

ADDRESSING THE ISSUE OF VIOLENCE IN
OUR SOCIETY. THE TEN MOST IMPORTANT
RULES IN THE LIGHT OF THE STUDY ON
“SOCIETY WITHOUT VIOLENCE”

Marzanna FARNICKA*
Jonathan CHUMAS**

ABSTRACT

Over 40 years ago the French Research Committee on Violence, Crime and Delinquency published a document that contained current analyses on the occurrence of social problems and their determinants, as well as guidelines to reduce risks and reduce the sense of threat and insecurity in modern society. The document became the basis for the reflection on public debate on violence in international communities and psychological practice against violence in both interpersonal and wider social relations. The combination of the individual and the social perspective gives a chance to criticise and rethink the guidelines suggested by the Committee from the point of view of such issues as community responsibility, individual rights and the current state in psychological and social care against violence. Special attention was paid to ten recommendations.

KEY WORDS

insecurity, violence, equality, social responsibility, social care, threat

* Dr Marzanna Farnicka, University of Zielona Góra; correspondence address: Instytut Psychologii, Uniwersytet Zielonogórski, al. Wojska Polskiego 69, 65-762 Zielona Góra, Poland

** Mgr Jonathan Chumas, University of Zielona Góra; correspondence address: Wydział Humanistyczny, al. Wojska Polskiego 71a, 65-762 Zielona Góra, Poland

OUTLINE OF THE REPORT

In 1977 a document called, “Du Comité D’Etudes sur la Violence, La Criminalité et La Delinquence” was published in France by Peyrefitte¹. The committee was appointed by a decision of the French prime minister in March 1976 and its aim was to diagnose the conditions of the emerging sense of insecurity and to indicate the most important and necessary actions to be taken to counteract pathological phenomena such as violence, crimes and delinquency. There were nearly 100 people in the committee: scientists (including Marc Ancei, head of the Research Centre on Criminal Policy, Jean Finatel, president of the French Section in the International Society of Criminology, Denis Szabo, Director of the International Centre of Comparative Criminology at the University of Montreal, Lloyd Weinreb, professor of law at Harvard University), practitioners (e.g. in law enforcement, justice), economists, officials, politicians, members of professional organizations and associations, and appointed experts. Under the decree of 23 March 1976 Professor Alain Peyrefitte became the chairman of the Committee. The Committee held 65 plenary meetings and 7 seminars. The full document approved by the members of the Committee was presented to the President of the French Republic on 27 July 1977. In addition to plenary work, the Committee conducted studies and analyses in five working groups. Owing to financial support from the Research and Technical Research Fund, they were able to conduct their own research. The first group, in which Pierre Deniker and Max Fernet represented the Committee, analysed the psychological and biological aspects of the phenomena studied. The group conducted studies on the psychological and biological determinants of criminal behaviour (project manager J. Leyrie). The second group worked on urbanization, housing conditions and changes in culture. In this group the committee was represented by Jacques Léauté and Francois Sperry. Their research concerned urbanization processes and their relations with insecurity and crime (project manager J. Léauté). The relations between economy and financial crime were studied by Jean Fourastié and Jacques Ellul. For their research on so-called “white collar crime” they engaged institutions such as: the Laboratory of Mathematical Economics, Statistics and Information (LEMSI), the Research Centre for the Development of International Relations and the Formation of Economic and Social Move-

¹ *Rapport Du Comite D’Etudes sur la Violence, La Criminaite et La Deliquence Society*, A. Peirefitte (ed.), Paris 1977.

ments (CEDIMES), the Central Committees for Scientific Organization (CEGOS) and the French Institute for Public Opinion Research (IFOP).

Another working group, with Simone Rozes and Jean Chazal De Mauriac as its members, studied youth protection. They examined the relations between violence and information provided in the mass media, as well as the relations between the intensity of criminal behaviour and the functioning of educational and cultural-educational institutions. Moreover, they studied the changing forms of juvenile delinquency and their attitudes towards these changes. Finally, the fifth group, with Robert Schmelck and Paul Lombard as its members, studied criminal and penitentiary aspects. They tried to determine how crime data was collected and processed by the penal and penitentiary system, and how its activities were coordinated and evaluated.

This shows that the report discussed numerous issues, important not only for French society 40 years ago but also for society in general. They are crucial for every modern state or community.

ASPECTS OF VIOLENCE

In the view of the authors of the Report, violence manifests itself on many levels. It is the violation of the individual's right and, what is characteristic, it causes a sense of insecurity, which happens by way of a specific 'process' of violence.

The process of inducing insecurity was analysed from an individual perspective as an act of violating the individual's well-being. A victim is a person who suffers mental damage or damage to the body, and a perpetrator is an individual or a group that performs such an action. Moreover, violence also applies to instrumental activities in which the individual is deprived of their rights or loses the goods so that the goals of other people or groups are achieved. This type of action is called blind violence, because in this case victims are random (e.g. victims of terrorist attacks, gangs, some legal regulations and ineffectiveness of actions taken by the state). However, these actions or their absence raise the social and individual sense of insecurity. The Report analysed selected aspects of phenomena related to violence. These were: acts of crime and its determinants, problems related to urbanization changes and housing conditions created in large cities and medium-sized towns; insecurity created by economic problems (overpopulation, job insecurity), the functioning of educational and socialization institutions (equipment, values, attitudes) and penal and penitentiary in-

stitutions (methods of data collection and management, coordination and evaluation of actions). Moreover, cultural transformations of forms of violence (gangs, terrorism, economic speculation or economic crimes) and patterns of behaviour presented in the mass media were also considered.

CONTROVERSIES ABOUT THE REPORT

The main controversy that appeared during the preparation of the Report and its 105 recommendations aimed at stopping the development of violence and crime was the issue of the death penalty. The Committee was explicitly for its abolition as one of many conditions for improving the quality of the life of societies. This issue became central because it affected the values that guided the authors of the Report. They referred to the idea of humanism as the main principle behind the organization of modern societies. Because of this assumption the Report, similarly to the Seville Statement on Violence² was criticized as a moralistic fallacy.

Another problem is the acceptance of instrumental violence and justifying it with the goal of the group in opposition to the rights of the individual. Studies of evolutionary psychologists indicate that humans may have a strong tendency to differentiate between their own group and other groups, which affects altruistic and aggressive behaviour. There is evidence that both intra-group and inter-group violence was much more prevalent in the recent past and in tribal societies, which suggests that tendencies to use violence in order to achieve goals are affected by society. Another phenomenon explained as natural is reluctance to accept migrants (the Cinderella effect) and competition between nations, social groups, clans, national and ethnic policies, etc. These aspects are the subjects of discussions and military activities within national security. From this perspective, the popularity of the term ‘insecurity culture’ in political and security sciences is explicable³. Having France as an example, Ahearne explains that “insecurity” seems to be a resource and a motif for the nationalist sections or the far right rather than the left as it moves along the spectrum from an analytic tool to a political framing and rallying device. What is interesting in many countries is that some politicians from the far right have directly and uninhibitedly integrated the term into

² *The Seville Statement on Violence*, “American Psychologist” October 1990, vol. 45(10), p. 1167–1168, <http://culture-of-peace.info/vita/1990/Seville.pdf>.

³ J. Ahearne, *Cultural insecurity and its discursive crystallization in contemporary France*, “Modern & Contemporary France” 2017, vol. 25(3), p. 265–280.

their public language. On the other hand, left-wing parties use it to fight inequality and fight for social egalitarianism as well as between societies.

40 YEARS ON – WHAT IS LEFT?

It seems clear that significant diffuse anxieties have arisen in the contemporary world as a linguistic, political and social phenomenon. Unfortunately, this phenomenon is becoming intensified also because we observe and monitor many uncontrolled events such as natural disasters, architectural disasters, accidents, wars, terrorist attacks or acts of violence. These anxieties have been dramatically heightened and spread by the media after the terror crises of September 2011, January 2015 and later ones. The sum of these insecurities cannot be captured by the adjectives ‘civic’, ‘economic’ and ‘social’, and the qualifier ‘cultural’ serves well to indicate their connection to the norms, symbols and rituals that define an inhabitable lifeworld. The use and development of cultural insecurity is discussed by Ahearne⁴. The depth of insecurity proclaimed in the media depends on the adopted political paradigm in a given country. He claims that “outside France since the 1980s in anglophone written news media four meanings for the term »cultural insecurity« have been established: ‘pure’ cultural insecurity expressing simply a relation to the art world; a nationally refracted cultural insecurity that expresses that relation through the prism of relations between nations; an anthropological-political conception; and a concept related to the human development paradigm”⁵. These elements point to the debate on insecurity in relation to individual and social dimensions, human rights, abolishing inequality, available resources, and the functioning of the justice system.

Peyrefitte’s Report is a great opportunity to rethink social policy and care. What should we do as a community, engage in peace, crisis, conflict and violence?

Pointing to France’s experience after the publication of the Report, King suggested an analysis of the comprehensive implementation of the prevention principles contained in the Report⁶. As modern history shows mere monitoring of phenomena and education was not enough to prevent terrorist attacks or instrumental violence.

⁴ Ibidem.

⁵ Ibidem, p. 270.

⁶ M. King, *How to make Social Crime Prevention Work: The French Experience*, London 1988.

The Seville Statement on Violence was another action of the international community to combat violence. It was prepared by an international meeting of scientists, convened by the Spanish National Commission for UNESCO in Seville (Spain) on 16 May 1986. It was subsequently adopted by UNESCO at the twenty-fifth session of the General Conference on 16 November 1989. The statement, then known as the ‘Statement on Violence’, was designed to refute “the notion that organized human violence is biologically determined” and to show social possibilities to create skills which can be beyond violent schemata.

A special commission to prepare a report on media violence and connection with aggression and violence was appointed in December 2011 by the International Society on Research on Aggression. The Media Violence Commission’s research-based report concluded that media violence consumption increases the relative risk of aggression, defined as intentional harm to another person, which could be verbal, relational, or physical⁷.

CONCLUDING RECOMMENDATIONS

As a conclusion of the reflection on “Society without violence”, 10 recommendations were formulated by the authors. They are, of course, based on the reflection on the original Report, which was published 40 years earlier. Intentionally, 10 recommendations were chosen from 100 – the ones that were considered by the authors of this article to be most feasible and challenging for researchers in humanities, social sciences, law and security.

1. Conduct research and disseminate results related to violence. Monitor data on violence understood as individual crime (rapes, robberies, violations of law), economic crime (using positions in business), social crime (inequality), political crime (using media, bullying), and publish them.

2. Intensify educational activities in societies by promoting evidence-based knowledge and identify various aspects of violence and their meaning and goals. Establish integrated units coordinating educational and controlling activities.

3. Create legal and financial conditions for conducting social activities. Make violence unfashionable by indicating and amplifying violations of

⁷ B.J. Bushman et al., *Risk Factors for Youth Violence: Youth Violence Commission, International Society for Research on Aggression (ISRA)*, <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/57530523f850829dde1dc031/t/5ad202726d2a73331c4449c1/1523712626745/isra-youth-violence-statement-2018.pdf>.

basic human rights in public or educational institutions. Cooperate with the media, statistical offices, politicians and officials.

4. When anti-promoting violence, consideration should be given to the consequences which those violating the norms of cooperation can bear especially if they perform political, social or public functions.

5. Apply arbitration in conflict situations, monitor and lead to the least violent resolution of disputes at the social and political level. This principle requires the creation of a climate that stigmatizes violence and values cooperative and communication activities based on facts. Exclude people who violate established communication rules from the debate.

6. In every institution where there is unequal access to goods, an external body that truly controls the rules and strategies of people with greater access to resources (e.g. “power”) should be established. This principle requires the introduction of procedures for creating clear and transparent criteria and rules of conduct, assessment or development in each institution.

7. Develop the communication skills of society members and treat them as key life competences. This requires raising competences in the interpersonal and intercultural dimension among teachers, politicians, officials, social workers, psychologists, as well as students, etc.

8. Present visions of the world where the individual has a sense of control and efficacy and where one can achieve success by respecting the right of individuals and groups.

9. Increase international cooperation in security understood not only in the national but also in the social and individual dimension. Security in its various dimensions should be made a subject of social discussion not only in the context of armed actions, crime, but also in the context of individual processes and actions.

10. Increase the importance of mental health and cooperation in the field of human rights and coordinate their observance by institutions.

REFERENCES

1. Ahearne J., *Cultural insecurity and its discursive crystallization in contemporary France*, “Modern & Contemporary France” 2017, vol. 25(3), p. 265–280.
2. Bushman B.J. et al., *Risk Factors for Youth Violence: Youth Violence Commission, International Society for Research on Aggression (ISRA)*, <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/57530523f850829dde1d->

- c031/t/5ad202726d2a73331c4449c1/1523712626745/isra-youth-violence-statement-2018.pdf (accessed: 10.10.2018).
3. King M., *How to make Social Crime Prevention Work: The French Experience*, London 1988.
 4. *Rapport Du Comite D'Etudes sur la Violence, La Criminaitte et La Delinquance Society*, A. Peirefitte (ed.), Paris 1977.
 5. *The Seville Statement on Violence*, "American Psychologist" October 1990, vol. 45(10), p. 1167–1168, <http://culture-of-peace.info/vita/1990/Seville.pdf> (accessed: 5.09.2018).

CITE THIS ARTICLE AS:

M. Farnicka, J. Chumas, *Addressing the issue of violence in our society. The ten most important rules in the light of the study on "Society without violence"*, „Kultura Bezpieczeństwa” 2019, nr 33, s. 9–16, DOI: 10.5604/01.3001.0013.1943.

Licence: This article is available in Open Access, under the terms of the Creative Commons License Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0; for details please see <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided that the author and source are properly credited. Copyright © 2019 University of Public and Individual Security "Apeiron" in Cracow