

## Policy Statement on Social Practices that Induce Violence

Violence is a public health problem of major proportions. The United States ranks first among industrialized developed nations in personal violence, and, whether homicide, suicide, or accidents, violence is the leading cause of death among America's youth. Violence, fear of violence, and the aftermaths of violence have eroded the quality of life in both urban and rural areas, with far-ranging dangerous effects (Violence & Youth: Psychology's Response, 1993).

There is extensive literature pertaining to the various aspects of violence, including the violent manifestations and outcomes of practices institutionalized into the country's current social order (Eron, Gentry, & Schlegel, 1995). Although emphasis has been understandably placed on the perpetrators and victims of violence, it is also necessary to focus on publicly accepted practices that are themselves violent and precipitators of violence.

Some overlooked essential aspects of this complex problem are the social practices of violence and malignant neglect that have been institutionalized into our society in the course of daily life for many Americans, but which may be destructive, even life threatening, or condone or stimulate violence. Societal attitudes may implicitly sanction some manifestations of violence. Community context may shape how a victim of violence labels or responds to his or her experience (Sorenson & Bowie, 1995). Entertainment media may characterize violence as a normative response when desires are thwarted or frustrated (Hill, Soriano, Chen, & LaFromboise, 1995).

A developmental perspective can support the assumption that people who are victimized in daily life may be less likely to perceive alternatives and options than those who have a history of more positive, healthy, violence-free life experiences (Sorenson & Bowie, 1995).

**Whereas** graphic depictions of acts of violence have become viewed in many quarters as attractive, commercially necessary content for amusement for all ages in films, television, toys and games, music, and general media resulting in multiple daily exposures to violent content (Donnerstein, Slaby & Eron, 1995; Hill, Soriano, Chen, & LaFromboise, 1995; Prothrow-Stith, 1991);

**Whereas** some aspects of society are becoming more openly polarized along racial, ethnic, cultural, economic, age, gender, sexual orientation, immigration status, religious belief, disability, health status, and power differences, increasingly expressed by psychological abuse, verbal and physical violence (Brown, Hamilton, Hoffman, & Mavaddat, 1995; Holmes, 1996; McClosky, Fernandez-Esquer, Southwick, & Locke, 1995; Seigelman, Bledsoe, Welch, & Combs, 1996);

**Whereas** the widespread socially sanctioned availability of firearms has escalated youth violence to an accelerating rate of lethal outcomes (Verhovek, 1995);

**Whereas** the conditions of unemployment and underemployment are relegating more persons and families into generations of entrenched poverty with its well-known pathological sequelae (Mead, 1989), with 21 percent of all children, 39 percent of Hispanic children, and 46 percent of African-American children included among the poor (Thompson & Hupp, 1992);

**Whereas** many urban and rural poor, and also ethnic/racial minority, populations are housed in areas that are disproportionately subject to life-threatening conditions of malignant neglect such as fires, lead poisoning, crime, and hazardous toxic dumping (Violence & Youth: Psychology's Response, 1993);

**Whereas** many schools for the urban and rural poor are neither safe nor successful in educating or even retaining their youth, thereby depriving them of hope and chances to compete for "the American dream" (Carta, 1992);

**Whereas** basic health care, prevention and treatment programs are too often not readily accessible to neglected population groups, resulting in otherwise avoidable infant mortality, illness, disability, shortened life span, or continued addictions (Baquet & Fritsch, 1995; Pear, 1993);

**Whereas** court and penal systems' inappropriate handling of youth victims and persons apprehended for even minor offenses can brutalize both the innocent and those convicted (Radelet, 1989).

**Whereas** state-sanctioned taking of lives through capital punishment has accumulated over 2,000 people in death rows, a disproportionate number of whom are ethnic minorities, and 31 of whom were sentenced for crimes committed when they were juveniles (Radelet, 1989);

**Therefore, be it resolved,** That any serious effort to understand and ameliorate the public health menace of violence must include attention to the practices that are often accepted as a normal way of organizing life for some people that constitute or promote violence. These interactive effects are within the expertise of psychology, thus

**Be it also resolved,** That efforts by APA to stimulate research and to provide leadership concerning reduction and management of violence include a focus on socially endorsed and institutionalized expressions of violence, and that social policy initiatives of the APA include that focus as well (DeLeon, 1996).

## References

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