

# VIOLENCE OVERVIEW

The primary definition given by Webster's II New Riverside University Dictionary for violence is "physical force employed so as to violate, damage, or abuse." This topic deals with the human propensity toward revenge, childhood and domestic abuse, rape, and violent crime. The topics of war and emotional injury are closely related. Most people sense that violence has always been a human problem, but it seems to have escalated in the twentieth century. In many countries violent crime seems to have increased, and the abuse of children and women has risen. In certain places ethnic violence has exploded. It seems that around the world more children are growing up suffering from post-traumatic stress syndrome than ever before.

In 1997, two teenagers phoned for pizza and murdered the two delivery men " 'just to see how it would feel.' " In what appears to be a newly-found epidemic, the media have recently publicized a slew of teenage mothers who hid their pregnancies only to kill and dispose of their newborn children immediately following birth. According to the U.S. Department of Justice, of the more than 11 million arrests nationwide in 1995, about 2 million involved individuals under age 18. Further, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention recently surveyed teens and found that 25.1 percent of female high school students and 40.5 percent of males said they engaged in a physical fight in the past year. (from USA Today, 8B, 12Jan05).

Every day in America 6 children commit suicide, more commit homicide, 13 children are victims of homicide, and 280 children are arrested for violent crimes. (According to the Centers for Disease Control and Children's Defense Fund.) One expert (Joy G. Dryfoos, *Adolescents at Risk*, 1990) estimates more than "seven million youngsters—one in four adolescents" as having "only limited potential for becoming productive adults."

From February 2 to May 21, 1998, the U.S. witnessed seven violent incidents in its schools, which left 23 dead, 48 wounded, and so many grieving and emotionally traumatized friends, families, and teachers.

Violence among youth is rising in Europe and in many societies around the world. But the United States is seen as an especially violent society by observers worldwide and from within—not only because its homicide rate is so high but because of its image. This country recognizes its need for power and force if it is to remain number one in a violent world. Unfortunately the media it exports is unusually violence filled.

Strong philosophic differences exist between those who believe that violence is a fact of life—perhaps a necessary evil—and those who maintain that evolution or moral development has lifted humanity to a point of renouncing force. The former assert that individuals and groups must be strong in order to maintain peace; the latter suggest that power is a disastrous and outmoded deterrence—people must be peaceful to survive.

Through television, even young children become aware of global issues. Early on, they show interest and delight in violent cartoons. Then, TV teaches them that life's problems have 30-minute, violent solutions. Adventure movies reinforce the same lesson.

A visit to a toy store reveals the values our society deems acceptable for children. Toys and games of violence abound. Fantasy games such as "Dungeons and Dragons " and video and computer games, deal in power and intrigue. On college and high school campuses, a game called "Assassination" may

continue throughout the school year. Assault games on parks allow players to don uniforms and stalk and shoot opponents with guns that shoot paint. Photon franchises are springing up with a sophisticated game in which contestants are stalked and shot by infra-red light—scores are kept by computers.

It is not easy to say how much of this child's play is necessary relief or healthy stimulation of imagination, or how much represents a programming toward violent orientation. Some also question the violence of sports, including wrestling, boxing, hockey, and football.

By the time young people begin viewing rock videos, a pattern of violence in their lives has probably already been established. Some acts of teenage violence against others and self have been correlated to rock groups and videos. It is difficult to prove the effects of any one variable in a violent society. Slasher films seem even more intent on combining sex and violence.

Our society has been especially shocked to witness the striking statistical increase in domestic violence—violence against wives and children. Violence against the aged also is being noted and studied.

### **QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION**

1. What is your experience with violence? How close to you has it come?
2. How do you define violence?
3. Do you human beings are born with a violent streak or aggressive potential that needs to be brought under social control, or do kids learn violence?
4. How do you critique the article above? What would you change or add?
5. How do you think violence in the home, among young people, and between nations can best be prevented?

### **IMPLICATION FOR PARENTS**

Parents want their children to grow into strong men and women. Love and discipline develop strength; neglect, abuse, and double messages encourage violence and rebellion.

### **IMPLICATION FOR TEACHERS**

Schools need to consider the socialization of the media. There is a rising cry in the U.S. for moral education—beginning with parents and continuing in the public schools. Attitudes which delight in, or are desensitized to, violence against the vulnerable need to be examined. The way of peace in a nuclear age must be studied by the young.

### **IMPLICATION FOR YOUTH LEADERS**

The youth leader meets young people who are at different developmental and maturity levels. One young person may delight in all sorts of violence, while another may hurt from insidious abuse, or be afraid of lurking personal or global violence. The youth leader is called to lead toward peace-making in a way that deals realistically with each young person: in terms of one's family and community, and in terms of the world. Each situation also begs a unique kind of healing, one which leads to growth and service. The opposite of violence is not passivity, but compassion and dynamic service.

Dean Borgman cCYS