standing interest of social psychology. Classic studies on stigmatization have usually been centered on stigmatized groups corresponding to ethnic or sexual minorities. Based on these studies, various theoretical models of stigmatization, its causes, and consequences have been proposed. Here, we use these models to shed some light on stigmatization in violent contexts, namely stigmatization against ex-FARC combatants, a left-wing former armed group who took part in Colombia's internal conflict and started their transition to civil society recently, following the Peace Talks between their leaders and the Colombian government.

This chapter has two aims. First, to provide a better understanding of the concept of stigmatization in conflict contexts, and second, develop an empirical validation of its measurement. First, we briefly review different definitions and theoretical approaches on the subject of stigmatization. In this section, we arrive at a working definition of stigmatization which includes both necessary and sufficient conditions to define stigmatization towards ex-combatants in the Colombian internal conflict. Second, we present the proposed scale to observe stigmatization and the methodology. Third, we present the results of this empirical validation. Finally, we discuss the advantages and limitations of the proposed scale and how these may be applied to the observation and evaluation of stigmatization against ex-combatants.

## **DEFINING STIGMATIZATION**

Studies on stigmatization have sought to conceptualize the term “stigma” and clarify its use in the context of social interactions. Literature on stigma has been centered in the context of interpersonal relationships. Most proposed definitions of stigmatization include three separate dimensions: a cognitive dimension, an emotional dimension, and a behavioral dimension (see supplementary materials). Some studies prioritize the cognitive dimension (Dovidio, Major, & Crocker, 2000; Goffman, 1963; Hannem, 2012; Link & Phelan, 2001; Sharp et al., 2014). From this viewpoint, stigma refers to a profoundly discrediting and negative characteristic attributed to the stigmatized person, opposing their actual, observable, demonstrable character.

In this sense, Goffman (1963) provides one of the most recognized studies. Goffman states that stigma is a deeply discrediting attribute which produces a special kind of gap between virtual social identity (the character ascribed to the individual) and actual social identity (the category and demonstrable attributes that actually belong to the individual). His ideas have served as the baseline for subsequent definitions and discussions, such as those by Dovidio, Major, and Crocker (2000), Link and Phelan (2001), Hannem (2012), and Sharp et al. (2014).

Later, Stafford and Scott 1986 would consider stigma to be a personal characteristic that is contrary to the norm of society. This view has been shared by authors such as Crocker, Major and Steele who highlight how this notion devalued the identity of stigmatized individuals in a particular context. Meanwhile, Jones et al. (1984) state that stigma is produced from a relationship between the “mark” (attribute) and its connection with certain undesirable characteristics (stereotype) of the stigmatized individual.

Therefore, the first studies on this topic focused on stigma as an individual negative quality. However, Link and Phelan (2001) ultimately reject the use of words such as “attribute”, “condition” or “mark” when they discuss stigma. Their argument lies in that this language denotes prejudice, presenting stigma as a characteristic feature of the person without acknowledging the role of the stigmatizer. Thus, dismissing

this notion, they use instead the term “label” and, in this way, clarify that this “something” is not a fixed part of the stigmatized individual but, rather, is assigned to them by others. This idea is shared by other studies which conclude that stigma is a negative “label” given from a dominant perspective, usually linked to physical, ideological or derived from some past actions (Goar, 2013).

Link and Phelan (2001) define stigmatization as a external process in which: 1) individuals label human differences; 2) prevailing beliefs in society lead stigmatizers to establish associations between those labelled and adverse qualities; and 3) stigmatized people are placed in distinguished groups that serve to establish a sense of disconnection between “us” and “them”, encouraging discriminatory behaviors. This reasoning is shared by subsequent studies (Phillips, 2011; Major, 2005). Keeping in mind the context which gives rise to stigma, Link and Phelan (2001) propose a stigmatization model which is contingent on the unequal access to power (political, economic, and social). For these authors, stigmatization cannot occur without such differences which trigger stigmatizers (“we”) exercise sufficient power to impose their visions over the stigmatized group (“them”).

Furthermore, they highlight that stigmatization is employed because it provides the stigmatizers with psychological dividends due to a relative “self-glorification”, since attention is deflected from their own negative attributes to those of others. In this sense, stigmatizing other groups works as a mechanism of self-defense or self-protection (Haghighat, 2005; Bobys & Laner, 1979).

While these studies highlight the antagonistic character of stigmatization, others emphasize its defensive nature, whose effect consists in maintaining group cohesion. Indeed, Dijker and Koomen (2007) define stigmatization as a process of social control in which the identity or character of a subject and/or group are viewed negatively by stigmatizing individuals based on a “deviant” condition, be it past, imagined, or present. Understood in this way, stigmatization is not concerned with changing the condition or behaviors of a person, but with condemning and socially excluding them. Hence, an undesirable attribute is transformed into a fundamental part of the person or group in question (Dijker, 2013). This coincides with the findings of other studies who proved that people who are close to members from stigmatized groups (usually family members) also suffer from this process (Phillips & Gates, 2011; Fernandez, 2009; Grey, 2002; Mason, 2009; Stark, 1987; VanDam, 2004).

The assignation of a particular “essence” to a person or a group seems to be the first step towards forming a generalization about a negative characteristic associated with them. Some studies take this notion as an example of psychological essentialism applied to different social groups (Rothbart & Rothbart, 1992). Thus, attributing essences to people is likely to result in an increase of psychological distance between groups, since it radicalizes differences between them and unifies members within each “in-group” in their single entity (Leyens, 2000). In scenarios of intergroup conflict, this can cause members of one group to believe that human essence belongs to the interior of that same group and, therefore, some type of subhuman essence must exist to identify the “others” (Leyens, 2000). To that effect, other authors have expressed that stigmatization occurs when others are shamed in a disintegrative way. In other words, when no effort is made to reconcile individuals with a community, divisions are reinforced between opposing groups (Braithwaite, 1989).

This also leads to dehumanization, understood as the process of depriving someone of their most basic identity: being “human” (Kukulu, 2007). In this way, some findings note that, psychologically, there exists a tendency to dehumanize those who belong to “inferior” groups (Bruneau, et al., 2018). The objects of this dehumanization are often perceived as individuals who lack the attributes that distinguish humans from animals (e.g., Intelligence, civilisation, morality). Thus, they are considered as inherently inferior. Indeed, dehumanization can facilitate discrimination (Bruneau, 2018). Added to the cognitive capacity

to assign labels, dehumanization causes discrimination. Some studies incorporate this consideration into his analysis of stigmatization. Some of them define discrimination as an attitude of the stigmatizing subject, formed by three components: an affective level, a cognitive level, and a discriminatory level (Haghighat, 2001). Similarly, other research includes the issue of dehumanization as a component of stigma, indicating that stigmatized people are them whose “social identity, or membership in some social category, calls into question his or her full humanity” (Crocker et al., 1998).

As well as clarifying the concept, research on this subject has also tried to link stigma to social distance or discrimination. Some authors have found the correlations between both behaviors, but without assigning a causal direction. This is what the results of research on stigma towards homosexuals in Virginia, USA show (Bobys & Laners, 1979), as well as studies on ex-convicts in Singapore (Tan, Chu, & Tan, 2016). In the examination of nurses’ procedures regarding schizophrenic patients in Turkey, researchers conclude that stigmatization is more intense when people interact closely with others, when there is increased social proximity (Kukulu & Ergün 2007). In this respect, Link and Phelan (2001) have emphasized that it remains difficult to differentiate conceptually between the phenomenon of stigmatization and social distance. Studies haven’t established the causal relation, ignoring whether social distance produces stigma or this causal link takes the opposite way.

McMullin (2012) explores in depth this issue regarding the link between the exercising of power and the development of stigmatisation. His study forms part of the limited bibliography dedicated specifically to the stigma of ex-combatants. Drawing from an analysis of the discourse and practice of DDR in Liberia, the author shows how dominant narratives reinforce negative assumptions about ex-combatants and affect the objectives of reintegration. He explains that, on the one hand, ex-combatants tend to be seen as a threat. On the other hand, ex-combatants are viewed with resentment by communities who are always painted as victims.

Similarly, Stafford and Scott (1986) view stigma as a characteristic that is contrary to societal norms. These characteristics can be related to physical or social features as well as past or present actions. In any case, stigmatization arises due to the perceived link between the stigma (i.e., the observable characteristic of stigmatized individuals or groups) and some negatively valued stereotypical attributes. These attributes imply a personal devaluation (Crocker, Major, & Steele, 1998; Dovidio, Major & Crocker, 2000; Jones et al., 1984; Simons et al., 2018) that makes the stigmatized group or person be considered as “inferior” (Goar, 2013) or even “less than human” (Boysen et al., 2020; Haslam, 2014).

Hence, there is a direct link between stigmatization and dehumanization, taken as denying that a person or group belongs to the most basic categorization of “human” (Haslam & Loughnan, 2014; Kteily et al., 2015). Psychological research suggests that dehumanization is usually linked to the belief that a dehumanized group or person is somehow “inferior” (Bruneau et al., 2018) and does not completely possess attributes that distinguish humans from other animals (e.g., intelligence, civility, morals...) or from machines (e.g., complex emotions, compassion, empathy...). Taken to an intergroup conflict scenario, stigma triggers some groups to believe that “true” humanity only belongs within their group and, therefore, some inhuman essence would be present in outgroup members (Leyens et al., 2000). In this context, a stigmatized person is defined as an individual whose social identity or group membership makes it uncertain, they are truly and completely human (Crocker et al., 1998).

Taking stigmatization as an attribute that somehow “belongs” to some individuals or groups has been criticized by highlighting that this attribution is assigned by others. In these views, stigmatization is a social process where a group of people assigns a negative value and its stereotypical attributes to an observable attribute of a person or group, rejecting the centrality of the “stigma” in favor of the

social process through which it came to be interpreted as evidence of a person's or group's value and humanity (Phelan et al., 2000). This "labeling" process is carried out by an "observer", that is, other persons usually belonging to an advantaged group, and is done to an observed individual or group, the "stigmatized" person or group.

This social process between the "observer" and the "observed" individuals or groups has been proposed to be not exclusively cognitive but also emotional, adding another dimension of stigmatization. Hence, stigmatization is not only based on the observer's thoughts or opinions but also on their emotional reactions towards the stigmatized group or person (Stone & Stone, 2007). The observer first identifies real or inferred attributes about a /target group, comparing these attributes with an ideal perception about him/herself, and finally reasoning that there is a discrepancy between the two identities, usually judging negatively those assigned to the others (Stone-Romero & Stone, 2007). Stigmatization is based on both the observer's knowledge and their emotional responses to the object/target group. With this dimension, the stigmatized person is not only attributed many undesirable, negatively valued attributes but also elicits strong emotional responses of disgust or rejection (Jones et al., 1984). These emotions serve as a "defense mechanism" in the face of a perceived menace or danger, incarnated in the stigmatized person or group, and motivates stigmatizers to keep their distance from the stigmatized group or person (Bobys & Laner, 1979).

The emotional dimension, in turn, gives way to the third, behavioral dimension of stigmatization, facilitating social and physical distance from the stigmatized group or person (Frías et al., 2018). Consequently, stigmatization is a social process aiming at social control and excluding the stigmatized group or person from the civil society, based on the perceived negative or "deviant" characteristics attributed to them (Dijker & Koomen, 2007). Then, stigmatization does not aim at behavior or attributes change or adjustment, it does not try to reconcile perceived differences between persons or groups, rather it tries to shame the stigmatized persons or groups into being marginalized and outcasts (Braithwaite, 1989). Thus, stigmatization is shaming in a disintegrative way when no effort is made to reconcile the delinquent with the community (Braithwaite, 1989). As a result, stigmatized groups are considered strangers with no place in society (Baumann, 2007).

Essentially, stigmatization is a social process that results in rejection, blame, and devaluation towards the stigmatized (Weiss, Tamakrishna, & Somma, 2006), discrimination (Corrigan, Rafacz, & Rüsche, 2011; Thornicroft et al., 2007; Van den Bos, 2007), frequently resulting in dehumanization (Bruneau et al., 2015; Haslam, 2014). This results from the reasonable experience, perception, or anticipation of a negative social judgment about a person or a group (Weiss, Tamakrishna, & Somma, 2006). Stigmatization is also associated with social distance; that is, the physical and symbolic distance one wants to keep with others in a social situation (Rey et al., 2019). Studies suggest that social distance is consistently larger towards members of stigmatized groups including homosexuals (Bobys & Laner, 1979), ex-convicts (Tan, Chu, & Tan, 2016), mentally ill patients (Kukulu & Ergün, 2007), and people suffering from drug addiction (Barry et al., 2014; Rey et al., 2019). Some even point to the difficulty of conceptually differentiating both social distance from stigmatization (Link & Phelan, 2001).

Authors have integrated all three exposed dimensions of stigmatization in a single social process where: 1) observers "label" perceived differences with other people; 2) dominant societal beliefs within a society link these labels with other negative attributions; 3) stigmatized persons or groups are then placed into a distinct, inferior social category creating an "Us vs. Them" mentality which engenders rejection, dehumanization, discrimination and different forms of violence (Major & O'Brien, 2005; Phillips & Gates, 2011). This stigmatizing process assigns a particular "essence" to people, based on

their group membership. This attributed “essence” allows for generalization across people and groups where all individuals belonging to a specific group are thought to have similar characteristics due to their shared “essence”.

In consequence, psychological essentialism, the belief that people or groups share a certain immovable essence which lends them shared attributions, has profound psychological and social implications by augmenting social distance to groups who share a “negative essence” and radicalizing “Us vs. Them” differences by unifying all members of these groups into a uniform entity (Leyens et al., 2000). Applied to stigmatization, psychological essentialism transforms a negative quality of one individual or group into its perceived essence (Dijker, 2013; Fernández & Arcia; Grey, 2002, Mason et al., 2009; Philips & Gates, 2011; Stark, 1987; Van Dam, 2004) extending these perceived negative qualities to other members of the target group, family or friends (Uhlmann et al., 2012).

From a societal perspective, stigmatization is contingent on inequalities in political, social, and economic power (Link & Phelan, 2001) whereby the “Us vs. Them” distinction is only possible if the stigmatizing group (“Us”) has enough power over the stigmatized group (“Them”) for the stigmatization process to have discriminatory consequences. Stigma is a mark or sign that usually highlights negative attitudes which lead to negative discrimination (Thornicroft, Rose, Kassam, & Sartorius, 2007). This stigmatization process in turn ensures that the hegemonic group has its economic and symbolic needs met before those of the stigmatized groups (Crisp, 2005). The link between power disparities and stigmatization is supported by power narratives from the dominant group who support negative attributions about stigmatized groups, for example, ex-combatants. These in turn are widely communicated and accepted by society, thereby hindering ex-combatants’ reintegration efforts, painting them simultaneously as a threat to society and an object of its resentment (McMullin, 2013).

All three exposed components of stigmatization can be unified by viewing it as an attitude that integrates cognitive, affective, and behavioral reactions to the stigmatized person or group (Haghighat, 2001, 2005). When stigmatization is publicly communicated, its cognitive dimension may give rise to negative emotional reactions and behavioral tendencies (Bos, Pryor, Reeder, & Stutterheim, 2013) in the stigmatizing person or group. In this view, social self-interest is the driving force behind stigmatization by keeping the self’s positive self-image through an advantageous comparison to the stigmatized group.

As the literature revealed, stigmatization is a notion with several different definitions and perspectives that involve three main dimensions (see Table 1). Indeed, at least 20 different definitions were identified in the academic literature. Furthermore, it was found that research on stigmatization in the field of reintegration or reincorporation processes is limited. In the Colombian case, the term has not been examined in depth or fully clarified, nor is there a record of measurements on the matter.

Thus, to offer a definition of stigmatization against ex-combatants in the Colombian internal conflict, we shall understand this term as a function of its components. The cognitive component or dimension captures some perceived characteristic (i.e., “stigma”) of an individual or group, construed as extremely negative, and assumes it as part of their very essence (Leyens et al., 2000). Based on this stigma, the stigmatized individual or group are distanced, taken to be very different from the ingroup which can lead to both ingroup-protecting (e.g., social distancing to avoid “contagion”) and overtly aggressive behaviors (e.g. dehumanization) (Crocker, Major, & Steele, 1998; Goffman, 1963; Major & O’Brien, 2005).

The emotional component of stigmatization consists of negative emotions (e.g. anger, disgust, outrage...) elicited by contact or interaction with the stigmatized group or person. Thus, feeling disgusted, angry, or uncomfortable by being in the presence of members of the stigmatized group would facilitate

**Observing Stigmatization Attitudes Towards Ex-Combatants in Colombia's Postconflict**

*Table 1. Dimensions of stigmatization in the literature review*

<b>Year</b>	<b>Reference</b>	<b>Cognitive</b>	<b>Emotional</b>	<b>Behavioral (distance)</b>
1963	Goffman, E. (1963). <i>Stigma. Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity</i> . Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.	✓		
1979	Bobys, R. & Laner, M. (1979). On the Stability of Stigmatization: The Case of Ex-Homosexual Males. <i>Archives of Sexual Behavior</i> , 8 (3), pp. 247-261		✓	✓
1984	Jones, E., Farina, A., Hastorf, A., Markus, H., Miller, D. & Scott, R. (1984). <i>Social Stigma: The Psychology of Marked Relationships</i> . Nueva York: Freeman.	✓	✓	
1986	Stafford M. & Scott R. (1986) Stigma, Deviance, and Social Control. En: Ainlay S., Becker G., Coleman L. (Eds.) <i>The Dilemma of Difference</i> . Boston: Springer.	✓		
1989	Braithwaite, J. (1989). <i>Criminological Theory and Organizational Crime</i> . <i>Justice Quarterly</i> , 6 (3), pp. 333-358.	✓		✓
2000	Dovidio, J., Major, B. & Crocker, J. (2000) Stigma: Introduction and overview. En: Heatherton, T., Kleck, R., Hebl, M. & Hull, J. (2000). <i>The social psychology of stigma</i> .	✓		
2001	Haghighat, R. (2001). A unitary theory of stigmatisation. <i>British journal of psychiatry</i> , 178, pp. 207-215.	✓	✓	✓
2001	Link, B & Phelan, J. (2001). Conceptualizing stigma. <i>Annual Review of Sociology</i> , 27, pp. 363–385	✓		✓
2006	Weiss, M., Ramakrishna, J. & Somma, D. (2006). Health-related stigma: Rethinking concepts and interventions. <i>Psychology, Health &amp; Medicine</i> , 11(3), pp.277 – 287.	✓		✓
2007	Stone, E. & Stone, D. (2007). Cognitive, affective and cultural influences on stigmatization: impact on human resource management processes and practices. En Martocchio, J (Ed.) <i>Research in personnel and human resources management</i> . Oxford: Elsevier.	✓	✓	
2007	VandenBos, G. (2007). <i>APA dictionary of psychology</i> . Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.	✓		✓
2007	Thornicroft, G., Rose, D., Kassam, A. & Sartorius, N. (2007). Stigma: ignorance, prejudice or discrimination? <i>British Journal of Psychiatry</i> , 190, pp. 192-193.	✓		✓
2007	Baumann, A. (2007). Stigmatization, social distance and exclusion because of mental illness: The individual with mental illness as a 'stranger'. <i>International Review of Psychiatry</i> , 19 (2), pp. 131-135.	✓		✓
2009	Dijker, A. & Koomen, W. (2007). <i>Stigmatization, Tolerance and Repair</i> . Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University press.	✓		✓
2011	Corrigan, P., Rafacz, J. & Rüsich, N. (2011). Examining a Progressive Model of Self-Stigma and its Impact on People with Serious Mental Illness. <i>Psychiatry research</i> , 189(3), pp. 339-343.	✓		✓
2013	Bos, A., Pryor, J., Reeder, G. & Stutterheim, S. (2013). Stigma: Advances in Theory and Research. <i>Basic and Applied Social Psychology</i> , 35 (1), pp. 1-9.	✓	✓	✓
2015	Goar, H. (2015). <i>Social stigmas</i> . <i>Research Starters: Sociology</i> (online edition).	✓		
2018	Simons, A., Houkes, I., Koster, A., Groffen, D. & Bosma, H. (2018). The silent burden of stigmatisation: a qualitative study among Dutch people with a low socioeconomic position. <i>BMC Public Health</i> , 18 (1), pp. 1-13.	✓		
2018	Friás, V. M., Fortuny, J. R., Guzmán, S., Santamaría, P., Martínez, M., & Pérez, V. (2018). Estigma: la relevancia del contacto social en el trastorno mental. <i>Enfermería Clínica</i> , 28(2), 111–117.	✓		✓
2020	Boysen, G. A., Isaacs, R. A., Tretter, L., & Markowski, S. (2020). Evidence for blatant dehumanization of mental illness and its relation to stigma. <i>Journal of Social Psychology</i> , 160(3), 346–356.	✓		

rejection or discriminatory behaviors towards them possibly through exacerbating moral judgments against them and making negative attributions about them more rigid and impervious to new information (Giner-Sorolla & Chapman, 2017; Landy & Goodwin, 2015).

Finally, the behavioral component implies social distancing or the tendency to avoid developing close social relationships with the stigmatized group, which would directly hinder their complete and successful reintegration into civil society. We are agnostic as to the causal structure underlying these components nor their possible links to other constructs such as gender or racial minorities or power imbalances. These, though interesting and deserving of further scientific inquiry, are outside of the scope of this paper. Our purpose here concerns conceptualizing what stigmatization towards ex-combatants means and propose an instrument empirically validated to measure it, as defined before, against ex-combatants in the Colombian internal conflict.

Therefore, the current research aims to characterize the phenomenon conceptually first, so that we would be able to propose a method to estimate its scope. Based on the findings of the literature review, we have established a definition of stigmatization as an attitude that involves cognitive, emotional and/or behavioral elements. It is expressed in one or all these three dimensions:

1. **Cognitive:** The attribution of negative characteristics to ex-combatants, through undesirable labels, elicits
2. **Emotional:** Negative emotional and affective reactions when being close to ex-combatants, implying
3. **Behavioral:** The establishment of social distancing and discrimination of those who were formerly ex-combatants (Haghighat, 2001; Link & Phelan, 2001).

## **CASE STUDY**

Colombia's internal conflict has lasted for more than 50 years, becoming one of the longest conflicts in the western hemisphere. Therefore, Colombia has experienced a very high demand for public policy to assimilate and reintegrate ex-combatants into civil society. In the case of the "FARC" guerrilla (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia - Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia), these policies are being implemented after the peace treaty was signed with the Colombian government in September, 2016 (Pizarro, 2017). However, reintegration and reincorporation policies are far from easy. On the contrary, ex-combatants have been subject to attacks, murders, social exclusion, and discrimination during their reintegration process from various agents including the Colombian State, other armed groups outside the law, their communities, among others (Cárdenas, Pérez, & Clavijo, 2018). More than 250 former combatants of that guerrilla have been killed. Reintegration policies are carried out by the "Agencia Colombiana para la Reintegración" (Colombian Agency for Reintegration -ACR) and currently aim at a successful reintegration of ex-combatants through coordinated interventions in personal security, production, family, habitat, health, education, and citizenship dimensions (Agencia Colombiana para la Reintegración, 2013).

Many years after their implementation, reintegration/reincorporation policies face several obstacles: ex-combatants' mental health (Ramos et al., 2017; Ávila-Toscano & Madariaga, 2015), recidivism (Ruiz, Aparicio, & Magallanes, 2018; Contreras & Galindo, 2018), killings and other forms of violence against them (Montes, 2019). Additionally, challenging barriers created by civil society receive increasing at-

tion among both public officers and academics. For instance, according to the Social Reintegration Policy Evaluation (Departamento Nacional de Planeación, Centro Nacional de Consultoría & E-valor, 2018), only 27% of Persons in Reintegration Process (PRPs) and 46% of those who finished their process have revealed their history as ex-combatants in their workplace (Departamento Nacional de Planeación, Centro Nacional de Consultoría & E-valor, 2018). These results suggest that, even in the best of cases, ex-combatants face big difficulties successfully integrating into civilian society.

Moreover, research suggests that Colombian citizens has a limited disposition to contact and develop social relationships with ex-combatants. Only a total of 49% of polled participants would be willing to offer a job to an ex-paramilitary and only 43% to a former member of guerrillas<sup>1</sup>. Even after obtaining employment, PRPs face several difficulties in their integration into civil society, specifically when getting a job or start their own business, because only 34% would be willing to become an ex-combatant business partner (Invamer & Corpovisionarios, 2017). These results do not drastically change when considering large cities such as Bogotá, where only 49% of participants would not agree with having an ex-combatant as a coworker (Bogotá ¿Cómo vamos?, 2016). Ex-combatants are aware of these perceptions from civil society and of the deep rejections they are victims of (Departamento Nacional de Planeación, Centro Nacional de Consultoría & E-valor, 2018, p. 25).

These results clearly show important challenges to reintegration and reincorporation public policy, specifically about civil society's acceptance of ex-combatants. Some studies have shown that rejection towards ex-combatants varies according to sociodemographic variables as gender, since women tend to be less accepting of ex-combatants, and have less confidence on final disarmament and demobilization than men (Angulo, Ortíz, & Pantoja, 2014). However, determinants of confidence towards the peace agreements are still largely unexplored (Casas, Méndez, & Pino Uribe, *In Press*; Méndez et al., 2017).

In this context, and more than two years after signing peace agreements with the FARC, we are mainly interested in rejection or acceptance towards ex-combatants. Specifically, this manuscript is centered on measuring stigmatization against ex-combatants. The psychological study of stigmatization has classically dealt with perceptions about various groups, including persons suffering from mental illnesses, convicts, and sexual or ethnic minorities (Major & O'Brien, 2005). However, given its unusual nature, research about the stigmatization of ex-combatants is still more focused on stigmatization as perceived by the stigmatized group, not with stigmatization exert by communities that may receive them (Nussio, 2012). To our knowledge, there is no systematic record of stigmatization or stigmatizing behaviors towards ex-combatants or their possible causes and consequences.

## **METHODS**

### **Sample**

Through the Colombian Agency for Reincorporation (ACR) we collected data from 286 participants (172 women, 108 men, 6 others/ NA) between 14 and 65 years of age from 34 counties all over Colombia. 232 participants lived in urban contexts whereas 53 lived in rural areas. A total of 133 people self-identify as victims of Colombia's internal conflict, 128 participants do not self-identify as such and 25 did not respond to this question (see Table 2 for demographic data of the observed sample).

**Observing Stigmatization Attitudes Towards Ex-Combatants in Colombia's Postconflict**

*Table 2. Sample demographic variables.*

Age	N	%
< 18	3	1.05%
18-25	62	21.68%
26-40	147	51.39%
41-64	66	23.08%
> 65	1	0.35%
<b>Sex</b>		
Female	172	60.14%
Male	108	37.76%
Others/ No response	6	2.10%
<b>Socio-economic status<sup>2</sup></b>		
1	53	18.53%
2	60	20.98%
3	67	23.43%
4	54	18.88%
5	24	8.39%
6	8	2.80%
No response	20	6.99%
<b>Context</b>		
Rural	53	18.53%
Urban	232	81.12%
No response	1	0.35%
<b>Highest finished education level</b>		
Primary school	4	1.40%
High school	47	16.43%
Profesional education post high school	52	18.18%
Undergraduate studies	82	28.67%
Graduate studies	35	12.24%
No response	66	23.08%
<b>Religious beliefs</b>		
No response	12	4.20%
Don't know	17	5.94%
Catholic	171	59.79%
Evangelical or Protestant	67	23.43%
None	15	5.24%
Others	4	1.40%

## **Materials**

As a collaborative effort with ARN and FARC representatives we created a set of 16 items reflecting all three components of stigmatization: the emotional component (4 items; e.g., “Thinking about being somewhere where most people around are ex-combatants of an armed group, how angry do you feel?”), the cognitive component (4 items; e.g., “Do you think that ex-combatants who are reintegrated to civil society are aggressive?”) and the behavioral component (8 items; e.g., “Would you be willing to have an ex-combatant as a neighbor?”). All items were responded with a 5-point Likert scale. 11 items out of 16 were reverse-coded to have high values corresponding to stronger stigmatization and lower values being lesser stigmatization against ex-combatants of Colombia’s internal conflict.

After reverse-coding we summed all items to obtain a grand rating of stigmatization between 0 and 80, where 0 corresponds to no stigmatization and 80 to the maximum possible stigmatization. Similarly, we summed each subscale to obtain a partial stigmatization score for each of the proposed components. For social distance, this sub-scale varies between 0 and 40, with 0 being no social distancing and 40 being the maximum possible social distancing. For emotional and cognitive components, subscales varied between 0 and 20, where 0 corresponds to no negative emotions/ negative labelling associated with ex-combatants and 20 being maximum possible negative emotions/ negative labelling associated with ex-combatants. In summary, this scale presents four distinct ratings: one general stigmatization scores and one rating for each of the three components of stigmatization.

All 16 items were integrated into a wider questionnaire administered by ARN personnel in sensibilization workshops in different organizations and communities all around Colombia<sup>3</sup>. The questionnaire includes sociodemographic data, stigmatization scales, external validity questions (dehumanization against ex-combatants, believing that guerrillas have political ideals, and believing that paramilitary groups were the lesser of two evils for Colombia) as well as some non-relevant items. Like external validity, we expect a positive and significant correlation between stigmatization scores and dehumanization and paramilitarism as the lesser of two evils as well as a negative and significant correlation between stigmatization and believing that guerrillas have political ideals.

## **Procedure**

Data were manually collected by ARN personnel after workshops in several organizations and communities all over Colombia. These workshops are part of ARN’s constitutional mission. The questionnaire was intended to be self-administered. However, given some characteristics of our sample such as their relatively low educational levels and limited familiarity with questionnaires the questionnaire was adapted as a closed interview if participants required it.

Data analysis has two stages. First, we test the psychometric properties of the scale; namely, its internal and external validity, sensibility, and reliability. Specifically, we will test internal validity by testing the predicted tri-factorial structure of the scale (emotional, cognitive, and behavioral components) through exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis. External validity will be tested through mentioned correlations between stigmatization ratings and supplementary items (dehumanization against ex-combatants, believing that guerrillas have political ideals or paramilitary were necessary). Finally, reliability will be tested through Cronbach’s Alpha for the whole scale and each subscale. Second, we will run exploratory analyses between demographic variables and stigmatization scores.

## RESULTS

### Descriptive Analysis

Here we offer a descriptive overview of each stigmatization dimension described above. Across all dimensions, results suggest small to moderate levels of stigmatization against ex-FARC combatants even in a sample who actively participate in reconciliation activities and government agents directly involved in them.

- **Behavioral Dimension:** Questions regarding social distance suggest that even though there are no overt segregation attempts, collective stigmatization is perceived, and rejection seems to increase in close environments. Most respondents (87.89%) agree that ex-combatants should have the right to freedom of movement, and 80.6% would consent to live next door to an ex-combatant, regardless of their sexual preferences. Likewise, academic interactions are widely accepted (89.84%), and sharing the workplace is approved by 85 to 90% of those surveyed. Moreover, gender implicates better acceptance, given that 51.9% would agree to work with an ex-combatant woman instead of a man (44.1%).

Nevertheless, taking part in close personal relationships with ex-combatants begins to raise doubts about integration since admitting ex-combatants as classmates/friends of their kids reduces approval to 77.3%. It is more evident when it comes to a direct bond, for example, only 27.7% of the observed sample would consider establishing an intimate relationship with ex-combatant people, while 26.9% flatly refuses. Besides, results suggest elevated collective stigmatization. More than 56% of the respondents agree with the statement that their community perceives ex-combatants negatively. A total of 31.2% of the respondents said that most people may avoid talking to ex-combatants.

- **Cognitive Dimension:** Surprisingly, the collected sample mainly disagrees with the belief that ex-combatants are more likely than other citizens to commit illegal acts (45.31% disagree compared to 39.3% who agree). Additionally, a majority of the collected sample believes that ex-combatants are at least somewhat friendly (83.2%) and hardworking (64.66%). In contrast, a considerable proportion (42.96%) also believes they are at least somewhat violent. A large majority of the collected sample (87.5%) agree with the belief that participation in reintegration programs would be beneficial to ex-combatants, suggesting that they do not prey to essentialist beliefs about ex-combatants.
- **Emotional Dimension:** Emotional reactions towards ex-combatants seem contradictory. Most of the collected sample refers to feeling at least somewhat uncomfortable if they were to be in a place mostly occupied by ex-combatants (88%). On the contrary, very few people in the collected sample would feel angry in such a place (30%). A total of 76.5% of the collected sample claims they would feel at least somewhat calm in a place mostly occupied by ex-combatants but 39.8% claims they would feel in danger and 72.38% would feel at least somewhat uncomfortable in the same context.
- **Rights Access and Collective Blame:** We inquired about the acceptance of the government supporting ex-combatants to cover their basic needs. A large majority of the collected sample (85%) approved it. Similarly, most of the sample (80%) consider that those who were part of an illegal armed group have the right to participate in politics, specifically being allowed to compete as

candidates in public elections. Similarly, more than 90% of the people consulted agree that ex-combatants are entitled to social and economic rights, which suggests that people can be selective about the recognition of rights for stigmatized populations. There is a difference of almost 10 points between the acceptance of political rights, and the acceptance of social rights of ex-combatants.

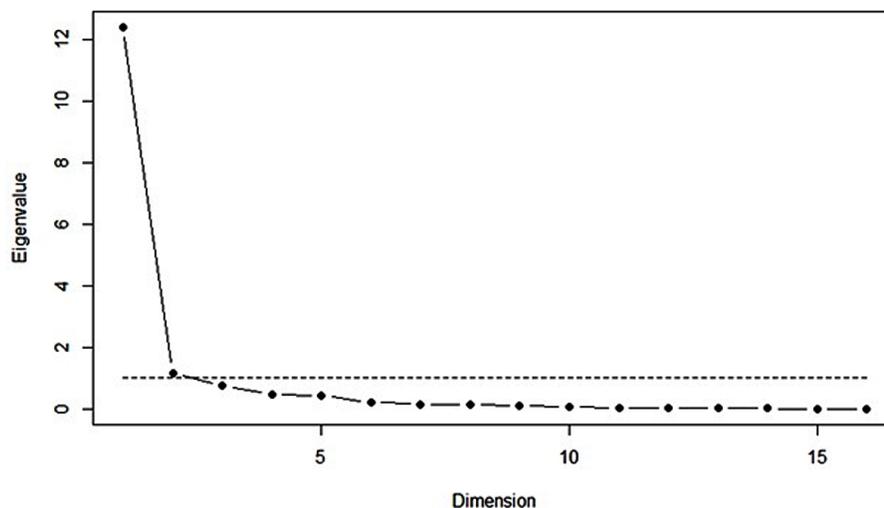
However, being part of an illegal armed group is perceived by the majority of the people surveyed as the product of causes related to social problems. This perception applies both to an opinion regarding FARC, as well as to other groups outside the law. About 85% of people would associate this phenomenon with social problems. In fact, near 90% of those surveyed agree that ex-combatants, both men and women, are also victims of the armed conflict. Despite this recognition of the association between social causes and illegal armed groups, opinions are more heterogeneous concerning the will of ex-combatants to recognize and be held accountable for their crimes. About 40% of people believe that ex-combatants have not been held responsible for their crimes. This item is more adverse when referring to the former paramilitary members.

## Factorial Analysis

After reverse coding all relevant items, we ran an exploratory factorial analysis with varimax rotation to determine the factorial structure of the designed scale. This analysis aimed at empirically verifying the theoretically determined three-factor structure of stigmatization, therefore it offered evidence pertaining to the expected structure of the theoretical measured construct. Surprisingly, this exploratory analysis yielded a unifactorial structure explaining 17.6% of the total variance (Chi-squared (75) = 293.09;  $p < 0.001$ , see figure 1). This pattern of results was confirmed by confirmatory factorial analysis.

Predicted three-factor solution does not show better fit indexes than unifactorial solution (RMSR trifactorial solution = 0.8, RMSR unifactorial solution = 0.11). The unifactorial solution is corroborated by a high Cronbach's alpha for the whole scale with no component distinction ( $\alpha = 0.95$  (IC (95%) = [0.941; 0.958])). Such a high Alpha value is not compatible with a trifactorial structure but rather with a unifactorial solution.

*Figure 1. Scree plot of exploratory factorial analysis.*



## External Validity Analysis

Given the unexpected unifactorial structure we tested external validity of the whole scale, not distinguishing between subscales. We did so by correlating total stigmatization scores with all three external validity items (dehumanization against FARC ex-combatants, belief that guerrillas have political ideals and belief that paramilitarism as the lesser of two evils). Following previous literature, we expected significant and positive correlations between overall stigmatization and dehumanization against FARC ex-combatants and belief that paramilitarism as the lesser of two evils<sup>4</sup>. Similarly, we expected a negative and significant correlation between overall stigmatization and belief that guerrillas have political ideals.

Most of these hypotheses were confirmed by observed data. Correlation between stigmatization and guerrillas having political ideals are negative and significant as expected ( $r = -0.28$  IC(95%) = [-0.38; -0.15];  $p < 0.001$ ; BF10 = 1291). In addition, the Bayes Factor suggests extremely strong evidence in favor of the alternative hypothesis. Likewise, correlation between overall stigmatization and paramilitarism as the lesser of two evils was positive and significant as expected ( $r = 0.22$  IC(95%) = [0.09; 0.34];  $p = 0.027$ ; BF10 = 58.8). As with the previous correlation, the Bayes Factor suggests conclusive evidence in favor of H1. However, correlation between stigmatization and dehumanization was positive, as predicted, but failed to reach statistical significance ( $r = 0.12$ , IC (95%) = [-0.004; 0.245];  $p = 0.058$ ; BF01 = 1.156). Correspondingly, Bayes Factors suggest that H1 (“real” correlation between the variables is  $r = 0.12$  as observed) is almost equally likely as H0 (there is no correlation between considered variables).

Overall, we consider that scale offers acceptable psychometric properties. We convincingly determined an unexpected unifactorial structure of the proposed scale as determined by both exploratory and confirmatory factorial analysis as well as Cronbach's alpha. External validity was assessed using correlations between stigmatization and three external items. All three external indexes had the expected direction and two of three (paramilitary as the lesser of two evils and guerrillas having political ideals) were statistically significant and offered conclusive evidence according to Bayesian Analysis. The other item (dehumanization against FARC ex-combatants) exhibited expected direction but failed to be statistically significant and offered no better than anecdotal evidence in favor of H1 compared to H0.

## DISCUSSION

The present sociopolitical situation in Colombia is heavily influenced by the slow implementation of the final peace agreement between the Colombian government and the FARC. More than two years after its signature, and like other peace agreements in Colombia's history, there are documented facts showing discrimination, rejection, and violence against ex-combatants by different groups within Colombia's civil society. These behaviors span both personal and professional settings wherein a considerable proportion of Colombian society would not be willing or comfortable with having an ex-combatant neighbor or coworker (Corpovisionarios, 2017). Moreover, growing reports of violence, murders, and attempted murders against ex-combatants and their families (185 killed ex-combatants as of February, 2020; Vélez et al., 2020). These facts lead us to believe that stigmatization against ex-combatants is a crucial variable to intervene in the hopes of accelerating peace and reconciliation in Colombia through successful and effective reincorporation of its ex-combatants into civilian society.

With this objective in mind, here we propose stigmatization as a possible cause of some of these problematic actions, propose and validate a scale to measure it for a Colombian sample. We hope that this

scale can be used to monitor stigmatization against ex-combatants in different regions of Colombia and with different samples to serve as a basis to test future intervention's effectivity to reduce stigmatization against ex-combatants. Based on our literature review we proposed a three-factor model of stigmatization which included a cognitive component (i.e., beliefs associated with the stigmatized group based on recognizing a particular characteristic), an emotional component (i.e., negative emotional reactions to being close to the stigmatized group), and a behavioral component (i.e., facilitation of socially distancing behaviors).

Those three components could explain several barriers ex-combatants face today. Indeed, stigmatization facilitates social distance in many spheres of social life which implies difficulties developing personal and professional relationships by ex-combatants (McMullin, 2013). Additionally, stigmatization implies attributing "labels" to the stigmatized group solely in virtue of their group identity independently of their actions or character. Finally, negative emotional reactions associated with stigmatization may make moral judgments against stigmatized individuals harsher and less prone to updating based on new information (Landy & Goodwin, 2015) which may lead to harsher punishments or even violence against them.

We aimed to design and empirically validate a 16-item scale to measure all three components of stigmatization against ex-combatants of OAGOLs. However, both exploratory and confirmatory factorial analysis, as well as Cronbach's alpha, suggested an unexpected unifactorial solution for this scale. This pattern of results suggests that, at least for the Colombian context and dealing with stigmatization against ex-combatants, stigmatization is a unifactorial phenomenon. In this sense, we have a limited construct validity since observed structure of the scale does not reflect theoretical definition of stigmatization (Benson, et al, 2011; Bobys & Laner, 1979; Crisp, 2005; Crocker, et al, 1998; Dijker, & Koomen, 2007; Dovidio, Major & Crocker, 2000; Goffman, 1963; Haghigat, 2001, 2005; Hannem, 2012; Hirschfield & Piquero, 2010; Kuku & Ergün, 2007; Link & Phelan, 2001; Major & O'Brien, 2005; McMullin, 2013; Phillips & Gates, 2011; Stafford & Scott, 1986; Tan et al., 2016).

Therefore, we could consider that the term "stigma" refers to the attributed negative characteristics, whereas "stigmatization" is a process that goes beyond, involving an emotional response but primarily a social distance element. This last consideration is particularly relevant in contexts that differ from those related to mental illnesses, where the concept is widely studied. Hence, in scenarios of violence, war, or post-conflict, the cognitive and emotional items may not be annulled, although the physical distance between the stigmatizer and the stigmatized individual or group becomes the main feature of stigmatization as our subject of study.

This unexpected factorial structure could be explained by the current sociopolitical context in Colombia. After the results of the 2016 Peace Plebiscite (49.78% Yes, 50.21% No), where Colombian society decided whether or not to approve the peace treaty between the Colombian government and FARC, and 2018 presidential elections where two candidates of extremely diverging political views were pitted against each other, public opinion in Colombia has been polarized. In this view, it is possible that unifactorial organization indirectly reflects these diverging views on Colombia's social discourse rather than "true" stigmatization.

Previous studies on stigmatization are aimed at groups that, although the subject of political debate such as mentally ill people or homosexuals, may not have a similar political importance as ex-combatants have in present-day Colombia (Corrigan & Penn, 1999; Crisp, 2005; Ferriman, 2000; Sharp et al., 2014). So, participants possibly misconstrued presented items as reflecting current political division in Colombia's public life instead of their personal feelings which could explain this unifactorial structure. We believe that future studies should test this hypothesis when Colombia's political climate is less adversarial which

may show the predicted three-factor structure. Another possible interpretation of our results deals with the observed sample since some participants coexist with ex-combatants whether in their communities or at work. Considering that ex-combatants are currently being victims of numerous forms of violence, it is possible that responses were given based on concerns for personal safety and not appearing to be too close to FARC ex-combatants.

A final interpretation of this unexpected structure deals directly with one of the main limitations of our study. The collected sample is fairly varied concerning sex, age, education, socioeconomic status, and rural or urban context. However, since we dealt with historically violent or difficult to access areas, we relied on ARN personnel to collect data after their workshop or other professional activities within their communities. We instructed ARN personnel to clarify that participant's responses were independent of workshops and other activities and that they should answer honestly as if workshops had never happened. However, it is possible that data being collected by ARN personnel biased data collection and prevented participants from reflecting their true stigmatization against ex-combatants. This could also explain the apparent lack of sensitivity from our scale since the observed range (28) was greatly inferior to the theoretical range (80).

However, we believe these limitations do not completely undermine our main conclusions. Even with a less-than-desirable data collection procedure, we observed encouraging external validity results. In addition, these limitations could explain the mild levels of stigmatization but, to our mind, not the unexpected unifactorial structure. Future studies should try to replicate these findings addressing limitations on data collection procedures. Nevertheless, external validity is satisfying with predicted correlations for all three items and significant ones for two out of the three items.

We observed that overall stigmatization is positively associated with belief that paramilitary was the lesser of two evils in Colombia and with dehumanization against ex-combatants<sup>5</sup>. Similarly, we observed the predicted negative and significant correlation between stigmatization and belief that guerrillas have political ideals.

In conclusion, we believe that the presented scale possesses appropriate psychometric properties to be used to measure and track stigmatization towards ex-combatants in Colombia's internal conflict. The proposed scale can be used for diverse samples, specifically in terms of age and education, and is particularly adaptable to low education levels or rural populations since it can be adapted to be either a self-administered questionnaire or a closed interview which allows for use in varied settings. Waiting for future validating studies to address mentioned limitations we hope that this scale is used to assess interventions trying to diminish stigmatization against ex-combatants as an essential part of a successful reintegration and reincorporation policy and peacebuilding.

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**Observing Stigmatization Attitudes Towards Ex-Combatants in Colombia's Postconflict**

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## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Organized Armed Group Operating outside the Law in Colombia are classically divided in “guerrilleros” belonging to left-wing guerrillas of which FARC are the biggest exponent and “paramilitares” which are right-wing, historically born as armed resistance to left-wing guerrillas.
- <sup>2</sup> Colombia divides urban population in six socio-economical stages according to where they live. In this classification 1 is the less economically fortunate and 6 is the most economically fortunate. On a nacional basis there are far more people in lower (1, 2 and 3) than higher (4, 5 and 6) stages.
- <sup>3</sup> Original materials in spanish, raw data and data análisis scripts are freely available in OSF: <https://osf.io/4gwbd/>.
- <sup>4</sup> All NHT statistics are followed by corresponding Bayesian statistics. These compare two models underlying observed data. The null model ( $\mu = 0$  or  $H_0$ ) corresponds to a null correlation between variables. The alternative model ( $H_1$ ) corresponds to there being a correlation between considered variables of the observed sign and value. Bayes Factor (BF10) corresponds to how much more believable is  $H_1$  compared to  $H_0$  given observed data. The higher BF10 the more convincing evidence is in favor of  $H_1$  compared to  $H_0$ . Classically,  $BF < 3$  is considered anecdotal evidence and  $BF > 50$  is considered to be conclusive evidence (Jarosz & Wiley, 2014).
- <sup>5</sup> Correlation between dehumanization and stigmatization was positive as predicted but not significant.