Chapter 18

Checkmating Violence among Young People: Counselling Psychologists' Perspectives

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ABSTRACT

The increasing instances of violence among adolescents and youth, manifesting as homicides, massacres, cultism, bullying, robberies, abductions, rapes, and other social vices, have plunged society into a state of chaos and insecurity. Violence permeates homes, neighborhoods, schools, day care centers, shopping malls, and workplaces, with adolescents frequently being both perpetrators and victims. This pattern of violence, often appearing petty, senseless, or random, underscores a disturbing disregard for human life, necessitating immediate and urgent intervention. In response, researchers advocate for counselling interventions tailored to address this crisis among young individuals. This position paper examime the nature of youth and violence, explores the various forms of violent acts committed by young people, and discusses the underlying causes and consequences of such behaviors. Additionally, it outlines counselling interventions aimed at mitigating violence among young individuals. The paper concludes with recommendations for comprehensive intervention programmes targeting youth, parents, educational staff, community members, and society at large, emphasizing the need for intensified counselling efforts to curb violence among young people.

Keywords: Youth, Violence, Counsellor, Checkmating.

INTRODUCTION

Violence among young people is a significant and multifaceted issue, encompassing a range of behaviors from physical violence to verbal aggression. This includes bullying, gang violence, domestic violence, and severe crimes like assault and homicide. Violence is essentially an extreme form of aggression, characterized by the deliberate use of physical force or power to inflict injury, cause damage, or forcibly interfere with personal freedom, potentially resulting in physical or psychological harm (Oxford English Dictionary, 2012).

Youth, defined as the stage between childhood and adulthood, is a time of substantial physical, cognitive, emotional, and social development. This period, typically ranging from adolescence to early adulthood (approximately ages 12 or 13 to the early to mid-20s), involves significant transitions and experiences that shape individuals' identities, values, and societal roles. The United Nations specifies the age bracket of youth as those between 15 and 24 years old, marking it as a time of growth, exploration, and change towards independence (United Nation, 2013).

Violence among young people specifically refers to aggressive or harmful acts carried out by individuals within this demographic. The Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) defines youth violence as the intentional exertion of physical force or power by individuals aged 10 to 24 to threaten or harm others. This phase of life is critical for shaping future behavior and social interactions, making the phenomenon of youth violence a concern for society at large, warranting comprehensive strategies for prevention and intervention to ensure the well-being and positive development of young individuals (CDC, 2020).

Statement of the Problem

Youth violence significantly impacts the physical, mental, and social health of young individuals, being a leading cause of death among this demographic. Annually, it results in over 400,000 nonfatal injuries.

Experiences of violence in youth are linked with a range of negative health and well-being outcomes throughout an individual's life. These include an increased risk of behavioral and mental health issues, such as smoking, substance abuse, sexual promiscuity, depression, academic challenges, school dropout, and even suicide. Globally, approximately 200,000 homicides occur among youths aged 10–29 years each year, accounting for 42% of all homicides worldwide. The high incidence of violence among youth and its severe consequences underscore the urgency of addressing this issue. This research aims to examine youth violence in depth, contributing valuable insights to the field and suggesting avenues for intervention and prevention.

PECULIARITIES OF THE YOUTH

Understanding the concept of youth is crucial for parents, educators, policymakers, and community leaders to make informed decisions regarding education, healthcare, employment opportunities, and social services, ultimately supporting young people during this pivotal stage of their development. The concept of youth encompasses several key aspects:

Transition and Development

Youth is characterized by significant physical growth, including the onset of puberty, alongside cognitive advancements in critical thinking, decision-making, and problem-solving skills. This period also involves emotional exploration of identity and relationships, as well as social strides towards independence and the establishment of personal values and beliefs.

Identity Formation

Particularly during adolescence, individuals undergo a critical period of identity formation, exploring and questioning values, beliefs, and societal norms to shape their sense of self.

Peer Relationships

The influence of peer relationships on social and emotional development is profound during youth. Friends and peers provide support and exert a significant influence on one's behaviour and development.

Responsibilities and Rights

This stage marks an increase in responsibilities and rights, such as entering the workforce, driving, voting, and making independent life decisions.

Education

Youth is primarily a time of formal education and skill development, preparing individuals for future career paths through schooling and higher education.

Challenges

Young individuals face various challenges, including academic pressures, peer pressure, identity crises, mental health issues, and exposure to risky behaviours, which can vary greatly among individuals.

Opportunities

Alongside challenges, youth presents opportunities for personal growth, skill development, and exploration of interests, allowing individuals to experiment with different paths.

Cultural Variability

The experience of youth is shaped by cultural and societal factors, with differing expectations, rites of passage, and traditions influencing this stage across cultures.

TYPES OF YOUTH VIOLENCE

Violence among young individuals manifests in various forms, each with distinct characteristics, causes, and implications. Understanding these types of violence is essential for effective intervention and prevention strategies. The forms of violence among young people include:

Physical Violence

This encompasses acts of aggression using physical force, ranging from minor shoving to severe assaults, potentially leading to injuries or fatalities.

Verbal and Psychological Violence

Involves using words, insults, or threats to intimidate or demean others, causing emotional harm. Psychological violence includes manipulation and emotional abuse.

Bullying

A widespread issue, bullying involves verbal harassment, social exclusion, spreading rumours, and cyberbullying. It can occur within schools, communities, or online environments.

Dating Violence

Also known as intimate partner violence, it occurs within romantic relationships and encompasses physical, emotional, or sexual abuse by one partner against the other.

Gang Violence

Associated with young individuals in gangs, engaging in criminal activities, territorial disputes, and conflicts with rival gangs, including drug trafficking and robberies.

Weapon Violence

It involves the use of guns, knives, or other weapons, leading to severe harm or fatalities, often related to criminal disputes or intimidation.

Hate Crimes

Motivated by hate or prejudice against individuals based on race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, or other characteristics, fueled by intolerance.

School Violence

Encompasses acts of violence within educational settings, including physical fights, bullying, verbal harassment, and severe incidents like school shootings.

Domestic Violence

Pertains to young people experiencing or perpetrating violence within their households, including physical, emotional, or sexual abuse.

Street Violence

Occurs in public places, often involving altercations between individuals or groups over territory, rivalry, or perceived disrespect.

Substance-Related Violence

The influence of drugs and alcohol may lead to violent behaviours, as intoxication can lower inhibitions and increase aggression.

Violence in Conflicted Areas

In areas of armed conflict or political unrest, young people may be drawn into violence, insurgency, or terrorist acts.

CAUSES OF VIOLENCE AMONG THE YOUNG PEOPLE

Violence among young people is influenced by a complex web of factors, each interlinking and varying across individuals. Commonly cited causes include:

Exposure to Violence

Young individuals witnessing or experiencing violence in their homes, neighbourhoods, or media may adopt violence as a conflict resolution tool.

Family Dysfunction

Dysfunctional family settings, including domestic violence, abuse, neglect, and substance abuse, can perpetuate a cycle of violence among the youth.

Peer Pressure

The desire for acceptance may drive young people to engage in violence to fit into groups or prove loyalty, especially within gangs

Socioeconomic Factors

Poverty, educational disparities, and unemployment can foster frustration and hopelessness, leading some to violent behaviours for survival or financial gain.

Mental Health Issues

Unaddressed mental health conditions like conduct disorder or mood disorders may result in impulsive, aggressive behaviors due to emotional regulation challenges.

Substance Abuse

Early drug and alcohol use can impair judgment and escalate conflicts into violence, often intertwined with drug-related confrontations.

Bullying and Victimization

Victims of bullying may harbor anger and a desire for revenge, potentially manifesting in violent actions.

Access to Weapons

Easy access to firearms amplifies the risk of minor disagreements turning violent, facilitating impulsive lethal actions.

Cultural and Peer Norms

In contexts where aggression is normalized or glorified, young individuals are more likely to engage in violent behaviors.

Lack of Positive Role Models

The absence of mentors or positive figures leaves youth without examples of constructive conflict resolution.

Political and Social Unrest

Young individuals in tumultuous regions may be drawn to violent movements or radical ideologies.

School Environment

Unsafe school environments where bullying is unchecked can normalize aggression, leading to violence both in and out of educational settings.

CONSEQUENCES OF YOUTH VIOLENCE

Youth violence has far-reaching consequences that affect not only the individuals directly involved but also their families, communities, and broader society. These consequences can manifest in various forms, both immediately and over the long term:

Physical Injuries

Victims may suffer from a range of physical injuries, from minor cuts to severe conditions like broken bones or gunshot wounds, potentially leading to disability and chronic health problems.

Mental and Emotional Trauma

Both victims and perpetrators may experience significant mental and emotional distress, including symptoms of PTSD, anxiety, and depression. Witnessing violence can also deeply impact the mental health of peers and community members, fostering a climate of fear and insecurity.

Death

In the most severe cases, youth violence can lead to fatalities, causing immeasurable grief and loss within families and communities.

Criminal Consequences

Young people involved in violence might face legal repercussions, including detention or incarceration, which can have enduring effects on their future opportunities and life trajectory.

Negative Impact on Education

Violence can disrupt victims' and perpetrators' education, leading to absences, suspensions, or expulsions, and hindering their academic and future career prospects.

Economic Consequences

The financial implications of youth violence extend to medical expenses, legal costs, and lost income, along with broader economic impacts on affected communities, such as decreased property values and economic development.

Community and Neighbourhood Effects

High levels of youth violence can create an environment of fear and insecurity, impacting community cohesion and the vibrancy of public spaces and local economies.

Cycle of Violence

Individuals who engage in violence are at risk of repeating these behaviours, perpetuating a cycle of violence that can continue to affect them, their families, and their communities.

Social and Cultural Implications

Youth violence can reinforce negative stereotypes and lead to the stigmatization of certain communities, exacerbating social tensions and discrimination.

Long-Term Health and Social Consequences

Exposure to violence in youth can increase the likelihood of chronic health issues, substance abuse, and criminal involvement in adulthood, underscoring the importance of addressing youth violence comprehensively to mitigate its long-lasting effects.

INTERVENTION PROGRAMMES FOR YOUTH VIOLENCE: COUNSELLING PSYCHOLOGISTS' PERSPECTIVES

The intervention programmes for youth violence are divided into two major categories which are counselling intervention and general intervention programmes.

Counselling Intervention Programmes

Intervention programs for youth violence fall into two main categories: counseling interventions and general intervention programs. Counseling interventions are pivotal in addressing the root causes of violence among young people, offering support, and teaching them alternative ways to handle emotions and conflicts. Key counseling strategies include:

Anger Management Counseling

Helps youths recognize triggers and develop healthy anger management and expression strategies.

Conflict Resolution Counseling

Teaches effective, non-violent conflict resolution methods, emphasizing communication and problem-solving.

Individual Therapy

Allows exploration of underlying causes of violent behavior, such as trauma or mental health issues, and the development of healthier coping mechanisms.

Group Therapy and Support Groups

Provide a safe environment for sharing experiences and learning from peers, fostering empathy and social skills

Family Counseling

Addresses family dynamics contributing to violence, aiming to improve communication and create a supportive home environment.

Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT)

Aims to identify and change negative thought patterns and behaviors, teaching positive responses to stress.

Trauma-Informed Counselling

Helps address the impact of trauma, offering coping strategies for those affected.

Substance Abuse Counselling

Manages substance abuse issues that contribute to violent behavior through counseling and treatment programs.

Social Skills Training

Improves communication, empathy, and understanding others' perspectives.

Character Education And Values-Based Counseling

Encourages exploration of values and ethics, promoting positive decision-making.

Mental Health and Counseling Services

Provides accessible mental health services, promoting awareness and reducing stigma around seeking help.

Mentorship Programs

Connects young people with positive role models for guidance and support.

Life Skills Training

Covers decision-making, problem-solving, and other practical skills for a productive life.

Prevention and Education Programs

Raises awareness about violence consequences and promotes non-violent alternatives.

Community-Based Counseling

Ensures young people have access to needed support through accessible services.

Effective counseling interventions should be customized to each individual's needs and circumstances, involving a multidisciplinary team of counselors, social workers, educators, and other professionals, along with parents, community, and government support. This comprehensive approach is most effective in addressing and mitigating violence among young people.

General Prevention of Youth Violence

Preventing violence among young people necessitates a multifaceted strategy, engaging various stakeholders such as families, educational institutions, communities, and governments. It's crucial to acknowledge that young individuals can play dual roles as both victims and perpetrators of violence, with numerous contributing factors. To effectively address and mitigate violence among this demographic, a holistic approach is vital, encompassing:

Promoting Positive Parenting

Enhancing parental skills through education and support programs to foster nurturing and supportive home environments.

Early Childhood Intervention

Focusing on early childhood development, social-emotional learning, and preventing adverse experiences.

School-Based Programmes

Implementing anti-bullying initiatives and conflict resolution training to cultivate a safe and positive school atmosphere.

Youth Development Programmes

Offering programs that provide skills development, job training, leadership opportunities, and personal growth.

Community Engagement

Encouraging young people's involvement in community decisions and activities, establishing community centers and safe spaces for positive engagements.

Positive Role Models and Mentorship

Facilitating access to mentors and role models who can offer guidance and support.

Conflict Resolution Training

Teaching young people to resolve disputes through non-violent communication and conflict resolution skills.

Gun Control Measures

Implementing stringent gun control policies to limit young people's access to firearms.

Community Policing and Law Enforcement Strategies

Building trust between law enforcement and youth through community policing approaches focused on problem-solving.

Media Literacy and Digital Citizenship

Promoting critical evaluation of media content, including the impact of violent video games and online materials.

Public Awareness and Education

Raising awareness about the impacts of youth violence and providing information on prevention and support resources.

Restorative Justice Programmes

Implementing restorative justice practices that emphasize reconciliation and healing over punitive actions.

Community Outreach and Social Services

Ensuring access to essential social services, including healthcare, housing, and substance abuse treatment.

Research and Evaluation

Continuously monitoring and researching the effectiveness of violence prevention programs and adjusting strategies accordingly.

This comprehensive approach requires collaboration across different sectors of the community to address the root causes of violence, foster supportive environments, and provide young people with the necessary skills and resources for positive development.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, youth violence is a multifaceted and complex issue with significant implications for individuals, communities, and societies. It manifests in various forms, such as physical aggression, bullying, gang violence, and more. Recognizing that prevention is more efficient and cost-effective than remediation is paramount. Creating safe, supportive environments, providing skill development opportunities, and promoting positive role models can empower young people to make healthier life choices, breaking the cycle of violence. Youth violence poses a formidable challenge, yet through comprehensive, coordinated efforts involving families, schools, communities, and government agencies, its prevalence and impact can be mitigated. Ultimately, such efforts can foster safer, more harmonious communities, underscoring the importance of a unified approach to address this pressing issue.

RECOMMENDATION

To effectively address violence among young people, a comprehensive and multi-faceted approach is essential. Here are recommendations for preventive measures:

1. Intervention Programmes for Adolescents and Youth: Implement social development programmes aimed at high-risk adolescents and youths, providing opportunities for education and vocational training. Offer individual and rehabilitation counseling, alongside programmes that offer drug abuse education and academic enrichment.
2. Intervention Programmes for Adolescents' and Youths' Relations (e.g., family): Establish mentoring and group counselling, offer temporary foster care for chronic delinquents, and provide family therapy. Refer families to appropriate agencies when necessary.
3. School Intervention Programmes: Collaborate with school administrators, teachers, and other school personnel to enhance the school environment through improved teacher practices, policies, and security. Promote guidance services, peer counselling, and seminars on the causes, consequences, and prevention of violence.

4. Community Awareness Programmes for Youth: Conduct violence and gang prevention programmes, refer high-risk youths to suitable agencies, and organize awareness programmes on violence prevention. Launch campaigns against violence, alcohol, and drug abuse, leveraging various media platforms.
5. Policy Initiatives: Encourage governmental promotion and funding of programmes for youth development, education, and healthcare to support young people's transition to adulthood. Implement policies and initiatives aimed at addressing youth violence, including stricter gun control measures and programs targeting at-risk youth.

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