

Aggression prevention and reduction in diverse cultures and contexts

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It is not as difficult to prevent and reduce violence as commonly assumed. The examination of peaceful societies and nonviolent social movements provides insight on how core values and norms like humility, respect for others, love and caring, forgiveness, and patience are fundamental in promoting peace. Additionally, nonviolent attitudes actualized through nonviolent models and non-punitive childrearing practices can help socialize children to become nonviolent adults. At the group level, the commitment to nonviolence by individuals using methods of sit-ins, boycotts, strikes, work slow-downs, civil disobedience, marches, and demonstrations in struggles against violence and oppression can bring about positive social change. Thus, the growing number of cases of nonviolent resistance triumphing over injustice and repression as well as the existence of dozens of highly peaceful societies bear witness to the fact that life without violence is possible.

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Introduction

Research in the social sciences has identified many different ways to decrease violence within and among societies [1[•],2,3,4,5]. Multiple approaches to violence reduction can have summative effects within society. Teaching conflict resolution skills in schools coupled with anti-bullying programs, for example, can effectively reduce aggression in youth [5,6[•]]. Similarly, community involvement in positive youth socialization can lower criminality [7]. Many countries have passed laws against the physical punishment of children [8], and the global movement away from corporal punishment could prove to be a significant factor in violence prevention because the witnessing and receiving of physical punishment in

childhood have been found to correlate with later aggressiveness in adulthood [3]. At the macro-level, links also can be drawn between economic disparities and violence, including domestic violence [9,10[•]]. For example, the Nordic countries after World War II have institutionalized social policies aimed at minimizing social inequalities, and one benefit of such equity-promoting social practices has been relatively low levels of violent crime over recent decades [10[•],11]. Regarding inter-societal violence-prevention, research on peace systems – clusters of neighboring societies that do not make war with each other – suggests that war can be prevented through promoting mutual interdependence, creating supranational institutions and over-arching social identities, and heralding values concordant with human rights, participatory democracy, and peace [12,13^{••},14^{••},15[•]]. These foregoing diverse examples illustrate that the prevention and reduction of violence at various social levels are possible goals to achieve. This article briefly explores three areas related to aggression reduction: (1) peace-promoting values and norms, (2) prosocial socialization, and (3) nonviolent social movements.

Peace promoting values and norms

Values encourage socially acceptable behavior and can be defined as the principles that guide people's lives [16–18]. Values are validated by and reflected in a society's traditions, institutions, narratives, and daily patterns of social interaction. Dozens of peaceful societies, cultures that place nonviolent values and norms front and center, have been identified and described [1^{••},13^{••},19,20[•],21,22]. A peaceful society can be characterized by “an extremely low level of physical aggression among its members as well as shared beliefs that devalue aggression and/or positively value harmonious interpersonal relationships” [23, p. 1557]. For example, to avoid confrontation, moving away from conflict situations is the norm among the Trio of South America and in many other societies [22,24–26]. Among the Kuikuru of Brazil, physical aggression is strongly de-valued and in fact hardly ever occurs [27]. The core values of nonviolence, sharing, helpfulness, and cooperation contribute to the extreme peacefulness of the Micronesian Ifaluk, among whom no homicides were reported or remembered, no feuding took place, and the viewing of Hollywood film violence resulted in recurring nightmares among these people unaccustomed to witnessing film violence [28,29]. Many descriptions of peaceful societies exist [20[•],21,22,30–32]. A comparative study of peaceful societies suggests that one avenue for reducing aggression is to promote nonviolent core values

and corresponding normative expectations of nonviolent behavior in society through overlapping social mechanisms.

Core values affect one's approach towards conflict resolution and the perception of peace. Within peaceful societies, importance is given to the protection of human rights, social justice, and human security rather than focusing on prevention and reduction of violence alone. In Norway, for instance, the promotion of positive peace is evident through this nation's active role in peace mediation at both the domestic and international levels [10[•],22,33]. Peace is highly valued in Norway [33], and the country has maintained one of the lowest homicide rates in the world [22]. Thus, in Norway and in other peaceful societies, anthropological and psychological research reveals that values and norms play fundamental roles in the promotion of peace and prevention of violence.

Prosocial socialization

Approximately eighty peaceful societies have been documented around the globe [22,31,34^{••},35] where child-rearing practices involving physical punishment tend to be shunned [22,32]. Through the socialization process, parents promote nonviolent values and behavior [36^{••},37^{••}]. Parents employ tactics of ignoring a child's aggressive behaviors and using nonphysical means to form the child into a nonviolent adult [38[•],32]. Among the Semai and Batek of Malaysia, Bosnian Muslims refugees living in Finland, and many other peaceful societies, parents acknowledge the importance of persuasion and verbal education instead of corporal punishment [39^{••},40,41]. Nonviolent approaches to childrearing, in contrast to reliance on physical punishment, provide children with opportunities to develop pro-social behaviors, compassion, and empathy towards the others [36^{••},43^{••},42[•],44].

Among the Semai, parents avoid physical punishment as it is believed to be harmful to a child's soul [30,44[•]]. Semai children learn nonviolent values by observing the behavior of their parents and other adults [45,46]. Additionally, Semai children also learn to solve conflicts through the commonly used dispute resolution assembly called '*becharaa*'. *Bacharaa* is a formal hearing procedure where the parties involved in a conflict express their viewpoints. The headman concludes the discussion with a speech that emphasizes appropriate behavior to maintain harmony within the group [1^{••},22,30,44[•],47]. Thus, Semai nonviolent childrearing practices and socialization processes within a broader nonviolent cultural milieu reflect crucially important approaches to the prevention of violence [30,46].

Another Malaysian society, the Batek, value and practice helping, sharing, respect, nonviolence, and non-competitiveness [48–50]. Children learn social nonviolence

through observation and practice [48]. As among the Semai, Batek parents avoid physical punishment [49]. Children gradually internalize the nonviolent, respectful, cooperative values and conduct that are expected of everyone living within Batek society. Whereas, disputes are sometimes resolved through public discussions, in cases where feelings remain bruised, a person may leave that group, stay away until their anger fades away, perhaps joining another camp [50,51^{••}].

Among the Bosnian Muslim community of Närpes, a small coastal town in Finland, a core value is respect. Children are taught to be good to others, think positively, be honest, and always keep in mind the consequences of their actions. Mutual respect and trust exist between parents and children. Therefore, punishment, as an option to educate children, is not a preferred method; instead, parents usually advise children as to what constitutes appropriate behavior [39^{••}]. Through these modes of socialization and internalization, Bosnian children and youth come to behave in accordance with the community-favored ways of dealing with conflict nonviolently and relating to other persons respectfully. Similar socialization processes that promote nonviolence over violence can be seen operating across a spectrum of diverse societies [19,26,30,32,38[•],48,49,53^{••},54[•],55^{••}].

Nonviolent social movements

The learned nonviolent values of love, forgiveness, respect, patience and so forth have been put into practice through nonviolent protests, non-cooperation, and intervention against oppression and injustice around the globe [56^{••},57^{••},58^{••},59,60^{••},61^{••}]. For instance, citizens used nonviolent tactics against Nazi brutality in Berlin, Denmark, and Bulgaria and saved Jewish citizens [62]. In former Czechoslovakia, the nonviolent Velvet Revolution resulted in the collapse of communism in the 1980's [63,64]. Moreover, the nonviolent actions of workers in the Polish Solidarity movement resulted in free trade unions, increases in wages, and ultimately the demise of communist rule [65]. Recently Egyptian citizens ousted 30 years of dictatorship in just 18 days of nonviolent struggle [66[•]].

A recent study demonstrates that nonviolent campaigns are twice as likely to succeed as are violent revolutions [58^{••}]. In nonviolent resistance, different kinds of tactics are used to pressure the opponents [59,67^{••},68,69^{••}]. As one scholar noted, "Nonviolent action is not passive. It is not inaction. It is action that is nonviolent" [60^{••}, p. 18]. Thus, nonviolence is an act of rejecting physical violence but is by no means passive [70,71^{••},72].

Whereas armed insurgents rely on violence, terrorism, torture, and destruction, the participants in nonviolent campaigns adopt diverse methods such as sit-ins, boycotts, demonstrations, street theatre, synchronized

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