



CRIME, VIOLENCE AND AGGRESSION

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PSY 264
PSYCHOLOGY OF CRIME
WEEK 4-5



Understanding Violence and Aggression

This presentation explores the psychological, social, and biological dimensions of violence and aggression, examining various theories and approaches to understanding these complex phenomena.



Violence

Definitions

There are numerous definitions of "violence" in the social sciences literature. Most focus on harming others, but some include forms of self-directed violence, such as suicide and self-harm.

Physical Harm

Acts that deliberately cause physical harm or injury to another person fit most definitions. However, these parameters may be too narrow and restrictive to construct a meaningful definition of violence.

Beyond Physical

In addition to explicit actions, psychological or emotional harm is as significant as physical harm. Injury should not only be a consequence but also a defining characteristic of violence.

Source: Borum (2004), Psychology of Terrorism



Violence

Any behavior imposed by the powerful on the weak

A topic requiring multidisciplinary study

Key dimensions when evaluating violence

1. The incident that occurred
2. The victim exposed to it
3. The perpetrator of violence

WHO (2002) Definition

"The use of physical force or power, whether as a threat or in reality, against another person, resulting in or having the potential to result in injury, death, or psychological harm."

Types of Violence

- Individual violence: Perpetrated by a single person
- Collective violence: Involves multiple individuals (e.g., gang fights, systematic racism)

Types of Violence

Individual forms of violence

- Violence against women
- Violence against children
- Violence against the elderly
- Peer violence
- Sibling violence
- Dating violence
- Violence against disabled individuals
- Violence against LGBTQ+ individuals
- Violence against refugees
- Self-directed violence (suicide)

Forms of violence based on execution

- Physical violence
- Sexual violence
- Emotional violence
- Economic violence
- Cyber violence

Aggression and Violence



Violence

The use of physical force with the intent to harm another person or destroy property. It can result from situational, environmental factors, mental states, or personal and cultural beliefs.



Aggression

Typically defined as angry or violent emotions or behaviors. A person can be aggressive without necessarily being violent.



Gender Differences

Popular belief suggests men are more aggressive than women, but research shows no significant gender differences in aggression. Women tend to use verbal and indirect aggression more frequently, while men engage more in physical aggression.

Source: Borum (2004), Psychology of Terrorism



Types of Aggression

Accidental Aggression

Unintentional, often due to carelessness (e.g., a person rushing for a bus accidentally bumping into someone).

Instrumental Aggression

Arises from conflicts over objects or perceived entitlements (e.g., a student forcefully claiming another's desk).



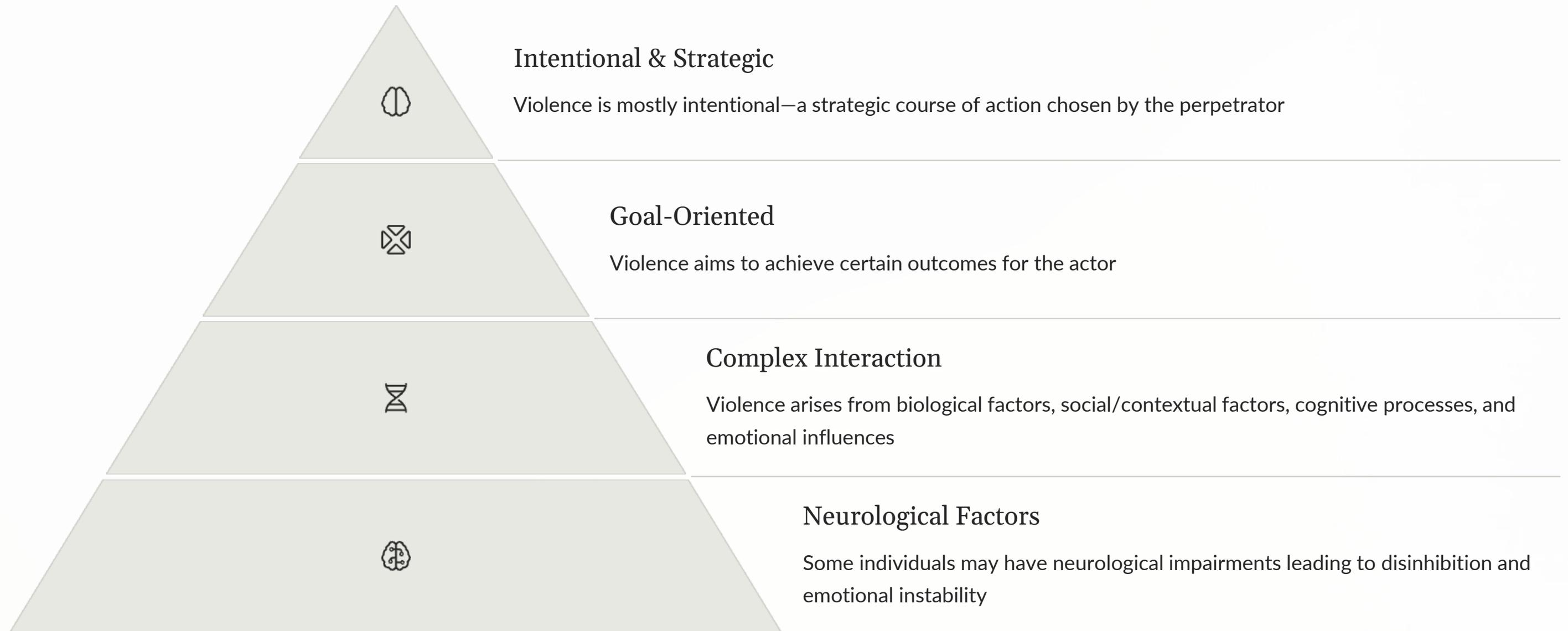
Expressive Aggression

Intentional but not meant to harm (e.g., a child throwing toys or kicking sand in frustration).

Hostile Aggression

Aims to inflict physical or psychological pain (e.g., bullying, spreading malicious rumors, retaliation due to provocation).

Psychological Approaches to Explaining Violence



Violence is not an instinct nor an inevitable result of psychological or social forces.

Source: Borum (2004), Psychology of Terrorism

Drive Theory



Psychoanalytic Model

The most widely accepted theory regarding the origins of violence is the psychoanalytic model.

Despite its influence on political science, sociology, history, and criminology, the psychoanalytic model lacks strong empirical and logical support.



Freud's View

Freud viewed aggression as an innate, instinctual human trait.

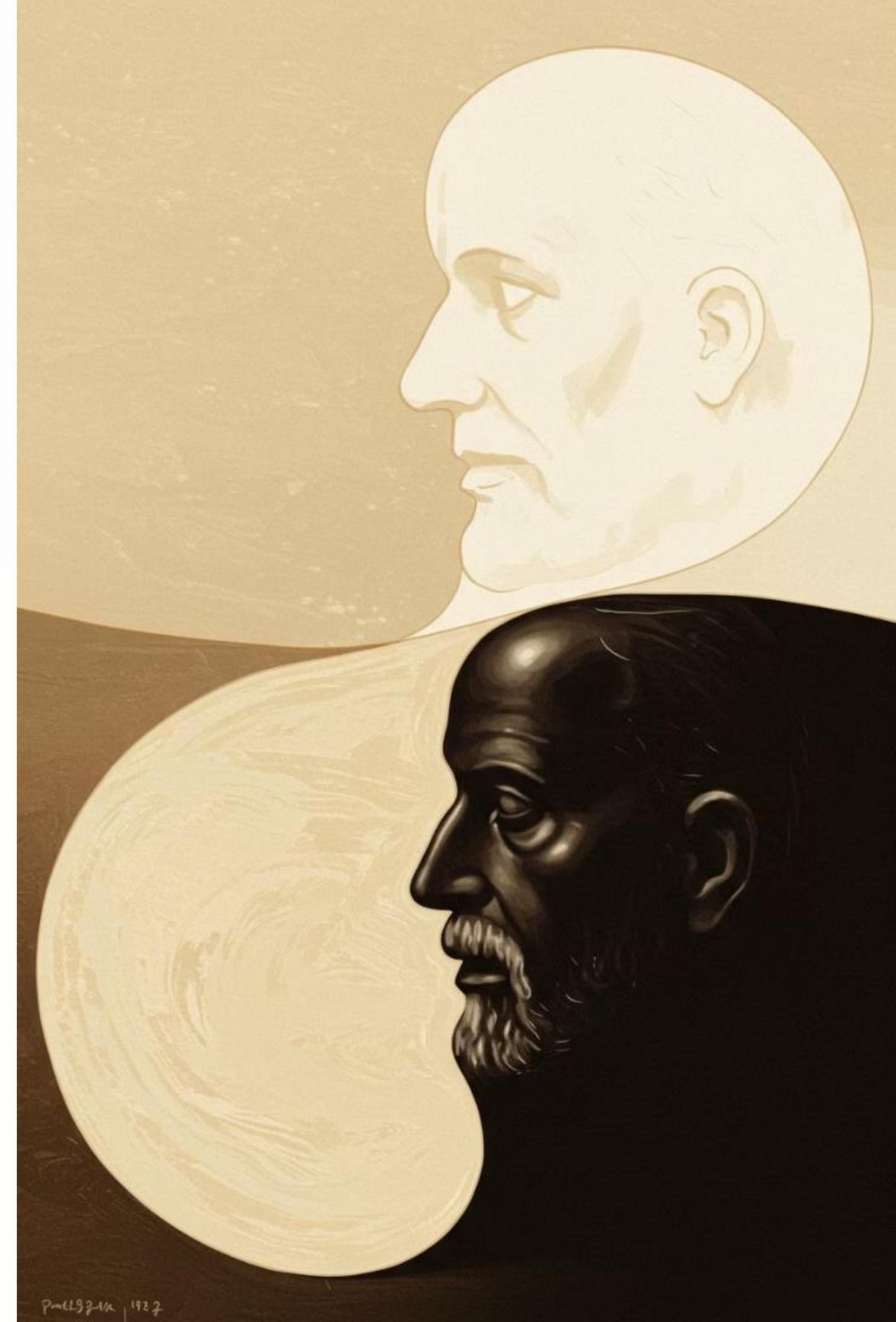


Revised Theory

He later revised his theory, proposing a balance between:

- Life drive (Eros): Associated with survival and self-preservation.
- Death drive (Thanatos): Linked to destruction and aggression.

Source: Borum (2004), Psychology of Terrorism



Drive Theory

Freud's Perspective

Freud viewed violence as a displacement of Thanatos, directing its destructive energy outward rather than inward.



Ethology

Ethology studies animal behavior in natural environments and explores human behavior from a biological perspective.

Konrad Lorenz (Ethologist)

- Aggression arises from a fundamental biological need.
- Humans develop an adaptive "fighting instinct" through evolution.
- Aggression drive is innate, but its expression is shaped by environmental exposure and interactions.
- The aggression drive accumulates over time, fueled by emotional or physiological arousal, and is released through a catharsis process.
- Cultural differences exist in aggression levels and expressions, demonstrating that aggression is environmentally manipulable rather than an inherent universal instinct.

Frustration-Aggression Hypothesis



Frustration

The blockage of goal achievement



Anger

Emotional response to frustration



Aggression

Behavioral response when anger combines with aggressive cues

Key Propositions:

1. Aggression always results from frustration.
2. Frustration always leads to aggression.

Criticism:

- Aggression can occur without frustration.
- Frustration does not always result in aggression.
- Berkowitz (1989) suggested that only "unpleasant" frustration leads to aggression.

Source: Borum (2004), Psychology of Terrorism

Learning Theories

Classical Conditioning

Associations between stimuli and responses



Operant Learning

When a behavior is followed by a desired outcome (reward), it is reinforced (becomes more likely to recur).



Social Learning Theory

Behaviors (such as aggression) are learned not only through direct experience but also by observing how such behaviors occur in the environment.

This is referred to as observational learning (vicarious learning).



When a behavior is followed by an undesired or aversive outcome, it is punished (becomes less likely to recur).

Learning Aggression

Through observation, individuals learn:

- The consequences of aggressive behavior
- How to execute aggression
- Who to direct aggression towards
- What provocation justifies aggression
- When aggression is deemed appropriate



"If aggression is a learned behavior, then a specific type of aggressive behavior—terrorism—can also be learned."



Cognitive Theories

Social Cognition

People interact with their environment based on how they perceive and interpret it.

Humans construct an internal (cognitive) map of their external (social) environment, and these perceptions—rather than objective external reality—shape their behaviors.

Intent and perception affect aggression.

Internal and external factors can influence a person's intentions and perceptions.

Cognitive Processing Deficits

Two common cognitive processing deficits observed in highly aggressive individuals:

1. Inability to generate non-aggressive solutions in conflicts (and lack of confidence in using them effectively).
2. Heightened perceptual sensitivity to hostile/aggressive cues, particularly in interpersonal interactions.

Source: Borum (2004), Psychology of Terrorism

Biological Approaches

Neurochemical Factors

Among all neurotransmitters in the mammalian brain, serotonin (5-HT) has been the most extensively researched and consistently associated with aggressive behavior.

Low serotonin levels are linked to higher aggression levels in normal, clinical, and criminal populations.

Since serotonin primarily functions as an inhibitory neurotransmitter, deficiencies in 5-HT may reduce the inhibition of aggressive thoughts/impulses.

Hormonal Factors

The effects of androgens/gonadotropic hormones on human behavior—especially aggression—are weaker and more complex than expected.

There is no strong empirical evidence supporting the idea that "testosterone poisoning" is a primary cause of disproportionately high male violence.

At most, testosterone plays a limited role in aggression.

Psychophysiological Factors

Studies on aggressive and antisocial individuals have consistently found lower-than-average arousal levels (e.g., low resting heart rate) and low reactivity.

Other neurotransmitters:

- Norepinephrine (NE) affects arousal and environmental sensitivity.
- Dopamine (DA) influences behavioral activation and goal-directed behavior.
- Compared to serotonin, the relationship between aggression and dopamine or norepinephrine is less clear.

Biological Approaches (Brain Functioning)

1

Prefrontal Cortex

The frontal lobe, particularly the prefrontal cortex, is the primary neuroanatomical region responsible for executive functions.

2

Executive Function

Studies on incarcerated individuals show a correlation between deficits in executive functioning and aggression.

3

Consistent Findings

Though the effects range from small to moderate, findings remain consistent and reliable.

Prefrontal dysfunction may explain psychophysiological deficits in individuals exhibiting antisocial and aggressive behaviors.

Prefrontal dysfunction may also account for:

- Low arousal levels
- Reduced (stress) reactivity
- Fearlessness

Source: Borum (2004), Psychology of Terrorism

Empirical Approaches to Violence

Statistical Models

Statistical models have been applied to explain violence and identify its predictors.

While some findings support risk factors for violent behavior, they do not establish causality.

Risk factors can be identified without fully understanding the causal mechanisms behind them.

Risk Factor Types

Risk factors are categorized into two types:

1. **Static risk factors:** Fixed characteristics with low likelihood of change (e.g., early onset of violence, gender).
2. **Dynamic risk factors:** Changeable characteristics influenced by individual, social, or situational factors (e.g., attitudes, peer associations, high stress levels). These are more modifiable through intervention.

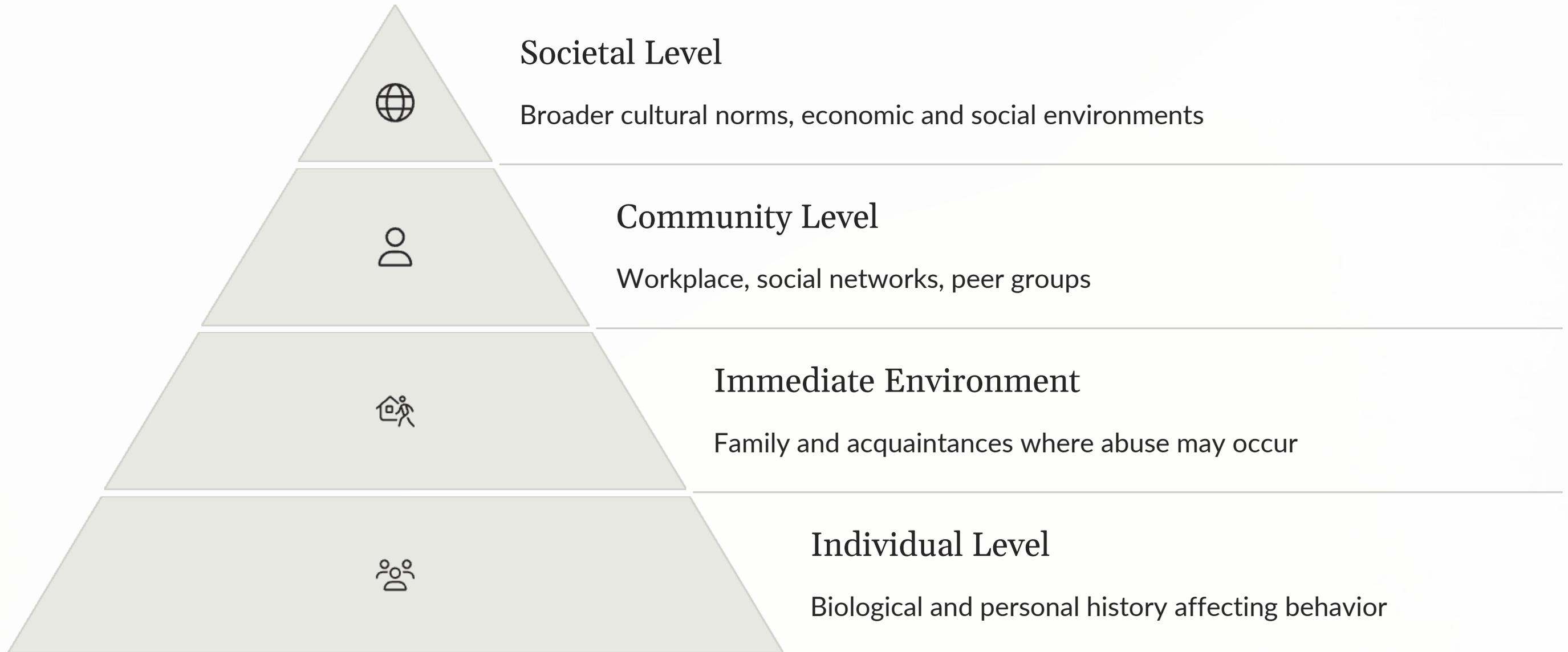
Most social science research on risk factors focuses on predicting general violence risk—i.e., an individual's likelihood of engaging in aggression within a given timeframe.

Understanding Domestic Violence and Abuse

This presentation explores the complex dynamics of domestic violence and abuse across different relationships and age groups. We'll examine various forms of violence, contributing factors, and societal responses.



The Ecological Model of Violence



Domestic Violence Overview

Main Categories

Violence against women, children, and the elderly. Most common: male perpetrators abusing female victims.

Forms of Abuse

Physical, sexual, emotional, and psychological. Most cases go unreported.

Risk Factors

Witnessing violence in childhood increases likelihood of perpetrating violence. Less frequent in egalitarian marriages.





Violence Against the Elderly



Trust Violation

Any act that harms an elderly person within a relationship where trust is expected.



Cultural Mistreatment

Situations where an elderly person experiences culturally unacceptable treatment by an adult.



Neglect

Failure of responsible individuals to meet an elderly person's daily needs.

Types of Elder Abuse

Physical Violence

- Intentional infliction of pain or injury
- Hitting, slapping, burning, tying up
- Unexplained wounds or bruises

Psychological Violence

- Intentional emotional harm
- Humiliation and intimidation
- Threatening nursing home placement

Additional Forms of Elder Abuse



Economic Violence

Unauthorized use of financial resources. Exploiting assets without consent.



Sexual Violence

Coercion into sexual activity without consent. Can involve family members or caregivers.



Elder Neglect

More prevalent than active abuse. Can be active, passive, or self-neglect.



Peer Violence (Bullying)

Physical Aggression
Pushing, hitting, kicking



Verbal Harassment
Threats, mockery, name-calling

Indirect Aggression
Social exclusion, ignoring someone

Peer violence is often a learned behavior during childhood. Based on power imbalance due to physical strength or age difference.



Sibling Violence



Underreported

The least studied form of violence despite being very common.



Poorly Defined

No clear definition—subjective and varies culturally.



Socially Accepted

Often considered normal and harmless in many societies.

Dating Violence

1

Relationship Abuse

Verbal, sexual, emotional, or physical abuse between partners



Contributing Factors

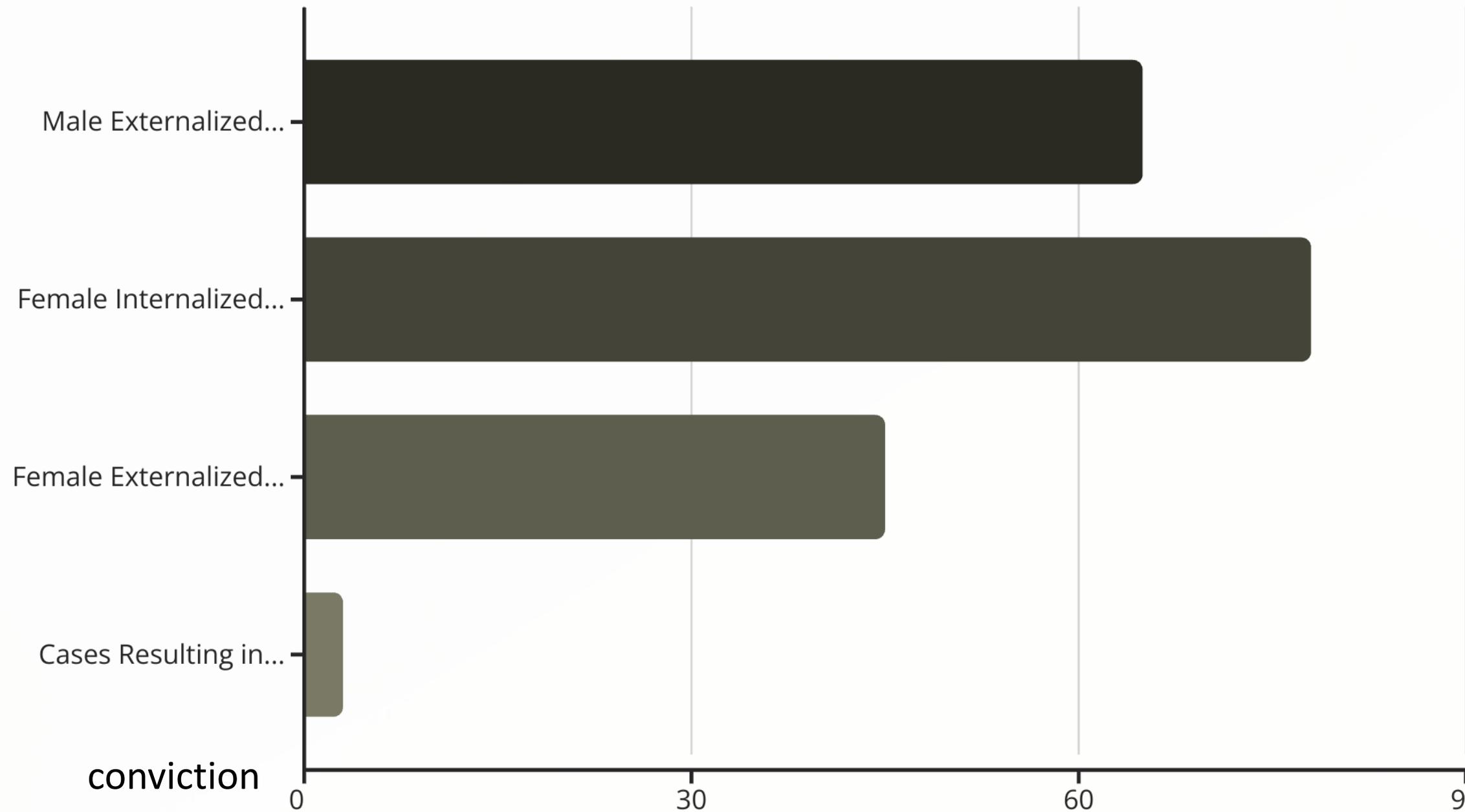
Psychological problems, gender roles, family structures



Control Purpose

To control partner's behaviors and exert dominance

Intimate Partner Violence Effects



Male victims tend to externalize distress through substance abuse. Female victims experience both internalized and externalized distress.



Challenges in Addressing Partner Violence



Legal Vulnerability

Many women remain legally vulnerable despite increased awareness.



Ineffective Protection

Restraining orders often fail to prevent violent attacks.



Limited Consequences

Perpetrators rarely face long incarceration, often increasing their aggression.



Support Services

Women's shelters have increased, but so have domestic homicides.

Forms of Violence Against Women



Physical Violence

Violation of bodily integrity. Can cause temporary or permanent damage.



Emotional Violence

Attacks on psychological well-being. Often leaves no visible marks.



Economic Violence

Restriction of access to financial resources. Difficult to detect and prevent.



Health Impacts of Violence

3x

Chronic Pain Risk

Increased long-term risk for victims

65%

Depression Rate

Among survivors of intimate partner violence

40%

Substance Use

Increased likelihood as coping mechanism

Violence negatively impacts women's physical and psychological health. Sexual violence can result in severe trauma, unwanted pregnancies, and complications.

Prevention and Intervention Strategies



Effective prevention requires multi-level approaches addressing individual, relationship, community, and societal factors. Education, support services, and legal reforms are essential components.

Violence in Society: Understanding Vulnerable Groups and Self-Directed Violence

This presentation examines various forms of violence affecting different vulnerable groups in society, including male victims of intimate partner violence, disabled individuals, LGBTQ+ people, and refugees. It also explores self-directed violence and emerging perspectives on treating violent behavior.



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Male Victims of Intimate Partner Violence

1 in 5

Men Experience IPV

Physical intimate partner violence during their lifetime

22.2%

Serious Assaults

Including kicking, pushing, punching, strangulation

1.9%

Stabbing

Most severe form of physical violence reported

Due to **gender differences in physical size and strength**, male victims are **less likely to sustain injuries** compared to female victims.

However, male victims report **mental health issues** similar to female victims, including **depression, PTSD symptoms, and suicidal thoughts**.

The severity of **intimate partner violence** is a **significant predictor of PTSD symptoms**.

Intimate partner violence is associated with **psychiatric comorbidity, disruptive disorders, and substance abuse problems**.

Source: Davies & Beech (2018) Forensic Psychology



Violence Against Disabled Individuals



Growing Concern

Violence against disabled individuals has become a significant issue in recent years



Limited Response Ability

Disabilities may limit victims' ability to respond to violence



Caregiver Violence

Highly prevalent in this group



Communication Barriers

Limited communication abilities make it harder for authorities to detect abuse (e.g., a visually impaired person unable to identify the attacker)

Individuals with **physical or mental impairments** restricting major life activities may struggle to resist violence.

Source: Polat, O. (2018). Introduction to Forensic Psychology (2nd Edition), Ankara: Seçkin Publishing

Violence Against LGBTQ+ Individuals

Primarily driven by homophobia.

LGBTQ+ stands for **Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Intersex** (Dunne, 2013).

Sexual Orientation

Defined as **emotional and sexual attraction** toward a particular gender.

Asexuality

No attraction to any gender.

Lesbian

Women attracted to women.

Gay

Men attracted to men.

Bisexuality

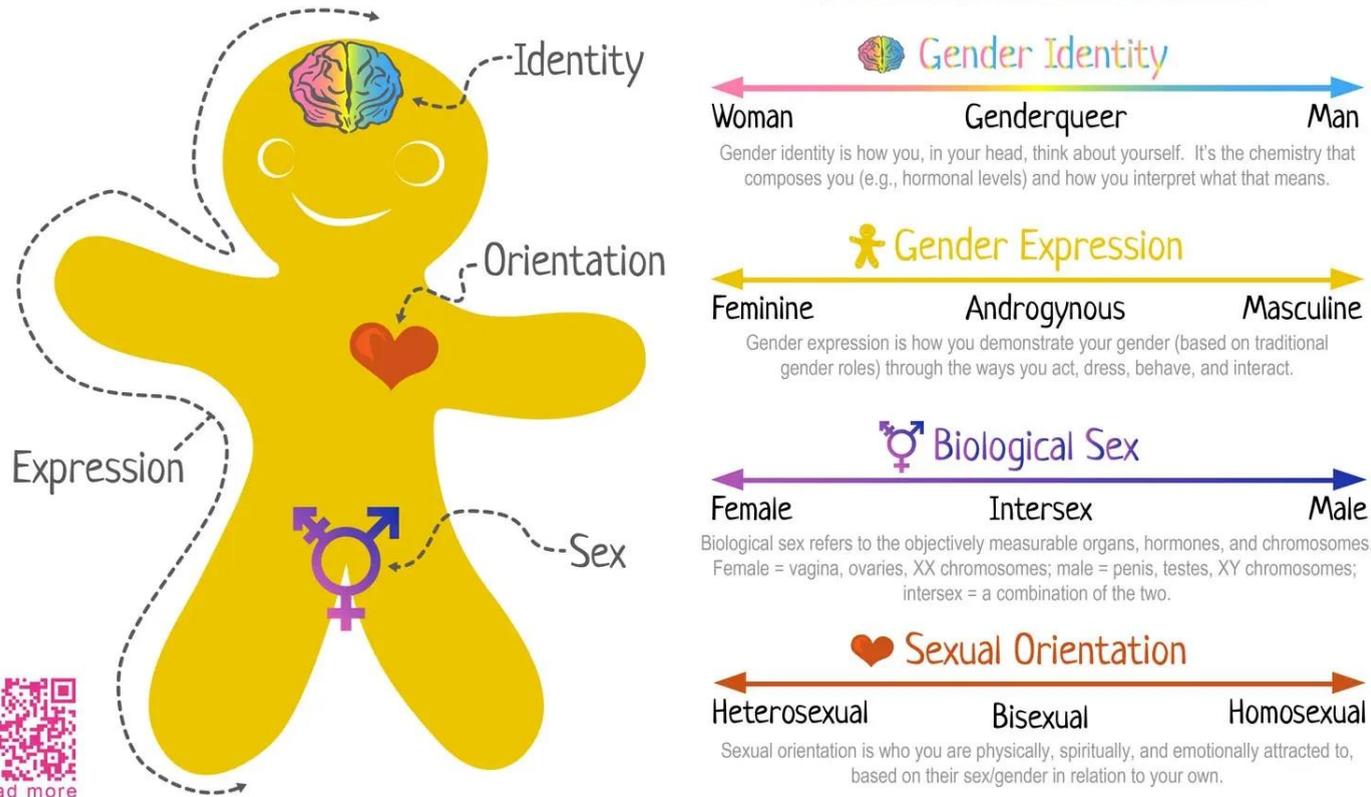
Attraction to both men and women (not necessarily equally).

Source: Polat, O. (2018). Introduction to Forensic Psychology (2nd Edition), Ankara: Seçkin Publishing

Gender Identities

The Genderbread Person

by www.ItsPronouncedMetrosexual.com



Transgender (Trans)

Gender identity does not match the sex assigned at birth. **Distinct from sexual orientation.**

Transvestite

Desires to **dress and behave** as the opposite sex. Often used for men dressing as women, but applies to women as well.



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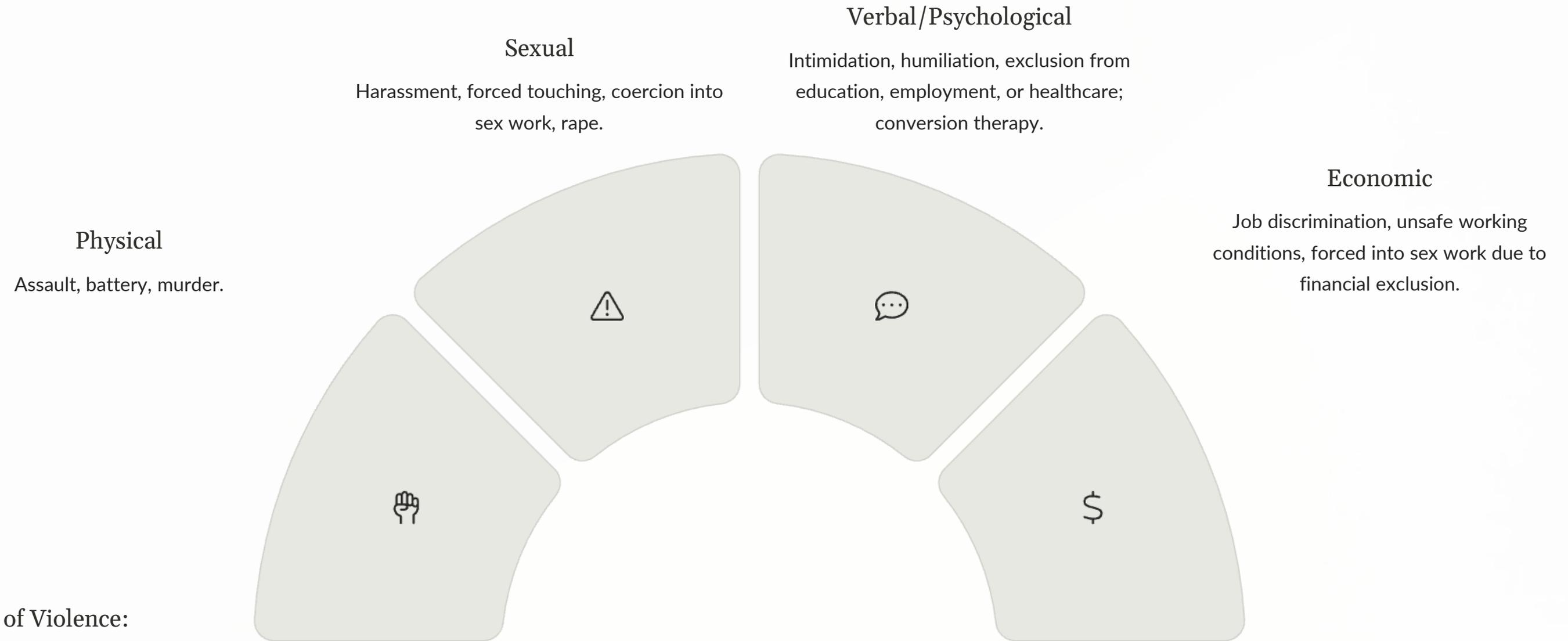
Transsexual

Identifies as the opposite sex; relates more to **internal experience than external behavior.**

Intersex

Born with **genitalia or reproductive anatomy that does not fit typical male or female definitions.**

Forms of Violence Against LGBTQ+ Individuals



Causes of Violence:

Homophobia driven by **psychological, ideological, or religious reasons.**

Homophobia: Hatred, fear, or anger toward homosexuality.

Violence Against Refugees



Increased Migration

Increased migration due to war has led to rising violence against refugees.



Vulnerable Populations

Women and children are the most vulnerable. Refugees face violence including rape, persecution, terrorism, and ethnic cleansing.



Special Protection Needs

Unaccompanied women and children require extra protection.

Definition (UNHCR, 2015): A person fleeing persecution due to race, religion, nationality, social group, or political beliefs who cannot return home due to fear.

Source: Polat, O. (2018). Introduction to Forensic Psychology (2nd Edition), Ankara: Seçkin Publishing



Self-Directed Violence (Suicide)

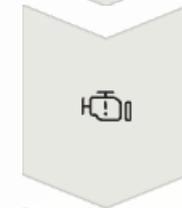
Definition: The act of **deliberately ending one's own life.**

Can be direct or indirect.



Common Features

- Self-hatred
- Conflicted emotions (wanting to die but also seeking rescue)
- **Recurring thoughts of death**
- **Hopelessness**—believing there is no other way out



Warning Signs

75% of individuals give clear signs of suicidal intent.



Critical Period

Highest risk of repetition occurs within three months after an attempt.



Risk Factors

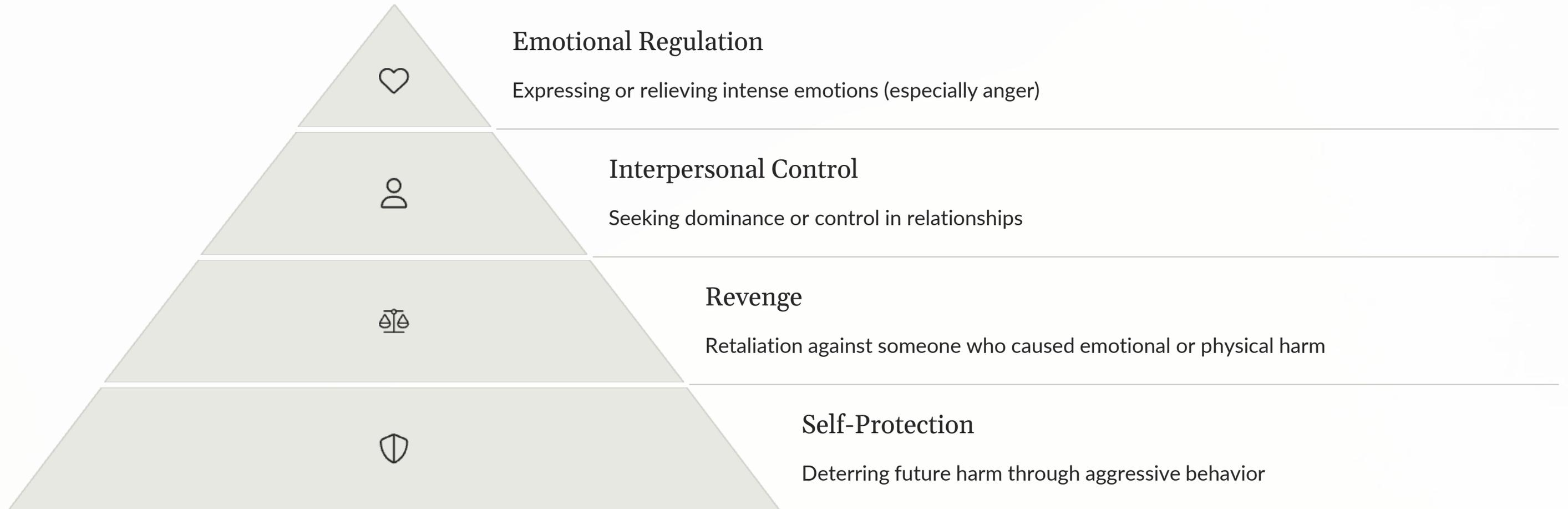
- **Multiple suicide attempts**
- **Depression, hostility, social isolation**
- **Parental psychiatric illness, abuse, or neglect**

Self-Harm as a Form of Violence

WHO Definition: "A non-fatal act where a person deliberately harms themselves without external intervention."

Self-harm is often habitual, forming repetitive behavioral patterns.

Suicide vs. Self-Harm: Suicide aims for **death**, whereas self-harm is often a means of **emotional regulation**.



Source: Pickard, H. (Self-Harm as Violence: When Victim and Perpetrator Are One).

Can Violence Be an Addiction?

Traditional View

Violence stems from **negative emotions** (e.g., anger, fear).

However, aggression can also be pleasurable.

Hedonic rewards reinforce aggressive behavior (e.g., revenge can feel satisfying).

Aggression is not just about anger—it's also about the satisfaction of retaliation.

Source: VCU News (2023) The Psychology of Violence and Aggression

Aggression may function like addiction, similar to alcoholism or opioid dependency.

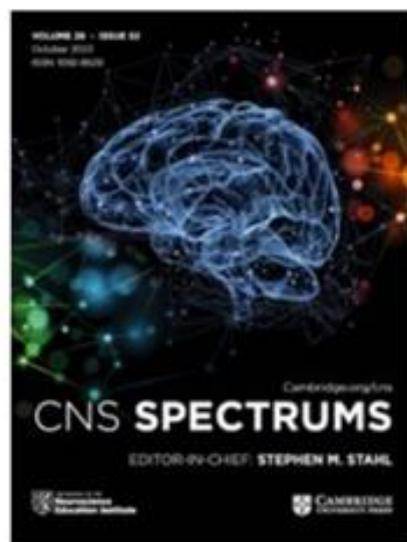
Treatment Approach

The pleasure derived from aggression operates on the same neural circuits as other addictive behaviors (**e.g., cocaine use, gambling, risky sexual behavior**).

Researchers are exploring the use of Naltrexone, a medication used for **opioid and alcohol dependence**, to treat violent behavior.

Can violence be treated as an addiction? Studies are currently testing whether **aggressive behavior can be reduced with medication**.

Source: Cambridge University Journal of CNS Spectrums



CNS Spectrums

Article contents

Abstract

Author Contributions

Naltrexone as a possible treatment for the violent patient in forensic and non-forensic settings

Published online by Cambridge University Press: 19 January 2023

Richard Skaff 

Show author details

Article

Metrics



Abstract