Violence: A Bio-psycho-social Analysis and the Mediating Role of Emotional Intelligence

Olabisi Olasehinde-Williams*

Introduction

Take a close look at the picture below. Can you guess what happened there? Probably not. But that is the picture of a retired prison warder who in March 2013 killed and sold the body parts of a young boy in Ilesa, Nigeria (Ataroye, 2/4/13)! Surprised? Unfortunately, such atrocity is not limited to the retired warder. The news media is replete with different forms and degrees of violence in our society. For instance, the same edition of Alaroye Newspaper also reported the case of a man who killed his wife and removed the two eyes in Lagos; and on 12 May, 2013, the National Television Newsline programme reported the case of 23 girls who were kidnapped and forcefully caged to be raped by hoodlums in order to produce children for sale (M800,000 and N500,000 for each male and female baby respectively) at a 'baby-making factory' owned by a woman in Imo State!

Neither are such cases of violence limited to Nigeria. In 2012, for instance, The BBC News carried the stories of a medical student who was gang-raped by six men and threw out of a moving bus in India (December, 2012); of Police men who chained a man to a moving vehicle and dragged him along a road to death in South Africa (March, 2013); of a man who kidnapped, tortured, raped and aborted pregnancies of three women for ten years in the United States (May, 2013); and cases of school violence in some Western countries! It all sounds so scary! Never has humanity been exposed to such dimension and magnitude of violence in recent memory. Living used to be

* Professor of Educational Psychology, University of Ilorin, Ilorin.
less traumatic in this country. For instance, it was possible to travel in the night and worry only about having flat tyres; work in any part of the country without fear of being kidnapped or lynched; live among members of another faith and attend their religious festivals without having a second thought. So what explanations can be provided for the current level of shocking and heinous forms of violence in the home, community, nation and the world at large? This is the question that prompted this chapter. Specifically, this chapter tries to conceptualise violence; interrogate biological, psychological and sociological explanations for violent behaviours; and explore the mediating role of Emotional Intelligence in preventing violence.

The Concept of Violence

The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language defines violence as "physical force exerted for the purpose of violating, damaging, or abusing". In the context of this paper, violence is conceived as any behaviour meant to injure or abuse an individual or a group of people either physically or emotionally. It is an intentional action taken to hurt people physically by beating, maiming, raping or killing for whatever reason; or to hurt people emotionally by restricting their access to rights, privileges and resources either because of cultural orientation, gender, racial or religious differences.

Common to every form of violence is aggression typically associated with the emotion of anger or fear. Uncontrolled anger or unresolved fear tends to produce aggression which, if unchecked culminates in violence.

Literature is replete with theories, forms and consequences of violence (Gilbert and Daffern, 2011; Briere and Jordan, 2004). The fact that violence is conceived as antisocial behaviour by the generality of the people-victims and perpetrators alike, is also well reported (Archer, 2006). However, why people still engage in violence in spite of that awareness is yet to be fully explored in literature. The next section of this discourse therefore presents a tripartite integrated approach (bio-psycho-social analysis) to understanding why people may engage in violence.

Biological Basis of Violence

Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory and Darwin's evolutionary theory proposes biological explanations for understanding violence. In his psychoanalysis theory, for instance, Freud identifies two opposing instincts as fundamental motivators of human behaviours - the life and death instincts (Freud, 1920). Freud describes an instinct as a state of excitation within the body which propels man to act in ways to remove that excitation. From this theoretical perspective, the life instinct (Eros) propels man to act in ways that could enhance the preservation of own life and ensure the continuation of the species; while the death instinct (Thanatos) pushes man towards extinction. The life and death instincts both propel man to act in seemingly opposing but actually complementary manners. In response to the life instinct (Eros), for instance, man's behaviours are directed at meeting the basic needs for health, safety and sustenance (to preserve life) as well
Violence: A Bio-psycho-social Analysis and the Mediating Role of Emotional Intelligence

as sexual gratification (to create life). On the other hand, the fear of disintegration and death, activated by the death instinct (Thanatos), propels man to do anything to preserve his own life even if it involves destroying others. In Freud's view, when this energy is directed outward onto others, it is expressed as aggression and violence (Cherry, 2013).

From the psychoanalytical perspective, therefore, violence is strongly linked with the death instinct. It can thus be assumed that individuals given to aggression, bullying, abuse, or any other form of violence do so basically in response to the fear of disintegration and death, activated by the death instinct within them - a genetic disposition that is apparently 'beyond their control'. Perhaps this explains why violence is as old as mankind; why generalised anger, fear and disgust are among the six basic emotions at birth (Ekman, 1999); why unfocussed actions and angry expressions begin during the first year of life; and why using force against peers typically begin by 14 or 15 months of age Hay, 2005; Tremblay and Nagin, 2005). These all sound so credible that it can be concluded that aggression is a natural and spontaneous behaviour of all human beings. So how come we are not all violent? How come that in any given population, only a small proportion of people engages in violent behaviours? How come the vast majority of people are pro-social in their behaviours? How come there is convincing evidence in literature that aggression is not universal as there are, indeed, peaceful cultures refuting the claim that human beings are naturally and spontaneously aggressive (Kohn, 1988)? It must mean that

the death instinct does not have compelling control over human behaviours after all, and that there must be something in the personality of violent people which sets them apart from the rest of the population. Consequently, our quest for understanding violence must include an exploration of the personality traits, here conceptualised as psychological basis of violence, as presented in the next section.

Psychological Basis of Violence

Everyone has two types of personality - the outer and the inner. The former constitutes the physical and visible component of man while the latter constitutes the quality component of man - the visible aspect of character as it impresses others. In relation to the physical component, size and strength have been shown to motivate physical aggression (Archer and Thanzami, 2007; Sell, Tooby and Cosmides, 2005; Felson, 1996). Archer (2004) even finds that sex differences in size and strength tend to relate to sex difference in forms of aggression, with more male than female manifesting size and strength-related aggression. More than the outer component, however, the inner component plays a defining role in violent behaviour. More often than not, the outer/physical component may merely be a mask for the inner qualities of man. When Duncan, in Macbeth says 'there's no art to find the mind's construction in the face' (Shakespeare, 1611-12; Act 1 Scene 4) he is in fact alluding to the inner character of man! Thus, discerning the inner qualities of the violent does not come easy but personality psychologists have painstakingly identified a number of characteristics with potential to motivate, man to engage in violence. Typically,
individuals with high tendency to engage in violence are hot-tempered, anxious, fearful, jealous, and morally lax. Consider the case of a man who threw a burning stove on his own child in anger; set his own house ablaze, killed two of his children; got a third child seriously burnt; suffered serious burns himself in the process; while his wife went into shock all because, his 10 year-old son, Taiye, opened the door for armed robbers (The Punch 20 May, 2010)! Stranger than fiction you think? Yes, but that is a typical example of a violent personality! Archer (2006) describes such individuals as generally impulsive, risk-taking and extravert compared with non-violent individuals. In addition, being a male may increase the probability of being violent particularly in cultures which view aggression as a positive male emotion.

It must however be acknowledged that though these characteristics may predispose individuals to violence, they are not, on their own, the cause of violent behaviours. They must combine with specific situations within the environment to trigger violence (Whipps, 2009). Genetic disposition for violence may or may not be expressed depending on the sociological realities of the individual as genes rarely work in a vacuum; and rarely do people engage in violence just for its sake but in response to specific triggers in the society. What may constitute such sociological triggers of violence is explored next.

**Sociological Basis of Violence**

The facts of genetic component of aggression and its possible expression as early as the second year of life are established in extant literature (Hay, 2005; Tremblay and Nagin, 2005). Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory and Pinker (2002) however, underscore the fact that through the process of socialisation, individuals can learn to activate aggressive tendency or inhibit such tendency and replace it with acceptable ways of achieving social goals (Montagu, 1978). It is thus logical to conclude that the environment has a decisive role to play either in curtailing or aggravating violence such that individuals with aggressive personality exposed to violence-inducing environmental influences stand the greater risk of engaging in violence.

Environmental influences on the tendency to be violent range from the home through the peer group to the society. Children with violent-prone personality who are exposed to such home experiences as antisocial behaviours by the mother or father (Tremblay et al., 2004); adults who constantly express anger toward children; parents who frequently employ shame or impose corporal punishment in dealing with children's expression of anger (XX'.irJ, 1970); and parents who expect children, particularly males, to stand their ground in fights have higher tendency to endorse violence as a problem solving strategy later in life.

Young people with violence-prone personality who mix with peers of similar disposition; who are embarrassed by their peers for showing signs of backing out from a fight; or who face rejection from the peer group stand the risk of perpetrating violence.

Common pastimes among the youths include prolonged watching of violent films and playing of violent video games. Long exposure to such media violence is generally linked to violent behaviours especially among
Violence: A Bio-psycho-social Analysis and the Mediating Role of Emotional Intelligence

individuals with aggressive personality. In their longitudinal study for instance, Huesmann, Moise-Titus, and Eron (2003) find that eight year-olds who watched a lot of violent TV were more likely to be arrested by the time they were thirty years old; while Berkowitz (1962), concluded that engaging in aggressive play strengthens the disposition to react aggressively; and increases the probability of becoming desensitised to violence.

Similarly related to peer culture is exposure to alcohol and drugs intoxication which may facilitate violence by impairing thought processes.

Violence-inducing factors within the society include ready access of violence-prone individuals to lethal weapons (Anderson, Benjamin, and Bartholow (1998); apart from easy exposure to direct training in violence for instance, as obtains in militant and terrorist camps in this country (Montagu, 1978)! Importantly, exposure to warped values in form of greed and insatiable selfish desire for resources especially by people in leadership positions can trigger anger and consequently increase the propensity for violence among individuals with violence-inclined personality. The potential of this category of violence-activating factors is clearly alluded to in the Holy Bible when it says:

What causes wars, and what causes fightings among you? Is it not your passions that are at war in your members? You desire and do not have; so you kill. And you covet and cannot obtain; so you fight and wage war (James, 4:1 &2).

In addition, perception of real or imagined discrimination in dispensation of justice, protection of human rights, and allocation of resources and distribution of commonwealth are critical triggers of anger, fear and disillusionment that may degenerate to violence among individuals with high violence-prone personality.

Viewed from all dimensions so far highlighted, it would seem that individuals with high level of violence-prone personality are doomed to perpetrate violence given the myriad of violence inducing environmental experiences to which they are generally exposed. Fortunately, it is not necessarily so. The good news is that human beings equally have the natural tendency to live cooperatively and in peace; and are capable of controlling their specific environmental experiences to achieve this objective. However, as the philosopher Aristotle once admonished:

Anyone one can become angry ... that is easy. But to be angry with the right person, to the right degree, at the right time, for the right purpose, and in the right way . . . this is not easy.

An environmental factor that has the potential to control emotions including anger and consequently mediate violent tendency is Emotional Intelligence. This factor and the specific role it plays in mediating violence is thus considered next.

**Emotional Intelligence and Control of Violence**

Emotional Intelligence (El) refers to the ability to understand and control oneself; as well as understand and relate with others competently. The term was first coined in 1990 by Peter Salovey and Jack Mayer; but it was popularised in 1995 by Daniel Goleman. According to Goleman, (1998: 317) El is "The
capacity for recognising our own feelings, and those of others, for motivating ourselves, and for managing emotions in ourselves, and in our relationships.” Earlier, Salovey and Mayer (1990) described EI as the ability to be aware of one's own feelings, be aware of others' feelings, to differentiate among them, and to use the information to guide one's thinking and behaviour. There are two basic dimensions and two levels of Emotional Intelligence as shown in the 2x2 Conceptual Model in Figure 1.

As shown in the Model, emotionally intelligent individuals do not only have the capacity to (i) understand and (ii) manage their own emotions; they also have the ability to (iii) understand and (iv) manage their relationship with other people. In other words, to be emotionally intelligent is to have good grip on one's own emotions; to have positive impact on others at any level of relationship; and to generally remain unruffled by stress. So, how does high EI status reduce the tendency to engage in violence?

As earlier identified, the root cause of violence is anger. Now, since anger is an emotion and emotions play central roles in most human behaviours, accurate awareness and active management of its manifestation can drastically control its degeneration into violence - and this is where Emotional Intelligence competence comes in. Emotional competence begins with capacity for accurate understanding of self - i.e. awareness of ways in which one is different from other people. Personality psychologists emphasise the fact of individual differences and call attention to the fact that 'Every man is in certain respects like ALL other men, like SOME other men and like NO other man’ (Murray, and Kluckhohn, 1953). Part of the differences is reflected in peoples' distinct emotional reactions. Emotional situations trigger physical reactions in the entire body but EI boosts the capacity to recognise a negative emotion; reflectively respond to the situation and actively work at modifying the negative emotion. There is ample evidence in literature that individuals with such capacity for self-regulation are more competent at controlling their own behaviours and are consequently able to suppress disruptive tendencies (Eniola, 2007).

Importantly, knowing that relationship is at the heart of living, Emotional Intelligence boosts capacity to accurately understand people we must relate with and then enables the capacity to competently manage our relationships at different levels (i.e. family, official, and community, national, international). In the course of relating with others, for instance, emotionally intelligent individuals learn to identify different types
of personalities, manage relationships involving such individuals efficiently and are competent in dealing with environmental demands and pressures. By and large, emotionally intelligent individuals have high capacity to correctly read their political environment; are sensitive to other people's emotions; make effective use of communication; accord others positive regard; are patient in moments of anger; always look for the good in others; readily accept their own mistakes; learn to discuss and resolve difficult interactions; are less reactive and more responsive to provocations; and are willing to see things from others' points of view. Consequently, such individuals are less prone to violence and are more likely to resolve problems reflectively. Conversely, emotionally illiterate individuals are typically glued to their own points of view, given to frequent mood swings, tend to resort to addictive behaviours (i.e. drug and alcohol) to soothe their emotions (Baggini and Macaro, 2013) and consequently often engage in disruptive behaviours. So what lessons are in this for the theory and practice of Peace Studies? The next section responds to this question.

Implications for the Theory and Practice of Peace Studies
The point has been made that violence basically results from inability to control anger. To start with, if they must be credible professionals, peace practitioners must themselves develop the capacity to bold painful emotion of anger, to feel its suffering, and then to let it go (McGarvey, 2010) because no one can give what s/he does not have. Secondly, Peace practitioners, by their calling, are bound to relate with aggressive or even violent individuals. If they must succeed in their work, then they must be competent at recognising and managing the emotions of their clients. Their chances of succeeding in both regards depend, to a large extent, on their own emotional intelligence status (Olasehinde-Williams, 2012). Managing emotions is therefore an important life skill required of all, but especially peace scholars and practitioners, to succeed in life. For instance, if peace practitioners must utilise EI competencies in their mediation work, then they must be properly grounded in EI theories, principles, competencies and their application (Olasehinde-Williams, 2010,2012). One implication of this is that Emotional Intelligence must be mainstreamed into the Peace Studies curriculum at least as a required course. Indeed, it should be an integral part of any Peace Education curriculum, be it at the primary, secondary or tertiary level to build students' capacity to become more competent managers of violence-prone emotions.

Considering the relative recency of Emotional Intelligence as a discipline in Nigeria, there is as yet a paucity of research into its theory and application in violence control. It will therefore be important for peace scholars (staff and students) to invest in related studies so as to enhance the possibilities for more competent emotions control and reduce the possibilities for violent behaviours in the country.

Stemming from the awareness that individuals with deficient EI skills typically respond to social problems violently suggest the need to factor EI skills training into mediation processes.
Recommendations

As established in this chapter, genes do not work in a vacuum. Violence-prone personality, for instance, requires appropriate environment for full expression of the tendency. If the culture of violence currently pervading our society must be reversed therefore, attention must be paid to modifying predisposing situations within the environment. A three-pronged approach of prevention, protection and punitive measures for reversing violence-inducing situations are here proposed.

1. A major source of fear and anger, particularly among the youth, is perceived atrocities in governance. To prevent such fear and anger therefore, it is important for people in political leadership to provide good governance in terms of transparency, accountability and integrity in the discharge of their responsibilities. For instance, efforts should be geared towards job creation, equitable distribution of the nation's commonwealth and allocation of resources; as well as towards eliminating corruption and perversion of justice in the land. More importantly, Government will need to do all that is necessary to diversify the economy out of the current mono-status - solely based on crude oil. Diversification will include stabilising power to encourage private investment assisting Small and Medium Scale Enterprises (SME) to grow and developing regional resources in agriculture, economic etc. Besides, the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth must translate to growth in employment rate, reduction in poverty level and generally impact on people's lives.

From the home front, parents have the responsibility of preventing expression of aggressive tendencies in their children early in life by providing opportunities for them to learn appropriate anger control and management options. In particular, child-rearing practices which encourage children to fight back; employ violence in dealing with children's misbehaviours; direct anger towards children; or freely express anger around their children must be avoided to prevent children from endorsing violence as a viable means of expressing anger.

Like the home, the school must also ensure prevention of violent behaviours by modelling, and directly teaching, appropriate anger management techniques.

2. Such preventive measures notwithstanding, there would still be some individuals who may be pathologically violent, for instance, on account of drug addiction. It will therefore be important to protect the general public from such violent individuals by putting adequate security measures in place. Good road networks, adequate patrol of highways by genuine security operatives, free access to police/medical help lines and well-equipped security for rapid response operations are some protective measures with potential to curtail violence in the society.

3. A possible factor in the current level of aggression among the populace relates to apparent perversion of justice in the land. For instance, it is difficult to understand why a 19 year-old student would be sentenced to two years imprisonment with an option of N10,000 fine payable after three months for stealing a blackberry phone valued at N50,000 (Talk of Naija, 2013); while a honourable member still sits in the National Assembly
Violence: A Bio-psycho-social Analysis and the Mediating Role of Emotional Intelligence

51

Despite overwhelming charge of involvement in a $620,000.00 bribery scandal! Besides the popular option of amnesty for militants and terrorists apparently reinforce rather than deter violence. Punitive measures that can minimise violence in the society include consistency and objectivity in dispensation of justice; and application of aversive punishment for perpetrators of violence. The public must have no doubt in their minds that government truly mean the zero-tolerance for corruption slogan without fair or favour.

Summary and Conclusion

Uncontrolled anger or unresolved fear tends to produce aggression which, unchecked, culminates in violence, i.e. an intentional action taken to hurt people physically or emotionally. Anger and fear are two of the basic emotions present at birth. However, there is ample evidence in literature to confirm that the genetic factors of these emotions interact with environmental influences to produce variations in the level of violence shown by individuals (Bjorklund and Pellegrini, 2002).

One environmental factor with high potential to mediate emotional reactions is Emotional Intelligence. Emotional intelligence is the ability to understand oneself, control oneself, understand others and manage social relationships harmoniously (Goleman, 1995). However, this does not come spontaneously for most people, it must be learned. The reason is simple. Except for reflexive and instinctive responses, all human behaviours have cognitive and emotive components. Violence, for instance, results from deficient management of anger-inducing situations in the environment. Individual differences in response style (whether impulsive or reflective); response mode (whether violent or harmonious) to such situations have genetic and environmental imperatives. As already established in this paper, what makes a significant difference in how individuals handle negative emotions, particularly anger, is their Emotional Intelligence status.

Individuals high on EI status is less apt to engage in problem behaviours and avoid self-destructive, negative behaviours such as smoking, excessive drinking, drug abuse, or violent episodes with others (Mayer, Salovey and Caruso, 2004). They're particularly good at establishing positive social relationships with others, and at avoiding conflicts, fights, and other antisocial behaviours. It can thus be safely concluded that, Emotional Intelligence is critical in developing capacity to handle one's own emotions and relate effectively with others.

The principal goal of Peace Studies is to minimise violence in the world by helping individuals to resolve conflicting situations harmoniously. Achieving this feat requires all connected with the field to also model the culture of peace with themselves and others. Holistic peace studies education and practice must therefore prioritise EI training to ensure that peace scholars and practitioners actually walk their talk by effectively modelling reflective and harmonious anger management behaviours to people with violence-prone personality.

References


Wikiquote
Available at http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Aristotle

Learning Theory.


54 Olabisi Olasehinde-Williams


World Information Agents (2013). Ajayi to nta eya ara eeyan sowo foju bale-ajo n'ilesa. Iwe Irohin Alaroye, 02/04, p. 16.

_____ (2013). Won ni Gbadebo payawo e, o tun yo oju e mejeeji l’ekoo. Iwe Irohin Alaroye, 02/04, p. 16.