In theory, the etiology, course, and treatment for IPV may differ depending on the subtype under consideration. Typologies have been constructed in an effort to improve knowledge and understanding of IPV, including identification of different underlying processes resulting in violence. It is also believed that reliable and valid typologies of IPV may lead to increases in therapy effectiveness, eventually resulting in subtype-treatment matching in which treatment is tailored to the needs of each group.

On the basis of a review of qualitative and quantitative research, Johnson and his colleagues theorized that couple violence in families takes one of two distinct forms: situational couple violence (previously labeled common couple violence) or intimate terrorism (previously labeled patriarchal terrorism). The primary variable distinguishing these two groups is the use of a general pattern of control by one partner, typically the male.

Unlike the abuse that arises from intimate terrorism, which is aimed at partner domination and control and is typically severe and injurious in nature, situational couple violence may be best understood as an inappropriate attempt to cope with conflict or stress. Situational couple violence occurs in response to a specific event or stressor rather than as a result of a general pattern of domination and oppression. Johnson and colleagues conceptualize this type of violence within family conflict theory in which some individuals view violence as an acceptable form of conflict resolution under certain circumstances.

Johnson and colleagues have found that, relative to victims of intimate terrorists, victims of situational couple violence report a lower frequency and severity of IPV victimization, as well as lower likelihood of IPV escalation. In addition, victims of situational couple violence are less likely than victims of intimate terrorism to be injured from IPV, to experience symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder, to miss work, to seek formal help, and to use certain types of drugs (e.g., pain killers and tranquiliizers).

This typology has direct implications for the treatment of IPV. For example, whereas couples counseling might be dangerous and contraindicated for those experiencing intimate terrorism, it might be appropriate for some couples experiencing situational couple violence. However, as with any classification system, the reliability and validity of this typology should be firmly established prior to making assumptions about therapy applications. This caution may be particularly relevant because researchers have hypothesized and found support for a different set of subtypes of offenders and in particular there is evidence that there are likely more than two subtypes of partner violence perpetrators.

Gregory L. Stuart and Jeff R. Temple

Further Readings


SOCIAL COGNITIVE PROGRAMS FOR VIOLENCE

Social cognitive programs for violence prevention and treatment emphasize changing the way individuals think about social interactions and interpersonal violence in order to change their behavior. A basic premise of the social cognitive perspective is that interpersonal violence is learned over time and across situations and that part of this learning involves the development of characteristic patterns of thinking that influence aggressive and violent behavior. Research studies have identified several social cognitive correlates of interperson violence, resulting in a proliferation of interventions aimed at modifying these social cognitive factors. Indeed, reviews of outcomes of violence prevention and treatment programs have consistently documented the effectiveness of social cognitive programs (also called cognitive-behavioral interventions to emphasize the connection between cognition and behavior). Most of these programs attempt to influence some aspect of social information processing that affects how a person understands, interprets, and responds to problematic social situations involving interpersonal conflict.

Social information processing involves a series of discrete cognitive steps individuals use to solve social problems. These steps include the following: (a) searching for relevant cues that help understand the nature of the problem (cue search); (b) interpreting the meaning of these cues (cue interpretation); (c) generating alternative solutions to the problem (response generation); (d) considering consequences of different solutions (consequential thinking); and (e) choosing a solution and evaluating its outcomes (enactment). These sequential steps can occur in a controlled fashion when there is sufficient time to think through a social problem and in an automatic fashion when responding becomes habitual. Both controlled and automatic social information processing are influenced by underlying attitudes and beliefs about the self, others, right and wrong, and appropriate or normative responses to specific situations. Social cognitive programs for violence focus either on a specific component of social information processing or on multiple aspects of social cognitive and their interconnections. Further, the specific emphasis of a particular social cognitive program varies depending on the clients served and the particular type of interpersonal violence targeted.

Cue Interpretation

Once relevant cues have been identified, individuals need to understand the meaning of these cues in order to guide their decision making and action. Research studies have identified a tendency of more aggressive individuals to attribute hostile intent to others (hostile attribution bias), particularly under ambiguous circumstances. Social cognitive programs that focus on changing this hostile attribution bias typically train participants to consider whether they hold a hostile worldview that leads to attribution errors and to gather more information regarding another's intent before assuming hostile motives. For example, children often misinterpret other people's "look" by another person as motivated by hostile intent when there is a range of other possibilities. Indeed, social cognitive programs that emphasize attribution retraining have been used frequently in youth violence prevention and intervention programs.

Response Generation

Solving social problems also involves thinking of alternate responses and evaluating their acceptability for a given situation. Research studies have found that more aggressive individuals typically generate fewer and more aggressive solutions when confronted with social problems. As such, many social cognitive programs train participants to generate multiple solution options that include nonaggressive responses. However, individuals also vary on the extent to which they believe that certain responses are appropriate or acceptable. These beliefs may facilitate or interfere with response generation. For example, if a parent holds a strong belief that it is wrong to hit a child under any circumstance, it is unlikely that he or she will generate aggressive solutions to problematic social situations involving children. For this reason, social cognitive programs frequently try to challenge pro-aggressive normative beliefs and to foster the development of antiviolence beliefs.

Consequential Thinking

Prior to selecting a response to social conflict, it is also important to consider the consequences of different potential solutions. Research studies have found that more aggressive individuals generate fewer consequences and are less likely to consider potentially detrimental and long-term consequences of aggressive
Socialization

Socialization is the process by which a society's culture—its values and norms—is taught and learned and human personalities are developed. Personality is a set of behavioral and emotional characteristics that describe one's reactions to various situations or events. Although some aspects of the personality are present at birth, environmental factors also shape and influence personality development. Genetics undoubtedly plays a personality development. Genes underwrite characteristics that are expressed later, such as competitiveness, assertiveness, shyness—traits that emerge much later in life. Although socialization begins at birth and is learned throughout life, what we learn and how we learn it varies at different stages of the lifespan. And one continues to learn and respond to different values and norms of one's culture until the end of life. Moreover, theorists of socialization maintain that regardless of the individual's age, the learning or socialization process is the same.

In the application of the concept of socialization to interpersonal violence, one may say that simply violent behavior is learned, and it is learned much the same way other behaviors are learned—that is, through interaction with others. More specifically, individuals who behave violently have had contact with other people who also behave violently and who have ready people who also behave violently and who have ready opportunities to take part in their behavior in particular situations. This contact may be direct (e.g., the learner personally observes the model's violent behavior) or it may be indirect (e.g., the learner observes the model's violent behavior through the media, such as a newscast, a film, or a television program). In any event, the behavior is perceived as desirable or justified or it results in a reward or an undesired outcome, which serves to reinforce the use of behavior in similar future situations.

Criminologist Ronald Akers uses the example of rape to illustrate the basic principles of this theory. Akers points out that an individual who spends most of his time with people (e.g., family members, peers) who are sexually conforming, who do not engage in violence themselves, and who condemn such behavior is unlikely to commit rape. However, if an individual spends much of his time with people who have themselves sexually coerced others and who accept or approve of such behavior, that individual is likely to behave similarly—that is, commit rape—because the opportunity arises. The more rewarding the individual receives for the behavior (e.g., sexual gratification, control of women, approval of friends), the more likely he will commit another rape under similar circumstances in the future. The attitudes and beliefs that support and reinforce the behavior may come from personal associates, but they may also come from less personal, cultural sources (e.g., rape myths prevalent in the society's culture that excuse or justify rape or that neutralize the deviant or criminal nature of the behavior).

The notion that violent behavior is learned through socialization has received considerable support in empirical research. Of course, one important implication of this research is that if violent behavior is learned, nonviolent behavior can also be learned. Nonviolent models are needed for nonviolent socialization, and individuals as well as cultural attitudes and beliefs that condemn violence must replace those attitudes and beliefs supportive or accepting of violence.

However, this perspective of violent behavior has also been criticized for depicting learners as passive recipients of socialization messages who unquestioningly model whoever they see around them. Socialization is not a unidirectional process by which learners are shaped and molded by the models in their environment. There is considerable evidence that individuals actively seek out and evaluate the behavior of models and the information in their social environment. Furthermore, changes in socialization processes are not likely to be effective without simultaneous changes in social structure that promote equality and human rights and that devalue or condemn violence and a "might-makes-right" culture.

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See also Rape Culture. Social Learning Theory

Further Readings