

Violence. Mentioning the word conjures up images of assault, abuse, and even murder. In today's American society, violence is more prevalent now than ever. Annually, we see violence statistics rise and are left to wonder why. Each year 1 person out of every 40 is the victim of a violent crime. Everyone wants to find an answer to a problem that is in great need of solving. But where do we look to find the answers? What causes people to behave in a violent fashion? There are several factors that will cause people to act violently. Maybe if we explore the reasons for the behavior, and address these issues, we will win our battle with violence.

Drug and alcohol abuse in this country has always been around, but recently numbers are hitting all time highs. From 1992 to 1995, drug use among teenagers almost doubled. Drugs and alcohol are both mind altering agents which cause people to do things that they would not normally do or intensify the emotions that they feel. I believe that many violent acts are due to people being under the influence of some type of narcotic or alcohol.

In a survey conducted in the University of Tennessee for the Department of Health, the effects of drug abuse on violence were studied. It was found that almost 56% of drinkers also used drugs while drinking. Interestingly, white males were found to be more abusive than black males. The study showed direct links from substance abuse to violence and crime.

With drug use and violence rising, a direct correlation can be seen. Our society has created drug awareness programs in our schools, but obviously something must be changed in these programs. They simply are not working. The highest drug abuse numbers are seen in the teen year's age group. We must find a way to lower these numbers and reduce the number of drug users, especially children. When we have successfully done this, I think the rate of violence will also drop.

Violent tendencies can get their starts early in one's life. The way a person was raised and the type of behavior they were exposed to has an impact on their behavior as young adults and adults. A child who sees violence towards a family member or is treated violently may grow to think that this behavior is normal and accepted in our society.

In a study done in 1987 on children, ages 4 to 11, staying in a domestic abuse shelter, it was found that these children had higher levels of aggression than children who were not victims or witnesses. The girls with the highest levels of aggression were school aged, while the boys were pre-school aged. Children 12 and over were not allowed into the shelter because of the behavioral patterns they had learned at home. This shows how violence can also be a learned action.

Children who have been exposed to violence during their childhood are also more likely to have emotional problems later on in life. In a 1992 study, it was found that boys who have been exposed have 17 times more behavior and mental problems, while girls who have been exposed have 10 times more. These behavior and emotional problems can potentially lead to violence later on in life.

I think to combat this problem we need to teach women, or men, as the case may be to educate themselves on the signs of domestic abuse. I think children should also be educated on it at an early age so that they too can pick out warning signs, and can talk to someone that they trust should they feel threatened. We must help children who are victims through counseling programs so that they learn violence is wrong before they are influenced by the examples set forth at home. Counseling should also be provided so that the child also has a chance to talk about the situation and his or her feelings.

One of the biggest reasons that I believe violence occurs is ignorance. Violence in the domestic area is not so much affected by this, but senseless, random acts of crime are. In today's society, many people are ignorant. They are ignorant to ideas that they don't know about, people with different lifestyles, and people of different ethnic backgrounds, for example.

Acceptance of others has always been a problem that our culture has faced. Many have died for the right to be accepted, and many have been killed because they weren't. In America, through the 60's we saw a revolution in rights for African

Americans. It was the age of Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, and race riots. Some, who were peaceful, like Martin Luther King, were cold bloodily murdered because someone did not agree with his ideas. Race riots broke out all across the United States, resulting in much violence. Many were ignorant to the feelings and lifestyle that the blacks were forced to lead. This ignorance lead to crime.

In abortion clinics, doctors have been killed and patients attacked by pro-life activists. What the activists don't realize is that they do not have any right to make any decisions for anyone but th