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Glossary of Concepts Related to Violence

This Glossary of Concepts Related to Violence is a glossary made by the violence and vocabulary specialists of Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare. It includes the recommended definitions to be used in violence prevention work. If the concepts of violence are not defined in cooperation, we might not be able to understand each other even when talking about the same subject. The purpose of this glossary is to support the specialists to be able to talk about violence with consistent terms and to share an understanding about terms' meanings.

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Introduction

Violence is a strong word which evokes various kinds of emotions. As a phenomenon, violence is very complicated and challenges our understanding. The Glossary of Concepts Related to Violence has been developed in collaboration by violence and terminology experts at the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare (THL), and it includes definitions of the recommended terms used in the campaign against violence.

Content warning: Reading the glossary of violence-related concepts may make the reader anxious.

The purpose of the glossary is to support experts and professionals to discuss violence using uniform terms and to share an understanding of what these terms mean. If professionals look at violence from their own perspective alone, the phenomenon may appear too narrow, and some of its characteristics, consequences and solutions may be overshadowed. If the concepts of violence do not have definitions which have been jointly determined, we may not understand each other, even when we are talking about the same issue.

The work on the concepts of violence of the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare is based on the internationally accepted WHO definition of violence. WHO defines violence as *being the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation*. As a phenomenon, violence has multiple levels, and it is the result of complicated combined effects of individual, interpersonal, social, cultural, and environmental factors.

Violence is diverse, which is why we need different kinds of terms. The glossary seeks to describe the multiple levels of violence and the content of concepts, as well as the relationships between concepts. Commonly used concepts describing violence have been looked at from different perspectives. Violence has been classified by *relationships*: family violence, intimate partner violence or domestic violence, for example. The concept of violence against women describes violence by *gender*, and violence can also be described by *population group*: violence against persons with disabilities, for example. In addition, violence can be described by *location*: street violence, for example. One common way to describe the concept of violence is by *the manifestation of violence*: physical or psychological violence, for example.

Purpose always limits the choice of words. For example, a researcher and a person working with victims of violence will speak of violence in different ways. Perspective also has an impact: for example, when you want to highlight the gender-based characteristics of violence as a phenomenon, you use the terms that best describe it.

The victim's perspective, however, takes precedence. Everyone has the right to receive help and support after experiencing violence so that recovery can take place in as favourable conditions as possible. The words that professionals use have an impact on the victim's experience of both the violent event and of how easy or difficult it is to get help. It is therefore important that the diversity of violence as a phenomenon is understood, and that the victim's point of view is respected. That is also the objective of this glossary.

The victim's point of view is also justified from a human rights perspective. Violence is always a violation of human rights, and work against violence is largely based on implementation of the obligations of existing human rights conventions. Moreover, national criminal law provisions on the one hand limit the concepts of violence, but on the other hand also enable and challenge us to talk about violence outside of them.

After the Institute's working group finalised its work on the glossary, it was sent for comment to an extensive group of experts. The list of organisations and individuals who have sent their comments can be found in the appendix to the glossary. The comments included many valuable observations and suggestions. One important general observation was that the work was based on the WHO definition of violence: it defines violence as being an intentional act. Thus, intentionality is and will be an integral part of the definition. Intentionality does not mean that the act was committed maliciously, but that it was committed knowingly.

Some of the proposed additions were not included. Several of the proposed terms can be defined through concepts already in the glossary. As an example, the phenomenon that is sometimes referred to as alienation is understood in this glossary as being psychological violence. Some concepts are new, and it is not clear in what form they will become established in language use (e.g. hate speech, online shaming, and digital violence). The debate on their definitions is lively and progressive, and they cannot yet be clearly separated from other phenomena.

In everyday language concerning phenomena, bullying is often described as a separate concept, but it can be better conceptualised through the forms of violence presented in the glossary. Bullying can be psychological, physical, or sexual, and it can take place in any environment. Disciplinary violence and educational violence are forms of violence, and separating them into their own concepts was not considered necessary. The glossary does not want to create the impression that any kind of violence is an acceptable part of raising children. Human trafficking is also violence, but in this glossary, it is not treated as being a separate form of violence.

The glossary harmonises and specifies the use of terminology. Terms have been defined using concepts that appear to be established at this moment. However, the glossary has some inevitable limitations. There are so many forms of violence that it is not possible to name all its manifestations. New terms will emerge, as will terms related to them, so the glossary is a living document which can be updated when necessary. We want to challenge ourselves and others to reflect on our own actions within the structures of anti-violence work, and to consider the effects of the language that we use.

Finally, we would like to thank the entire working group for their long-term work on the glossary, and we would also like to thank everyone who sent in their comments, as well as the Institute's terminology experts Virpi Kalliokuusi and Johanna Eerola for their invaluable help when creating this glossary.

Authors

On the terminology work in the context of this glossary

Terminology work is characterised by the fact that it centres around concepts. Where dictionaries look at words and their meanings in different contexts, terminology glossaries are based on concepts and the relationships between them.

The essential and distinctive characteristics of concepts included in the definition must be such that they apply to all objects falling within the scope of the concept but do not exclude from its scope those objects which fall within it. The definitions in this glossary have therefore been drafted in such a linguistic form that they can be used to identify the relationship of each concept with its related concepts and the place of the concept in a wider conceptual system.

In this glossary, concepts are presented as being concept-specific entities (records) that begin with a running number. The recommended term is shown in bold. It is recommended that this term be used for the concept in question in various language-use situations. If the term refers to a general concept, the first letter of the term is always written in lower case.

Below the term is the linguistic description (definition) of the concept in question, which limits the real-world phenomena (so-called objects) that fall within the scope of the concept and that identify and distinguish the concept from related concepts.

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Definitions begin with a lowercase letter and do not end with a full-stop. If there is a proper name at the beginning of a definition, the definition starts with a capital letter.

Indents mark possible notes. Notes contain additional information to supplement the definition of the concept. Notes are written in the form of a normal sentence, starting with a capital letter and ending with a full-stop.

The glossary is hierarchical so that subordinate concepts are more narrow specialised cases of broader generic concepts. Hierarchical generic concepts lead to various sets of subordinate concepts using different subdivision criteria (e.g. subordinate concepts of the concept of violence according to the following subdivision criteria: by relationship, by gender, by population group, by location, by manifestation). Subordinate concepts according to one subdivision criterion, i.e. belonging to one dimension, are mutually exclusive coordinate concepts and cannot be combined into a new concept.

The recommendation “rather than” means that the term is used in limited contexts, such as in legislation, but is not recommended for other contexts.

1. Basic concepts related to violence

1.1 Violence

the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation

In the WHO definition, violence is specifically linked to the act itself and not to its outcome. Unintentional cases, such as most road accidents and burns, are excluded from the definition.

The inclusion of “power” in the definition alongside the “use of physical force” broadens the nature of a violent act. Conventional perceptions of violence are extended to include acts, threats, and intimidation resulting from a power relationship. In this way, in addition to the more obvious acts of violence, **neglect and omission** are also included.

The context for use of the term “**maltreatment**” is more limited in Finnish than the context for the term “violence”. “Maltreatment” is used in situations where violence occurs in a relationship based on responsibility, trust, or power against a more vulnerable person, such as a child or an elderly person.

1.2 Exposure to violence

a situation in which a person or a group of people must live in a violent environment or experience the fear or consequences of violence in their close relationships

Typically, the term is used in situations in which a minor must witness violence between close adults or live in an atmosphere of threat.

2. Concepts of violence at two different levels of review

2.1 Violence at community level

2.1.1 structural violence

violence in which the structures, systems of power, norms, and practices prevalent in society undermine the rights and position of individuals or groups of people in relation to others, thereby preventing the fulfilment of their basic needs, threatening their lives, health or wellbeing, or otherwise harming them

Structural violence is indirect in that it does not directly target individuals, but it is individuals or groups of individuals who suffer its consequences.

Structural violence includes, for example, inhuman political decision-making which violates human rights, inadequate implementation of legislation, the unfair and asymmetric distribution of power and resources, discrimination against groups of people, human rights violations, and media and advertising that glorify and promote violence. Structural violence hinders the universal realisation of human rights. Structural violence may be related to sexism or racism in society, for example.

2.1.1.1 institutional violence

structural violence arising from the unequal and damaging structures, systems of power, norms or practices of the various institutions that govern society

2.1.1.2 community violence

structural violence arising from the unequal and damaging structures, systems of power, norms or practices of the various communities that operate in society

Community violence can manifest itself in communities in the actions of those in power against the more subordinate, for example. It is typical of community violence that the responsibility for the actions of individuals is clouded by the community. Community violence is often anonymous, and the threat of violence can be felt throughout the community.

2.1.2 collective violence

violence between large groups of people or communities to further their social, political, or economic goals

Collective violence is divided into social, political, and economic violence. Subgroups of collective violence provide an indication of the possible motives of the larger groups of people or states that perpetrate the violence. Violent acts by large groups may have multiple motives.

2.1.2.1 collective social violence

collective violence perpetrated to further a specific social objective

Social violence includes crimes caused by the hatred of organised groups, acts of terrorism and harassment, for example.

2.1.2.2 collective political violence

collective violence perpetrated to further a specific political objective

Political violence includes wars and similar violent conflicts, state violence, and similar acts by large groups, for example.

2.1.2.3. collective economic violence

collective violence with the aim of upsetting the economic activity of society or a community, impeding access to basic services or creating economic disparities between groups in society

Collective economic violence may include attacks by large groups seeking financial gain, for example.

2.2 Violence at the level of interpersonal relationships

2.2.1 Breakdown into subordinate concepts by the interpersonal relationships related to violence

2.2.1.1 domestic violence

violence whose perpetrator and target are or have been in a close relationship

Domestic violence can be targeted at a person's current or former partner, child, close relative, or another close individual.

2.2.1.2 family violence

domestic violence against a member of the same family

In family violence, violence against any member of the family always exposes everyone in the family to violence and its consequences.

2.2.1.3 intimate partner violence

domestic violence against a person's partner or current or former spouse

2.2.1.4 dating violence

intimate partner violence in relationships between young people

Dating violence is different in nature from adult intimate partner violence, although they share some of the same characteristics. A particular difference is that young people's emotional and cognitive skills are still developing. Young people do not necessarily perceive what is desirable and allowed while dating because

they do not yet have the same social skills in relationships as adults do. According to the School Health Promotion Study, girls are more often victims of sexual violence compared with boys. Boys are more likely to report violence against them in public places, girls in closed spaces.

2.2.2 Breakdown into subordinate concepts by the gender of the victims

Gender-based violence means violence in which its forms, practices and meanings differ according to gender. From a gender perspective, violence is not the same; instead, there are differences in the experience, use, characteristics, and consequences of violence.

2.2.2.1 violence against women

violence which is targeted at women because of their gender

Violence against women often manifests itself as domestic violence, sexual violence, and gender-based harassment. Violence against women can also take the form of trafficking women, forced prostitution, genital mutilation, threats, assaults and murder based on family honour, or mass rape as an instrument of war, for example.

2.2.2.2 violence against gender minorities

violence which is targeted at gender minorities because of their gender identity or gender expression

Gender minorities include intergender, transgender, non-binary, agender and cross-dressers. In many contexts, instead of the term “gender minority” it is recommended to refer directly to the groups meant or use the term “gender diversity” which describes the gender variations of all people.

2.2.2.3 violence against men

violence which is targeted at men because of their gender

Violence against men is often perpetrated by a familiar or an unknown man, often in a public place. An attitude which tolerates violence against men is deeply ingrained in our culture. Violence against men may take the form of genital mutilation or forcing men to commit violent acts, for example.

2.2.3 Breakdown into subordinate concepts by the population groups as victims of violence

2.2.3.1 violence against children

violence which is targeted at children so that it causes or may cause physical injury or endanger the child’s wellbeing, safety, health, or emotional development

2.2.3.2 violence against the elderly

violence which is targeted at the elderly so that it causes or may cause physical injury or endanger the wellbeing, safety, or health of the elderly victim

2.2.3.3 violence against persons with disabilities

violence against persons with disabilities is related to their dependence on another person in coping with everyday life, in particular

These forms of violence include damaging assistive devices, manipulating medication and neglecting assistance necessary for the disabled person. In addition, persons with disabilities may be victims of the same types of violence as other people.

2.2.3.4 violence against sexual minorities

violence which is targeted at sexual minorities on the basis of their sexual orientation

2.2.3.5 violence against ethnic and cultural minorities

violence which is targeted at ethnic and cultural minorities on the basis of their characteristics or way of life which may differ from that of the majority

This type of violence often includes racist characteristics, especially when a person’s ethnic or cultural background is outwardly different from that of the majority.

2.2.4 Breakdown into subordinate concepts by the location of the violence

2.2.4.1 violence in private

violence which takes place in private locations or private spaces, such as homes

2.2.4.2 violence in public

violence which takes place in public locations or public spaces, such as workplaces, schools, or institutions

2.2.5 Breakdown into subordinate concepts by the manifestation of violence

2.2.5.1 physical violence

violence which is manifested as an intentional violation of a person's physical integrity

2.2.5.2 psychological violence

violence which is manifested as the intentional harming of a person's psychological wellbeing

Psychological violence can take the form of subjugation, isolation, or control of another person.

2.2.5.2.1 stalking

psychological violence which causes fear or anxiety in a person or group of people by repeated and intentional threats, following, surveillance or other such activity

2.2.5.3 sexual violence

violence which is manifested as an intentional violation of a person's sexual integrity or sexual self-determination

When using the term, it should be remembered that from the perspective of the victim of violence, sexual violence is not a sexual act or experience.

The use of the term "sexual abuse" used in criminal law is not recommended because it misrepresents the content of the concept defined here.

2.2.5.3.1. sexual abuse of a child

sexual violence in which a child is used to fulfil the sexual needs of a person older than the child or to fulfil the perpetrator's need to subjugate or hurt the child

Sexual abuse of a child is a problematic concept because these acts always constitute violence against the child. The acts are characterised by the age difference between the child and the perpetrator and the child's development phase.

2.2.5.4 economic violence

violence which is manifested as the intentional infringement or restriction of a person's self-determination related to their financial affairs

2.2.5.5 chemical violence

violence which is manifested as the intentional harming of a person's physical or psychological wellbeing using medicines, psychoactive substances, chemicals, solvents, or other similar substances

2.2.5.6 instrumental violence

psychological violence which is manifested as the intentional harming of people close to a person or the property of the person to achieve a specific goal

Instrumental violence may include destruction of a person's property or the harming of pets in order to make the victim suffer, to control their activity or to limit their opportunities to act.

2.2.5.7 cultural violence

violence in which a harmful practice linked to a specific culture is intentionally used to violate or restrict the right to self-determination or integrity of a person or a group of people

Female genital mutilation, forced marriage and exclusion from the community are examples of cultural violence.

2.2.5.7.1 violence related to religion

rather than: religious violence, spiritual violence

a manifestation of cultural violence in which a harmful practice linked to a specific religion is intentionally used to violate or restrict the right to self-determination or integrity of a person or a group of people

2.2.5.7.2 honour-based violence

rather than: honour violence

cultural violence which is manifested as psychological pressure or the use of physical force against a person or group of people in a situation in which a person or group of people are suspected of having violated the community's chastity principles

2.2.5.8 neglect

violence in which a person or a group of people is deprived of care, assistance or other fulfilment of their basic needs in a situation in which they are dependent on them

ANNEX

Comments were requested or received from the following organisations and individuals:

Rape Crisis Centre Tukinainen, Women's Line, The Mannerheim League for Child Welfare, Victim Support Finland, Helsinki Girls' House, Helsinki Boys' House, SETA - LGBTI Rights in Finland, Viola - Free from Violence, Save the Children, Federation of Mother and Child Homes and Shelters, Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare, Finnish National Agency for Education, The European Institute for Crime Prevention and Control, SERI Support Centre for Victims of Sexual Assault, members of the Committee for Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, and Jukka Lehtonen, Minna Piispa, Anu Mantila, Pekka Heikkinen, Marianne Notko, Marianne Mela, Lisa Grans, Eija Paavilainen, Leo Nyqvist, Tarja Pösö, Merja Laitinen, Tomi Timperi, Juha Holma, Katariina Kilpeläinen, Raisa Cacciatore, Markus Kaakinen, Anna-Mari Salmivalli and Marja Darth.