

Violence and Aggression

What is violence?

Violence is a form of human aggression. It is behavior with

the intent to harm someone or something. Aggression can be verbal; words can be vicious weapons.

Emotional Violence; Instrumental Violence

Aggression is categorized as *emotional* or as *instrumental*. *Emotional* or *expressive aggression* is reactive. People commit acts of emotional aggression in response to pain, a threat, or frustration. People use this kind of aggression or violence to express anger. In emotional anger, the stimulus to anger activates the fight-or-flight response: it causes the brain and hormones to order the heart to pump faster and to send more blood with food and oxygen to the muscles. The palms sweat, and the face flushes red with anger. A teenager who gets angry and hits his or her brother or sister is showing emotional aggression.

Instrumental aggression is used to attain a goal or an award. Instrumental aggression is proactive. People who commit acts of instrumental aggression may not be angry. A teenager who commits an act of violence to obtain membership in a gang is committing instrumental aggression. A hit man or an assassin who kills in cold blood is committing instrumental aggression. A soldier who is violent in order to defend his or her country is also committing instrumental aggression. There is low arousal by the central nervous system in instrumental aggression. It is a cold-blooded, reward-seeking form of aggression.

Range of Aggressive or Violent Behavior

Aggression or violence can range from verbal acts, like yelling and screaming, to slapping, to choking, to the use of weapons, to a fatal act.

Some acts of aggression are **crimes**. The FBI lists four kinds of violent crime: murder, forcible rape, robbery, and aggravated assault.

Murder is the willful killing of one human being by another.

Forcible rape is the carnal knowledge of a female forcibly and against her will.

Robbery is the taking of anything of value from a person by force or threat of violence or by putting the victim in fear.

Aggravated assault is an unlawful attack for the purpose of inflicting severe aggravated bodily injury. This type of assault usually is accompanied by the use of a weapon. In comparison, a simple assault is one where no weapon is used and which does not result in serious injury to the victim.

Where Violence Occurs

Surveys show that more violence occurs in cities than in rural areas; more violence occurs in crowded areas of the city than in less dense areas of the city. Violent crimes are also more frequent in areas where there are illegal markets, such as for

prostitution and drugs. And, studies show that 70 percent of juvenile offenders, offenders between the ages of 10 and 17, come from single-parent families that lack a sense of closeness and togetherness.

When Violent Behavior Is Justified

The Semai tribe in Malaya is a society that does not condone violence. They may provide a model of when violence is appropriate. The Semai tribe is so nonviolent that not a single murder has ever been recorded among them; they have no

need for a police force. However, when their country was threatened in World War II, they fought against the Communists, very violently, to protect their home. After the war, they went back to gentle, nonviolent ways.