

Summary

Violence is a problem that concerns most Americans. Generally, violence refers to the use of force to kill, injure, or abuse others. Interpersonal violence occurs between individuals or a number of individuals. Intergroup violence involves identifiable groups, such as different races or religions.

In estimating the amount of violence, we find an impressive amount based on self-reports, newspaper accounts, and police statistics. The United States has one of the highest homicide rates in the world. Virtually all Americans are exposed to a vast amount of violence in the mass media.

The meaning of violence can be summed up in terms of human destruction and injury, psychological disruption and dehumanization, economic costs, and "seductive self-destruction." These factors all diminish the quality of life, and their impact can be both severe and long term.

Violence has been linked with a human need for aggression, yet this explanation is not sufficient. Various sociocultural factors contribute to the problem. One structural factor is group and societal norms, which make violence more likely among members of those groups. An important factor in intergroup violence is exclusion from the political process. People who are unable to exert power through legitimate political means may resort to violence. An important factor in interpersonal violence is the lack of adequate gun control. Inequality is related to violence; political and economic inequalities between groups in a society increase the likelihood of violence.

Among the social psychological factors in violence are a number of attitudes that legitimate violence. The majority of Americans agree that physical force is sometimes justified, including the use of force in intimate relationships. A frequent explanation of violence involves the notion of relative deprivation, which means that attitudes toward deprivation rather than the objective condition are the critical factor.

Certain values support violence, including retributiveness and self-defense. Such values can be internalized, along with attitudes, through exposure to the mass media. The extent to which the mass media socialize people into violent attitudes and behavior is a matter of controversy. However, the bulk of the evidence indicates that violence portrayed and conveyed in the mass media is related to aggressive attitudes and behavior.

Rape is a form of interpersonal violence that afflicts tens of thousands each year. Fear of rape is one of the more common fears of women. All rapes involve both physical and emotional trauma. The rape trauma syndrome involves several weeks of acute symptoms and disorganization, and a long period of painful emotional readjustment.

The more men agree with traditional norms about sex roles, and the more they are integrated into a culture whose norms support male dominance and superiority, the more likely they are to be sexually aggressive and to minimize the harm of rape.

The mass media contribute to the problem of violence against women in general and rape in particular through portrayals of sexual violence. These portrayals increase the tendency of males to engage in antisocial attitudes and behavior. Studies of offenders show that they had negative family experiences and are psychologically disturbed. All have extremely high levels of aggression.

Key Terms

Aggression	Posttraumatic
Catharsis	Stress Disorder
Domestic Terrorism	Relative Deprivation
Forcible Rape	Retributiveness
Incest	Statutory Rape
	Violence

Study Questions

1. How would you define violence? How much violence is there in America?
2. What are the physical and emotional consequences of being a victim of violence?
3. What social structural factors contribute to the level of violence in America?
4. What role do the mass media play in violent behavior?
5. How common is rape?
6. Discuss the physical and emotional consequences of being a victim of rape or attempted rape.
7. Why do men rape?
8. What can be done about the violence, including rape, in American society?