

Medical, Legal and Psychosocial Aspects of

VIOLENCE IN FAMILIES

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The American Academy of Psychiatry & the Law
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Chairman's Foreword

Violent behavior has been known from the beginning of recorded human history as an almost ubiquitous phenomenon to most cultures. Yet it has been very little understood. Today, apart from wartime, most violent acts do not occur among strangers, but among persons known to one another — indeed, an alarming majority occurs among family members.

Violence in families appears in multiple forms. It may range from the more or less normal fights of sibling rivalry to parent-child corporal punishment, wife beating, child abuse, infanticide or parricide. Moreover, it is a phenomenon to which the contemporary physician has been witness in both its subtle and overt forms.

The problem of violence in families becomes of necessity a new and urgent challenge to many disciplines within medicine and beyond. It must be approached from varied points of view, including the medical, neurological, psychiatric, psychological, sociological, and legal perspectives. Thus, it is the purpose of this Symposium to consider not only the questions of etiology, but also the more pressing questions centering on our current state of knowledge regarding preventions of violence, and the management and treatment of the violent person. Questions to be discussed include the following:

What are the correlations between violent behavior and brain pathology, *e.g.* temporal lobe epilepsy or dyscontrol syndrome?

What are the correlates between violent behavior and psychiatric illness, *e.g.* paranoid schizophrenia or antisocial personality?

What are the sociological factors in the development of violence in individuals and within families and communities? Are gang-related violent episodes among adolescents on the rise?

Do we have adequate, proper diagnostic and assessment techniques to enable us to recommend management programs? Do we have available proper facilities for caring for our families in need, and, in particular, for our adolescents who pose a threat to society or to themselves?

What are the legal problems involved in the management of violent individuals, and what are the rights of adolescents who are managed by restrictive techniques?

Finally, what can the family physician do when he encounters a disturbed family or a violent family member? What are the resources he may turn to for consultation and for disposition?

To consider these questions and those offered through audience participation, we are fortunate in being able to gather a faculty from among this country's recognized experts in their fields.

We thank Dr. Herbert E. Thomas, Editor of the *Bulletin*, for the chance to present the materials of the Symposium to a wider audience.

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Symposium Chairman