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Psychology of Violence, a developmental perspective

(Session: Mental Illness and Dangerousness)

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I. Introduction

Extreme human conditions such as aggressive behaviour, rape and violence inflict our thinking with a high level of emotionality mainly governed by fear and anxiety or disgust rage and revenge.

In such a mental state we are no longer able to analyse carefully and conceptualize in a highly differentiated fashion. We are rather governed by archaic thinking and behaviour patterns ourselves, one might say we get slightly contaminated by the criminals we are supposed to evaluate, judge or treat and therefore our judgement as well as treatment gets reduced in professional quality, is mainly influenced by our moral judgement of common sense or folk psychology.

One way of trying to keep ourselves mentally cool and objective is by turning to a statistical technique of analysis, a generalized level of thinking rather than an individualised analysis of the biography of this very person in question. But if we turn to fast to a statistical generalized level of analysis of a human phenomenon we loose many important details in the complex thinking and behaviour pattern and our understanding of this phenomenon remains respectively crude and primitive or superficial.

This might be one of the reasons why we are not any further in our understanding, treatment and prevention of human violence.

In my following talk I will therefore not turn to any statistical support of my concept of psychology of violence. I will instead try to analyse carefully all the cases of violence I have ever seen in person or on paper in a most sophisticated clinical fashion in order to come up with an as differentiated concept of violence as possible. I'll try to bring in some interactive, developmental aspects in criminal behaviour.

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II. What circumstances evoke aggression as a basic human behaviour pattern

- Aggression is not just a bad behaviour of a nasty little boy or girl, who doesn't know how to behave him- or herself, aggressive behaviour is a basic human condition closely related to survival strategy and defence.
- Aggressive behaviour always arises under conditions when a human individual feels threatened by somebody or something.
- The threat to a person can be on a physical, emotional, mental or social level.

1. Physical Threats

- Getting physically too close to an anxious person can pose a physical threat and therefore provoke aggressive reactions.
- Touching a person physically or pushing him or her aside or looking into his eyes too long is a threat or even an offence and can set off aggressive behaviour.
- Hitting or threatening with a weapon of course is a clear physical threat and usually does provoke aggressive behaviour as a self defence.
- Demanding extreme physical labour from somebody in a subordinate position can also represent a physical threat to that person and release aggressive behaviour.
- Not allowing a person to attend to his or her physical needs such as eating when hungry, drinking when thirsty and going to the toilet when necessary, can equally represent a physical threat.

2. Emotional threats

- Speaking in a loud voice to somebody can raise anxiety and therefore represents a threat which elicits aggressive behaviour.
- Passing moral judgement putting somebody down on his behaviour or his person in general represents an extreme emotional threat by provoking feelings of guilt, inferiority complex etc.
- Scolding or reprehending somebody of course represents even a stronger threat.
- Screaming and shouting at somebody is an emotional offence and represents a strong threat.

3. Mental threats

- Arguing more cleverly and faster than the discussion partner can be a mental threat to him (preconference, wanting to cut the throat).

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- Just asking a question or asking questions in a cross fire, putting mental traps and finding the loop holes in a persons arguing pattern is an other mental threat.
- Just being more clever than the discussant partner can already pose a mental threat and provoke aggression.
- Setting the rules of discussion and the rules of thinking can be a restriction to the persons freedom of thinking and speech, and therefore represents a mental threat.
- Arguing in a very powerful way can also be a threat to the other person who holds a different opinion.
- Just having a different conviction and thereby threatening the belief system can be a threat to the other as being demonstrated in all the religious wars which are the most ferocious ones.

4. Social threats

- Man is a social animal and therefore used to be socially connected, so if you cut his social ties he gets aggressive.
- If he looses his social connection he gets anxious and feels threatened.
- If an individual doesn't get enough accepted by a social group he feels threatened and in return can get aggressive towards that group.
- If he is not admitted to a social group he would like to be a part of, he feels threatened and turns aggressive towards that group.
- If he has been a part of that group and gets excluded for some kind of mis-conduct he feels threatened and can turn aggressively back to the group.
- If the group coerces him to obey to certain rules or code of conduct which go against his personality or which he simply is not able to follow he again feels threatened and can react with aggression.
- The more disturbed a person is the less he/she can take any threats. Before a criminal act, one can often find these narcissistic injuries.

III. Threats as educational tools in childhood

- Many parents use threats as an educational device to obey. A child is only partially able to defend himself aggressively against a threat because he/she is dependent on the parents for survival. Only when coming into adolescence and adulthood the youngster starts to react aggressively towards threats by his parents.

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- So threats can be used by the parents to force a child into obedience.
- Threatening of course can also be used towards adult persons in order to force them into submissive behaviour.
- If one threatens an adult person too much in his or her total existence, submissive behaviour can no longer be elicited but instead aggressive self defensive behaviour crises.
- Normal neurotic adults can absorb a lot of threats while nothing happens.
- But children, who have been threatened a lot in their personal existence by educational methods, can turn highly aggressive when they come into adolescence and adulthood.
- They are highly sensitive towards threats by their environment and react very fast with aggression. This all the more if they have a certain impulsive temperament.
- The more parents are overstrained the more they are threatened in their own existence and therefore start to threaten their children when they misbehave. This is often the case in disadvantaged families.
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IV. Children who provoke more "educational threats" in their parents

- Children who are more difficult to educate such as impulsive children with attention deficit, hyperkinetic symptoms or learning disorder are likely to elicit and attract much more threatening educational behaviour from their parents, if the parents use this type of educational behaviour at all.
- These type of children are much more of a behavioural problem at home and in school and therefore get constantly reprehended or threatened in their personal existence in many different ways.
- They are often in the center of aggressive interaction at home and in school, they are constantly negatively focused.
- These children when becoming adults are either oversensitive to any kind of criticism from their environment or numb all together. They react immediately with a defensive strategy which often turns into aggression, when they get criticised, or don't react at all, ignore everything.

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V. Delinquency and ADD or ADHS in children

- Among delinquents one can find many of these "hyper kinetic children" or children with ADHS. All the descriptions one finds for psychopath such as low impulse control, projects the problems on to his environment is defensive doesn't learn from the past etc. etc. also relate to such children with ADD or ADHS.
- In my estimation, the organic or genetic basis for delinquency is part of the ADHS in children.
- The dysfunction of the frontal lobe or the decrease in size of the frontal lobe as found among delinquents can also be related to the ADHS since it is assumed that their is a dysfunction of this part of the brain which is stimulated with the drug Ritalin.
- One might ask the question why not all children with ADHS become criminals. The discriminating factor in this regard according to my experience is the educational style of the parents of this child. Parents with a very threatening and punishing educational style are more likely to "produce" a delinquent adolescent when they have a ADHS child while parents who don't have this type of educational style don't.
- The educational system which often can't handle these children adds the other part to this unfortunate development toward delinquency of these children.
- The correction homes into which these children are placed when the parents are totally overwhelmed with their educational task are usually not any better in handing these children and therefore add the rest to this negative development.
- Children with ADHS are highly sensitive to emotional overflow in their learning behaviour which means that they need an absolutely emotionally neutral atmosphere in order to be able to learn.
- As soon as they get emotionally overstimulated they can not learn any more, their emotions fludd any rational thinking, they get irritable and aggressive, they can no longer control their impulses, which is exactly how one describes the delinquents too.
- For this very reason ADHS children do often much better with computers than with human teachers. The computers are absolutely unemotional they don't get mad, when the child doesn't give the right answer or misbehaves, they just don't work or tell him on the screen that he has made a mistake, but without emotions.

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VI. Calculated neurotic sadistically violence

So far I have only described the impulsive violence and it's origin, but there is also another type of violence which I might call the neurotic, sadistically calculated violence, which is performed in a highly sophisticated strategic way and might be related to the hunting behaviour of man, or the poisoning behaviour of women.

- The origin of this type of violence is more difficult and complicated to explain.
- The threat to the personality of the child and young adult has usually been much more subtle and can not so easily be detected.
- It also doesn't need the impulsive type of behaviour of an ADHS child.
- The psychic injuries by a significant other person are sort of stored over time and are therefore totally unnoticeable. But when a certain level is reached, they can no longer be stored. The storage is full and the person has to do something in order to get a relief through retaliation.
- Since the anger and aggression can not be let out towards the significant person he is dependent from, a replacement object has to be found and a displacement takes place.
- This replacement object-person can be found like a hunter looks out for a deer to be hunted down.
- The killing is done like a hunter kills his animal prey, he clearly is in the dominating position over his prey, often sexual activity is involved in it.
- When the act of killing is accomplished the „hunter criminal" turns back into the weak and submissive person again. He then has to efface all the traces in order not to get caught and become a prey himself.
- Since these types of criminals are usually highly intelligent they also find many ways of effacing, erasing their traces and many ways to mislead their „juridical hunters".
- What does this tell us? What can we do with this insight?

VII. Measures to be taken in order to prevent violence in the face of this type of psychology of violence

- Prevention of violence should already start at an early age by supporting overwhelmed parents with ADHS children.

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- Teachers should be taught and supported in handling these so called behaviourally disturbed Kids since they are usually known as such already since first grade according to findings of Mrs. Sheilagh Hodgins.
- Correction homes should be aware of the fact that emotional threatening behaviour as punishment by the "educator" does not help to make the person change his behaviour but rather makes them more aggressive as a self defence.
- The behavioural correction of violent behaviour has to take place in a very correct emotionally neutral, even caring atmosphere in order to be successful.
- Any kind of neg. emotionality on the part of the "psycho social educator" only raises defensive aggression on the side of the delinquent and therefore does not fulfil the purpose.
- In order to be able to behave in this caring emotionally neutral way vis à vis the delinquent of course the staff would need a quite sophisticated therapeutic training.
- Therefore we would need many more therapeutic capacities in prisons and correction homes from where the rest of the staff could also be trained. And first of all we should invest more in prevention.

Conclusion

We all know that punishment is not really a good educational tool and therefore does not really change criminal behaviour but rather represents revenge on a juridical level – beside protecting the public from further criminal acts – so why don't we try something else and use our psychological knowledge of today and practice therapeutic jurisprudence. Every criminal is a psychologically and behaviourally disturbed person and therefore should be treated if possible while he is in detention. May be we would do more for the public security of the public by taking this route because most of them come out one day, but usually more disturbed than they entered. And second we should not be so much preoccupied with the end of the tale, when nothing can be done any more, but rather invest much more in prevention of crime.

Story: boy who wanted to help his mother by stealing money from the divorced father. Reaction of the environment: boy should be put in correction home, punished.

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My Presentations on Psychology of Violence

- introduction of my background
- critical not statistics remarks observation of conference
- comprehension of mental illness and misbehaviour, no fixed category but continued process, interactive dynamic concept
- aggression, violence is human social behaviour reaction of self defence (survival strategy) not prone to reasoning (yet cognitive therapy is used for therapist)
- when does it get elicited

  physical threat
  psychological/emotional threat
  mental threat
  social threat (example of conference)
- the more disturbed a person, the faster he/she feels threatened, narcissism
- care taking of children and adult delinquents by threatening behaviour (poor parents)
- difficult children
- ADHD
  - perception deficit
  - learning disability
  - impulsiveness
  - deviation behaviour

  → difficult task for parents
  brain dysfunction before character dysfunction
  impulsiveness
- ADHD
  - schizophrenia
  - delinquent
  - drug

  sample of sun who stole

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Conclusion

1. Give support to parents for difficult children ⟶ prevention at a early stage, such as head, start programs with longitudinal studies, individual follow ups of patient and provider quality.
2. Promote therapeutic jurisprudence in cooperation with psychiatric services with clinically well experienced professionals and have less sophisticated discussions at the back end of the problem.
3. If you do run a research-project, consult an experienced clinitian first or along the road, you can avoid many unnecessary roads and expenses.

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