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Violence

behaviour

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Violence, an act of physical force that causes or is intended to cause harm. The damage inflicted by violence may be physical, psychological, or both. Violence may be distinguished from [aggression](#), a more general type of hostile behaviour that may be physical, verbal, or passive in nature.

Violence is a relatively common type of [human behaviour](#) that occurs throughout the world. People of any age may be violent, although older adolescents and young adults are most likely to engage in violent behaviour. Violence has a number of negative effects on those who witness or experience it, and children are especially susceptible to its harm. Fortunately, various programs have been successful at preventing and reducing violence.

Types Of Violence

Violence can be categorized in a number of ways. Violent crimes are typically divided into four main categories, based on the nature of the behaviour: [homicide](#) (the killing of one human being by another, sometimes for legally justifiable reasons), [assault](#) (physically attacking another person with the intent to cause harm), [robbery](#) (forcibly taking something from another person), and [rape](#) (forcible [sexual intercourse](#) with another person). Other forms of violence overlap with these categories, such as [child sexual abuse](#) (engaging in sexual acts with a child) and [domestic violence](#) (violent behaviour between relatives, usually spouses).

Violence can also be categorized according to its motivation. Reactive, or emotional, violence typically involves the expression of anger—a hostile desire to hurt someone—that arises in response to a perceived provocation. [Proactive](#), or instrumental, violence is more calculated and is often performed in anticipation of some reward. The American psychologist Kenneth Dodge found that those two types of violence involve distinct physiological states: a person engaging in reactive violence experiences increased [autonomic nervous system](#) arousal (i.e., increased heart rate and breathing, sweating), whereas a person committing an act of proactive aggression experiences low autonomic arousal.

Another method of categorizing violent behaviour involves distinguishing between predatory and affective violence. Predatory violence involves planned acts of hostile force. Affective violence is more impulsive and unplanned. Other types of violence have been suggested, including irritable violence (motivated by frustration) and territorial violence (motivated by intrusion into one's perceived territory or space).

Causes Of Violence

One point that all researchers seem to agree on is that violence is multicausal, meaning that no single factor is responsible for violent behaviour. Instead, violence results from a combination of factors, including those originating in the violent person's social or cultural environment and those representing immediate situational forces. Researchers have examined multiple factors within a person that may contribute to violence, including genetic predisposition, neurochemical abnormalities (e.g., high testosterone levels), personality characteristics (e.g., lack of empathy for others), information-processing deficits (e.g., the tendency to view others' actions as hostile), and the experience of abuse or neglect as a child.

Effects Of Violence

Regardless of its cause, violence has a negative impact on those who experience or witness it. Violence can cause physical injury as well as psychological harm. Several psychological disorders, including post-traumatic stress disorder, dissociative identity disorder, and borderline personality disorder, are associated with experiencing or witnessing violence. Other psychological symptoms, such as depression, anxiety, and mood swings (see bipolar disorder), are common in victims of violence.

Children seem to be particularly susceptible to the negative effects of violence. Those who experience or witness violence may develop a variety of problems, including anxiety, depression, insecurity, anger, poor anger management, poor social skills, pathological lying, manipulative behaviour, impulsiveness, and lack of empathy. As such examples show, some children may respond to violence in "internalizing" ways, such as by developing feelings of insecurity, anxiety, and depression, whereas others may react in "externalizing" ways, such as by feeling angry and behaving in an antisocial manner. Although some of the effects of violence may manifest themselves during childhood, others may not appear until adulthood. For example, abused girls are more likely than nonabused girls to have substance-abuse problems as adults.

Moreover, exposure to violence can increase violent behaviour in children. The American psychologist Albert Bandura showed that children often imitate violent behaviours, especially if those acts are committed by trusted adults (e.g., parents). Children also imitate violence shown on television and in other forms of media. Those exposed to greater amounts of media violence are

more likely than other children to become violent adults. This is particularly true if the child identifies with the violent characters and if the child believes that media violence represents reality.

Prevention Of Violence

Because the tendency to behave violently develops during childhood, most prevention programs target young people. Many such programs are school-based, although some involve the family or the community. The most-successful violence-prevention programs are those that target all children, not just those who are considered to be at risk for violence. In addition, the most success has been found in school-based programs with committed and involved teachers and programs that include parent training.

A variety of programs have been developed to reduce or prevent violence in individuals who have already shown a tendency toward violence. For example, a number of prison-based programs attempt to reduce the likelihood of reoffending among violent and nonviolent criminals. Such programs often involve a variety of components. Violent offenders may receive training to improve parenting and other relationship skills. A mental-health component, such as substance abuse treatment, may be included. Job training is another common component of prison-based prevention programs. Occasionally, drugs such as antidepressants, beta blockers, or benzodiazepines may be used in addition to other methods. Overall, the most-successful programs for preventing violence are those that effect behavioural changes.

Kristine M. Jacquin

WHO Violence Prevention Unit - What do we do?

With a focus on interpersonal violence - child maltreatment, youth violence, intimate partner violence, sexual violence and elder abuse - our objectives are to:

- Raise awareness of the prevalence, causes and consequences of the different types of violence
- Identify, synthesize and disseminate evidence on what works to reduce violence
- Expand the global evidence base to cover more low- and middle-income countries
- Advocate for increased political support for and financial investment in violence prevention
- Provide guidance and technical support to countries to develop evidence-based prevention and response capacity
- Develop tools and training packages to strengthen prevention and response efforts
- Support measurement of indicators for the violence-related targets in the Sustainable Development Goals

<https://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/disease-prevention/violence-and-injuries/areas-ofwork/violence/youth-violence>