

The Study of Violent Crime

Its Correlates and Concerns

Scott Mire and Cliff Roberson



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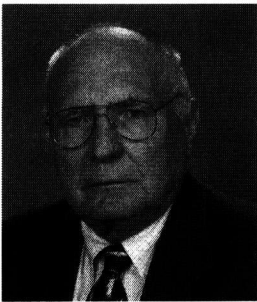
Its Correlates and Concerns

Preface: Is Violence as American as Apple Pie?

As the plan to write this book began to develop, a few central points became immediately apparent. First, the concept of violence represents a vast collection of behaviors and cognitions within a theoretical domain whose parameters are extremely ambiguous. Of course, there are distinctions between the types of violence and their nature, which can be clearly articulated, but the causal and correlational variables that contribute to the acts of violence are legion. As a result, it was quickly determined that an attempt to cover the entire domain of violence within a single book is futile and may even result in further confounding the already misunderstood concept of violence and its attendant characteristics that have such a profound impact on ideology and beliefs.

The latent theme of this book is to provide a current analysis of violence and violent crime perpetrated by adult offenders within the United States of America. The concept of *latent* is strategic and purposeful. The reason is that to understand adult violence in the United States one must explore historical trends in violence, including trends in other countries as a result of the United States as such a young populace. In addition, it is important to explore developmental processes, including some important facts related to juvenile violence, to understand adult violence.

Authors



Cliff Roberson LLM, Ph.D., is editor-in-chief of *Professional Issues in Criminal Justice Journal* and is academic chair for the Master of Science in Criminal Justice Program, Kaplan University. He is also an emeritus professor of criminal justice at Washburn University, Topeka, Kansas.

In 2009, a research study conducted by a group of professors from Sam Houston State University determined that Roberson was the leading criminal justice author in the United States based on his publications and their relevance to the profession [See *Southwest Journal of Criminal Justice*, Vol. 6, issue 1, 2009]. He has authored or coauthored more than 50 books and texts on legal subjects. His books include:

Cliff Roberson, Harvey Wallace, and Gilbert Stuckey (2009) *Procedures in the Justice System*, 9th ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson).

Cliff Roberson (2009) *Constitutional Law and Criminal Justice* (Boca Raton, FL: Taylor & Francis).

Harvey Wallace and Cliff Roberson (2008) *Principles of Criminal Law* 4th ed. (Boston: Allyn & Bacon).

Michael Birzer and Cliff Roberson (2008) *Police Field Operations: Theory meets Practice* (Boston: Pearson)

Cliff Roberson and Dilip Das (2008) *An Introduction to Comparative Legal Models of Criminal Justice* (Boca Raton, FL: Taylor & Francis)

Cliff Roberson and Scott Mire (2010, at printer) *Ethics and Criminal Justice* (Boca Raton, FL: Taylor & Francis)

Harvey Wallace and Cliff Roberson (in publication) *Family Violence* (Boston: Pearson).

His previous academic experiences include associate vice president for academic affairs at Arkansas Tech University; dean of arts and sciences, University of Houston, Victoria; director of programs for the National College of District Attorneys; pro-

fessor of criminology and director of Justice Center, California State University, Fresno; and assistant professor of criminal justice, St. Edwards University.

Roberson's nonacademic experience includes U.S. Marine Corps service as an infantry officer, trial and defense counsel and military judge as a marine judge advocate; and serving as a director of the military law branch, U.S. Marine Corps. Other legal employment experiences include trial supervisor, Office of State Counsel for Offenders, Texas Board of Criminal Justice and judge pro-tem in the California courts. Roberson is admitted to practice before the U.S. Supreme Court, U.S. Court of Military Appeals, U.S. Tax Court, Federal Courts in California and Texas, Supreme Court of Texas and Supreme Court of California.

He earned his Ph.D. in human behavior at U.S. International University, his L.L.M. in criminal law, criminology, and psychiatry at George Washington University, his J.D. at American University, his B.A. in political science at the University of Missouri, and did one year of postgraduate study at the University of Virginia School of Law.



Dr. Scott Mire is currently an assistant professor of criminal justice at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette. He has held this position since August of 2005.

Before that, Dr. Mire spent several years in law enforcement. First, he served as a police officer and narcotics agent with the Lafayette, Louisiana Police Department.

Following his tenure with the Lafayette Police Department, Dr. Mire worked for the United States Border Patrol. He was assigned to the Laredo sector and was stationed in Laredo, Texas. As a Border Patrol agent, Dr. Mire carried out all relevant duties including track-

ing and apprehending illegal aliens as well as conducting in-depth investigations of alien smuggling. In that role, he was also responsible for conducting complex narcotics investigations that typically involved law enforcement officials of various countries.

Then Dr. Mire went to work for the Texas Police Corps as a training coordinator while pursuing a Ph.D. in criminal justice at Sam Houston State University. As a training coordinator he was responsible for all curriculum development in addition to providing training in all aspects of law enforcement.

More recently, Dr. Mire has authored or coauthored several journal articles and book chapters including two text books in the areas of correctional counseling and ethics in criminal justice.

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Chapter 1

Introduction to the Study of Violence

Introduction

Almost universally, historians agree that the United States has always been an extremely violent nation and that violence usually redounds to the ultimate advantage of those who control the levers of power.

Buenker, 1999, p. 314

We still kill each other at roughly three times the rate of most Western nations.

Brown, 1969, p. 243

This chapter begins the examination of the concept of violence. As noted in the Preface, violence is as American as apple pie. An informal survey of local young people in urban neighborhoods found that nearly 80 percent have had family or friends wounded or killed by gun violence—a number that the report called “staggering.” When asked for two ways to stop street violence, the largest proportion (18 percent) of the respondents to the survey cited banning or controlling guns. After that came more community activities, no solution, more police, staying off

the streets, and jobs/education. Those suggestions (Kalson, 2010) are examined in the chapters of this book.

Chapter 1 starts the inquiry about this concept, and the following chapters explore all aspects of violence.

It is necessary to point out that much of what is contained in this chapter and the others is directly or indirectly supported by the work of the World Health Organization on violence. An immediate question may be why so much reliance would be placed on the work of an organization dedicated to improving conditions of the world and not just the United States. There are two primary reasons:

1. The variables associated with violence do not change or reconstrue themselves based on geographical boundaries. In other words, the underlying dynamics of violence are largely synonymous and are not dependent on a particular location.
2. The World Health Organization uses a public health approach to understanding and responding to violence. It is believed that this model is superior to any singular approach that relies solely on the criminal justice system to adequately deter violent actions.

Before getting into the specific objectives of this chapter, there is an important question that needs to be addressed: Why is it important to study violence and violent crime? After all, one would be hard-pressed to identify any period of time when violence was not present in some form or fashion (Krug, Dahlberg, Mercy, Zwi, and Lozano, 2002; Weiner, Zahn, and Sagi, 1990). The answer is really a basic one: We must continue to strive toward better understanding this phenomenon because the results of violent encounters are often damaging and severely destructive. Long after the physical wounds have healed, psychological and emotional damage is likely to persist, especially if appropriate treatment is not provided. In essence, violence is a phenomenon that is capable of significantly altering one's quality of life. And, this reduction of quality of life and the ability to experience happiness, joy, and pleasure do not occur in a vacuum. In other words, when one person is negatively affected by the consequences of violence, so are the person's family, community, and society in general. Having to constantly work to mitigate negative emotion and fear as a result of a violent experience greatly reduces one's ability to engage in meaningful activities, such as employment and interpersonal relationships.

Arguably, the most salient reason to study violence and violent crime is because both are preventable. It is possible to greatly reduce the amount of violence we currently experience in modern society. Society may not be ready to embrace some of the changes that would be necessary to prevent violence, but this should not be confused with the basic fact that violence can be prevented. First, however, we as a society would need to determine the extent to which we are willing to

sacrifice. Consider the myriad cancerous diseases millions of people experience and die from each year. Furthermore, compare our current ability to successfully diagnose and treat cancer to that of 10, 20, or even 30 years ago. Today, we are much better equipped to save many of the lives that would certainly have been lost before because we as a society “put our money where our mouths are.” We watched as many of our loved ones suffered excruciating pain and ultimately death, and we demanded that our medical profession become more effective and efficient in methods of treatment and intervention. Most important, however, we collectively proclaimed, “We don’t care what it costs.”

As is often the case in social sciences, the more research one does, the more questions that are generated. We began with a basic question: Why study violence? However, in exploring this question two additional questions were generated:

1. To what extent are we, as a society, willing to commit to preventing violence?
2. Who is most capable of engaging in interventions most able to prevent violence?

The answer to the first question is fairly straightforward. The extent to which we as a society are committed to preventing violence is portrayed in the extent to which we operationalize assets aimed at its reduction.

The answer to the second question is more involved. To begin, any serious attempt to reduce or prevent violence must be multimodal. As a society, we cannot afford simply to relegate the issue of violence to law enforcement and then sit back and relax as though the problem will now be addressed and solved. We have taken this approach long enough with little in the way of discernible results that would suggest this strategy has had any significant impact on the rates of violence.

If we, as a society, decide that we are serious about reducing violence, then we must take a more holistic approach that draws from many different disciplines. This is precisely why, as mentioned, strong arguments can be made for treating the concept of violence as a public health issue. First, it is a public health issue, and second, a public health approach draws on many disciplines to provide a framework from which to address the issue. As an example, the World Health Organization adopted the following resolution aimed at preventing violence:

A public health approach to violence is interdisciplinary and based on the principles of scientific investigation (Mercy, 1993). Disciplines commonly considered in a public health approach include psychology, sociology, medicine, epidemiology, criminology, and education (Krug et al., 2002).

How, then, is a public health approach to violence operationalized when particular attention is paid to ensuring full compliance with the rigors of science? Theoretically, this is done through the following four postulates: