Youth Violence

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In the past few years, there has been an increase of violence particularly among the young adults with mass shootings in the United States and other parts of the world. These incidences and many others have focused the attention on youth violence as it has become one of the leading causes of death among persons aged 5 to 14 years. Englander (2017) adds that the rates of shootings amongst young adults, adolescents, and children are higher in the U.S comparing to the numbers in other developed countries. Youth violence involves violent acts such as hitting, slapping, and bullying which cause both emotional and physical harm (Hoffman, 2011). Also, there are assaults and robbery cases that are carried out either with or without weapons and lead to severe injuries to the victims and sometimes to death. The increased instances reported on youth violence has initiated a public concern as it affects thousands of young people, their families, communities, and schools each day. The present paper carries out a literature review on several aspects of youth violence.

Englander (2017) refers to violence as the actual or threatened employment of physical power towards an individual or a group, and that causes or likely to result in death or injury. These forces include other possible outcomes such as deprivation, mal-development, and psychological harm. Another definition of violence by Wilkinson (2015) is the behaviors that deliberately try or threaten to inflict physical damage on others such as robbery, sexual assault, and homicide among other severe conducts that are not outlawed in the criminal code. According to Hoffman (2011), youth violence is the injurious conducts that begin at an early age and progresses into their young adulthood. The abuse can occur on a young person as a victim, witness, or an offender. Ebsensen (2011) states that it involves young adults hurting their peers whom they may or may not be familiar with, and it can take different forms. Heller (2014) adds that violence by young people is a common social disorder especially in urban settlements where youths use guns to threaten or kill others. There exist numerous causes of youth violence and Englander (2017) David-Ferdon et al. (2015) Barnie et al. (2017) identify key risk factors for youth violence such as access to guns, mental health, and exposure to violent media. Hoffman (2011) adds other risk factors such as misunderstandings and inadequate support in life.

Causes of Youth Violence

There are thousands of violence cases reported each year which has forced parents, school boards, and policymakers to focus on this issues to try and find solutions. However, the answers to these problems are not easy as youth violence is a problematic phenomenon (Ebsensen, 2011). Therefore, one has first to recognize and appreciate the issues that place the young adults at threat for violence perpetration and victimization. Englander (2017) writes that youths who are victims of violence are at a higher risk of developing mental health, physical problems, and health issues such as academic difficulties, depression, high-risk sexual behavior, smoking, obesity, and even suicide. This section involves understanding the biological, environmental, and psychosocial causes of youth violence.

The period of young adulthood and adolescence is marked by patterns of behavior change including violence when these behaviors receive a heightened expression. Therefore, there is need to understand the conditions that violent acts occur. Youth violence commences through different techniques as some teenagers start to display problems in their actions in an early age. These problems gradually intensify into more cruel practices of violence either before or during adolescence. Some studies indicate that childhood anger is a forecaster of violence in early adulthood and adolescence. Wilkinson (2015) writes that between 47 percent and 69 percent of girls and 20 percent and 45 percent of boys who are violent offenders at the age 16-17 years developed violent behaviors since their childhood and they are more likely to commit more violent and severe acts in their adulthood. These individuals continue their behaviors into adulthood especially if they do not receive help.

The General Form or Findings of Studies of Youth Violence

The incidents of youth violence increase during adolescence or early adulthood. The frequency then rapidly decreases throughout the life of an individual. In the United States, more youth die especially from homicide cases that have become frequent each year that is committed by between 4-24 years old adults. Therefore, the youth experience and perpetuate high levels of violence in the U.S matched to those from other advanced nations. Wilkinson (2015) states that youth shooting rates are higher in U.S than in similar high-income countries. According to Heller (2014), the prices vary between different ethnic and racial groups and the males are the profoundly affected.

Social Scientists Explanations on Youth Violence

The frequent shootings and deaths throughout the U.S have caused mayhem in the society as parents perceive the communities and schools not safe for their children with the increased youth violence. Prevention programs have been employed in schools and community throughout the U.S. However a limited number of the programs have been evaluated, and prevention measures and policies are ineffective. The increased lethality of youth violence has created interest among researchers. Over the decade, more research has revealed prevention of youth violence and social scientists are making more strides to understand the causes of youth violence. The social scientists explain family/community, culture, and biology as the most causes of youth violence. Children begin to learn from an early age, and they adapt to the environment when they are young. The culture present dictates how children develop affiliations with others and also helps them choose their friends. The community and family that they grow in determines the behavior that persists in them. According to social scientists, as the children mature their behavior becomes more intentional, and they get exposure to social diversity. As they approach adolescence they overwhelming develop a need to be respected and a feeling of belonging to a peer group. These feelings increase the intensity of dynamic interaction and become insistence on being dominant which may turn to become bullying and develop into an aggressive behavior (Ebsensen, 2011).Englander (2017) states that when a young adult does not establish a social position, they are likely to continue using aggressive behavior.

How Is Youth Violence Understood or Examined Cross-Culturally

Youth violence has been common in the United States than in other parts of the world. There have been cases of school, and street shootings and the list of youth committing serious violent incidences against their peers and also towards the public is growing. These cases are devastating, and adults from different spheres are seeking answers to the questions regarding the causes and prevention measures. According to Hoffman (2011) school shootings mainly take place in stable, close-knit, and low-crime areas. A significant number of these cases happen with young adults who have little or no history of disciplinary problems. Wilkinson (2015) adds that the perpetrators of violence often have a high intelligence and excellent academic achievements. However, despite these definite descriptions the perpetrators are commonly assumed to be loners. Antunes and Ahlin (2014) describe them as individuals who have failed to join peer groups, and they are socially marginalized. They find it difficult to cope with the social marginalization. Other studies indicate a variety of signs of mental illness such as suicidality and depression.

The cases of street shootings perpetrated by youths are common in densely populated areas that involve high crime levels, poverty, and low social trust. Barnie et al. (2017) note that a significant number of youths in these areas commit a vast majority of violent acts reported in urban street shootings and most violent neighborhoods. Englander (2017) explains that these youth have an extreme loyalty to their region and they readily engage with known antagonists and it involves hurting or killing individuals who pose a risk to them or their groups. Englander (2017) adds family as another influence on youth violence. The author states that families play a crucial role that is important for increasing or decreasing the risk of youth violence. The family environment and the parental behavior are central factors in the development of violent behavior among the young adults. Parents who exercise inadequate supervision and monitoring of their children and prefer to use punishments that are harsh and physical to correct them are some of the reliable predictors of violence in early adulthood and during adolescence. Family risk factors include inadequate monitoring by parents in children who have indicated first signs of aggression, inconsistent discipline, chaotic family life, child neglect and abuse, inter-parental violence, and harsh or rejecting parents. David-Ferdon et al. (2015) add that these risk factors increase related health-risk behaviors, substance abuse, antisocial behaviors, and mental health problems. Therefore, there is need to have close attachment bonds to caregivers, practicing effective and sensitive parenting that involves consistent monitoring and disciplinary practices, and having families that encourage a well-regulated, well-managed, stable, and safe experience among children.

Neurobiological risk factors is another cause of youth violence. This element involves deficits in the neurocognitive of an individual, psychophysiological differences, genetic risks, and perinatal complications among others. These factors result in a traumatic and chronic stress that is shaped by childhood experiences. Traumatic separation from caretakers, sexual abuse, neglect, physical abuse, family conflict, and violence are adverse exposures during childhood that create aggression and impulsiveness among young adults. These environments alter the development of the child and develop behaviors of abuse and antisocialism. The exposure to media violence among the children has been cited by Antunes and Ahlin (2014) Bushman et al. (2016) and Hoffman (2011) as a cause of youth violence. There exist debates on the link between youth violence and violent media as the perpetrators use what they have learned from media scripts to cause physical and emotional harm to their peers. Violent media has been linked to mostly the street shootings where several guns and ammunition are used to kill as many people as possible. The perpetrators then kill themselves or are shot by the police and are found to have masks, military uniform, or movie costume (Englander, 2017). Therefore, the exposure to media violence is substantially related to violent criminal behavior.

In the U.S most youth violence is conducted using guns (Ebsensen, 2011). The involvement of ammunitions in lethal youth violence indicates that the availability of firearms among the citizens is a significant cause of violence among the young adults. The ability of guns to inflict severe injuries on victims is a serious issue, and the high levels of gun ownership in the U.S along with loose gun control laws has created an unsupervised access to handguns especially among the youth. These guns are more readily available within the United States than in other high-income countries, and studies have reported more youth homicide cases where household gun ownership increased across the states in the U.S. In addition, there are illegal gun availability to the youths that impacts youth homicide. Other factors that determine the rate of lethal violence include alcohol use, racial composition, and economic and social resource deprivation. Barnie et al. (2017) link an increase in youth homicides among African American and higher arrests for illegally carrying guns. In this group, there are deaths due to gun suicides and accidental shootings.

Increase in youth violence is also linked to peer hierarchies and social rejection. According to Antunes and Ahlin (2014), the perpetrators of violence among the young adults usually have a history of rejection from their peer networks where they have sought entry. The youths use specific behaviors to gather interest from others. However, the peers may perceive them as socially unacceptable and lead to rejection. Similarly, a member can disrespect their peers and causes a collective violence which forces youths to join neighborhood gangs for protection from such abuse. Ebsensen (2011) states that rejection takes various forms under different conditions such as bullying, disrespect, devaluation, and exclusion which may lead to aggression. According to Bushman et al. (2016), whenever rejection occurs in community, family, and peer settings it can force a youth to develop an increased sensitivity towards the future threat of rejection and may lead to a significant increase in the occurrence of violence and aggression. Bushman et al. (2016) argue that the dismissal from peers has a stronger impact than rejection from romantic partners or friends, especially among the males. In cases where the masculinity or femininity of an individual is threatened through denial that conveys devaluation and powerlessness, the youth are much affected since it impacts their self-esteem. Antunes and Ahlin (2014) explain that during adolescence the brain systems of the young adults are unable to support the self-control and the youth is more likely to engage in risky behaviors.

Conclusion

Youth violence is multiplying in high-income countries. There is more volume of information that is now in demand throughout the globe regarding the causes and prevention of these cases. There is need to make more investments into surveillance and improvement of youth violence cases and also creating a global infrastructure to address this issues. Intervention programs can be adapted to reduce youth violence. However, stakeholders should conduct a careful evaluation to identify programs that work efficiently. Therefore, if the structures and systems in place are restructured, they can successfully meet the challenge and reduce youth violence in future. Children are flexible and need to be directed into self-regulation skills through pieces of training that are delivered directly regarding self-control.

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