

Sociological Theories of Domestic Violence

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### **Sociological Theories of Domestic Violence**

Sociological theories of domestic violence seeks to explain violence as a function of social structures. There are various theories the psychologists use to understand intimate partner violence. Family violence theory views domestic violence the expression of conflict within a family that can best be explained by examining the social structures which contribute to violence. The social theories of domestic violence focus on the processes which are created through interacting with others in large groups or one-to-one relationships. This paper discusses some of the sociological theories which explain domestic violence.

#### **Social Theories of Family Violence**

##### **Control theory**

The basis of control theory is that many family conflicts are as a result of the need of an individual to obtain and maintain control and power within a relationship. The abuser's behavior is motivated by the power and control that he or she is can exert over other family members (Lawson, 2012). The members of the family who are more powerful like husbands or fathers often use force or threat to obtain compliance from the family members that are less powerful, such as children or wives. The intention of violent behaviors, force and threats is to prohibit the less powerful family members from doing what the controlling party does not want. At the same time, the controlling individual demands the occurrence of the behavior they deem desirable. In the efforts to maintain control over other family members, the abusers may leverage different forms of intimidation such as isolation, denial of personal blame, coercion and economic abuse (Hyde-Nolan & Juliao, 2012). The victims may as a result, start to slowly modify their own behavior so as to avoid the continued abuse or survive the abuse. The most harmful form of

intimidation may be the isolation the victim from any social contacts, since in the absence of social support, the possibility of the victim escaping is reduced greatly.

### **Resource Theory**

This theory suggest that there is a relationship between wealth and violence. The proposition of this theory is that violence and force are resources which can be used in conflict resolution, although they are often used as a last resort in the modern society. For instance men who have a high social standing and income, in addition to violence, have access to a wide array of resources that they can use to control their wives' behavior. Men with no or limited resource and wealth may quickly resort to violence or physical force (Hyde-Nolan & Juliao, 2012).

### **Cognitive or Behavioral Theories of Family Violence.**

#### **Social Learning Theory**

This theory maintains that people lean social behavior by imitation and observation of others. The most important element in how children learn is by imitation of models. Social learning theory maintains that individuals become aggressive in the family because the same behaviors were learned through observing the behavior or role models or through operant conditioning (Lawson, 2012). Operant conditioning is how positive and negative reinforcements strengthen behaviors, for example the suppression of behavior through punishment. This is the reason corporal punishment may, in fact, be chosen as method of discipline because it brings about the compliance of children with parental demands. Research has pointed out that there are short and long term effects of physical punishment such as antisocial behavior, increased physical aggressiveness, criminal behavior, partner abuse in adulthood and poor parent-child relationships during childhood.

Social learning theory tries to explain the existence of violence transmission between generations. The theory suggests that which children are growing up, they receive feedback from others regarding their behavior. From the feedbacks they start to create standards for judging their behavior and seeking models that match the standards. The children who grow up in abusive families may learn the abusive behaviors and imitate them. Later they may then repeat the same behaviors in future relationships. Many studies suggest that an individual is at high risk of abusing their children if they were abused in their childhood (Hyde-Nolan & Juliao, 2012). Additionally, men who saw their fathers abuse their mothers in their childhood have a higher risk of abusing their wives. Researchers have also shown that people who experience or observed abuse in their childhood have a higher likelihood of being in an abusive intimate relationship either as the victim or abuser (Lawson, 2012).

### **Reactive Aggression**

The focal point of this theory is the cognitive and emotional processes that lead to behavioral responses. It suggests that when a person experiences an unpleasant situation the following take place (Hyde-Nolan & Juliao, 2012):

- An aversive stimulus creates a negative emotional response.
- The negative emotional response leads to thought of hurting others, or the urge to do so.
- Unless an inhibiting factor is present, the urge results in an aggressive behavior.

Several studies have suggested this theory in family violence. One particular study classified a group of men who abuse their spouses as borderline batterers. The observation that was made was that these men react with rage when faced with abandonment by their spouses or actual rejection.

When faced by emotional pain, they overcome it with the thoughts about hurting, and the desire

to hurt their spouse. Unless something happens, the desire may be followed by violent behavior and rage towards their spouse.

## References

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