

causes

of War and Violence

A. Retaliation/Escalation

An action or situation is interpreted as an "attack" or "wrong" against an individual, group or state. Action is then taken to right the "wrong" through counterattack. This creates an escalating cycle of conflict.

- an ongoing conflict between two groups of students erupts into a large fight in the parking lot because it is believed that a member of one of the groups trashed the car of the other group's "leader"
- the buildup of armies and of dreadnought battleships by Germany and Britain contributed to the start of World War I

B. Resources

Competition for limited resources (land, oil, water, gold, diamonds, etc.) may lead to conflict, or the desire of one group to have the resources of another may include the use of violence as a means to acquire them.

- a student is swarmed in a mall and his cell phone, CD player and leather jacket are taken from him
- India and Pakistan fight over disputed land in the Kashmir region

C. Class Conflict

Conflict arises between groups that have resources, represent the norms of a culture or hold power and those that have very little of the resources, are outside the norms of the culture or hold little or no power.

- passersby curse under their breath or ignore homeless people panhandling in big cities
- the RCMP are called out to break up demonstrations during the Winnipeg General Strike of 1919

D. Power-Hungry Leadership

Authoritarian law and rule by militant groups can take people into war against their wishes

- the leader of a gang orders members to fight another gang
- Christian kings led their people against Islam during the Crusades

E. Fundamentalism/Extremism

People who believe in extreme forms of religion or nationalism stir up hatred against other groups, which can spill over into violent behaviour.

- crowds boo the national anthem of opposing teams during sports events
- the Ku Klux Klan uses Christianity to justify violence against Blacks and Jews

F. Learned Behaviour

Violence and war are part of the structure of a society and become acceptable or even valued options within a culture. Male-centred structures and a military economy "teach" violence and war as reasonable options. This is then reinforced through public institutions, media and parenting.

- the film industry in many countries produces movies showing war as honourable and glorious
- countries/cultures that have a history of conflict with another country or group "teach" the next generation to continue the hatred and aggression

G. Racism

The lives and property of one race or cultural group are seen as superior to those of another group. Violence is used to reduce others' power, convert them to a better way of life or get rid of the other group altogether.

- gangs of kids from one cultural group fight with gangs from different cultural groups
- as settlement spread across North America, Aboriginal people were confined to reserves with few rights

H. Socio-cultural Differences

Differences between people, groups or cultures result in mistrust and potential conflict.

- students who are different in their clothing, skin colour, religious practices, sexual orientation, physical appearance, ability level or behaviours are often subjected to bullying by others
- the Nazis targeted Jews, Gypsies, Jehovah's Witnesses, homosexuals, socialists and people with disabilities

I. Human Nature

War is rooted in human nature itself, while the triggering mechanisms for violence are many and varied. Human beings are somehow "wired" to be violent and aggressive.

- people claim that fighting is inevitable in children
- leaders claim that war is inevitable between nations