

Causal Pie: Theories for Why Domestic Violence Happens

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this exercise is to help individuals come to consensus as to why the Domestic Violence occurs within their community. Since there is no one reason why the violence occurs, communities must decide on the reason that the group feels is the most prevalent reason.

TASK(S)

Break the large group into small groups. Give each small group a piece of newsprint and have them create a pie chart illustrating the reasons why the group feels the violence occurs. The larger the pie slice equals the greater notion that it is the reason why.

Use the theories listed below to help in this exercise. Before breaking into small groups explain each theory for a better understanding on the part of the group. Depending on time have the group offer examples.

THEORIES

Carnivorous Beasts

Human beings are no greater than or lesser than other creatures in the animal kingdom, and in fact as meat eating mammals we evolved with violent instincts that are designed to protect us. Through socialization, we have learned to control our instinctual urges to greater and lesser degrees, but we all succumb to some of those urges at one time or another. There have been clear differences in male and female evolution which combine to preserve the species, and these differences account for why men are more sexually aggressive and more violent in our society.

Personality Disorders

Domestic violence occurs as a result of a personality disorder on the part of one or both of the partners. Those who are violent are often antisocial (disregard the rights of others), borderline (unstable, inappropriate in emotional expression), schizoid (detached from social relationships and their emotions) or paranoid (distrustful and suspicious of everyone). Those who are attracted to and often addicted to violent partners are often histrionic (excessively emotional and dramatic), dependent (submissive and clinging, want to be taken care of), obsessive compulsive (preoccupied with orderliness and control) or avoidant (inhibited, hypersensitive to criticism).

Psychiatric disorders

Violence in relationships occurs as a result of a physical anomaly, most probably a chemical imbalance in the brain, on the part of batterers. Certain actions on the part of the partner stimulate a physiological response similar to that found in panic disorders, resulting in a response that is out of the control of the individual with the disorder.

Learned Behavior

All human social behaviors are learned through personal experience or exposure. Domestic violence is a result of some individuals learning that it is okay to be violent or to use violence in certain settings, and other individuals learning to accept or tolerate violence. This learning primarily takes place in the family of origin, resulting in an intergenerational cycle of violence.

Aberrant Behavior

Violence in relationships is clearly an abnormal behavior. It is most likely a result of the abuse of drugs or

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alcohol, or some situational stressor that triggers an individual to act in a way that he or she would not otherwise act.

Sociopathic Behavior

Beyond personality disorders or the occasional aberrant behavior, those who commit violence within relationships are sociopaths who have no regard for other individuals, social institutions, or themselves. In fact, they seem almost to take pleasure in the abuse that they perpetrate, and they seem to be violent and inappropriate in all aspects of their lives.

Systems Theory

Domestic violence is a symptom of a family system that is out of balance. The normative structure of the family, the personality traits of the individuals in the family, and the stress and conflict that the family is subjected to combine to create an environment in which violence can occur.

Resource Theory

All social systems, including the family, are held in place to some degree by force or the threat of force. This is true in the political arena, religious arena, social arena, and in the family. The more resources (social, personal, economic) one has, the more effectively the threat of force can be used. The fewer resources one has, the more likely one is to use physical force in order to maintain control.

Exchange Theory

Human beings, for the most part, engage in behaviors that reward them and avoid behaviors that have a high cost. Violence and abuse will be used in social settings and situations where the rewards are higher than the costs. Historically, it has been true that there has been cultural approval for males using violence to maintain authority in their relationships with women. The lack of institutional sanctions meant there was not a heavy penalty. Even with changes in the institutional response (e.g. the laws), until those changes are made very real to people and actually carry a higher cost than the rewards, society will not change. In addition, until the costs for choosing to leave and abusive relationship are lower than for staying, victims will not change their behaviors.

Subculture Theory

There are subcultures within the primary culture where the values and norms support and even require violence in relationships. "Public" awareness and policy may move and change much more quickly than the culture at large, and subcultures must hang on to the values and norms that define them so that they will not disappear into the "mainstream."

Feminist Theory

The root of violence against women is gender inequality. The recent history of our culture is one of male domination, where men had the right to control and dominate women. Hundreds of years of psychological and physical coercion and abuse cannot be turned around in just twenty years, and will only be turned around in conjunction with other social action that eliminates gender inequality of any type.

Karma

Everything that each individual does in her/his life is a choice. While the choices may not make sense to us, we must trust in the universal force toward balance.