



Violent Crime Typology and Continuum

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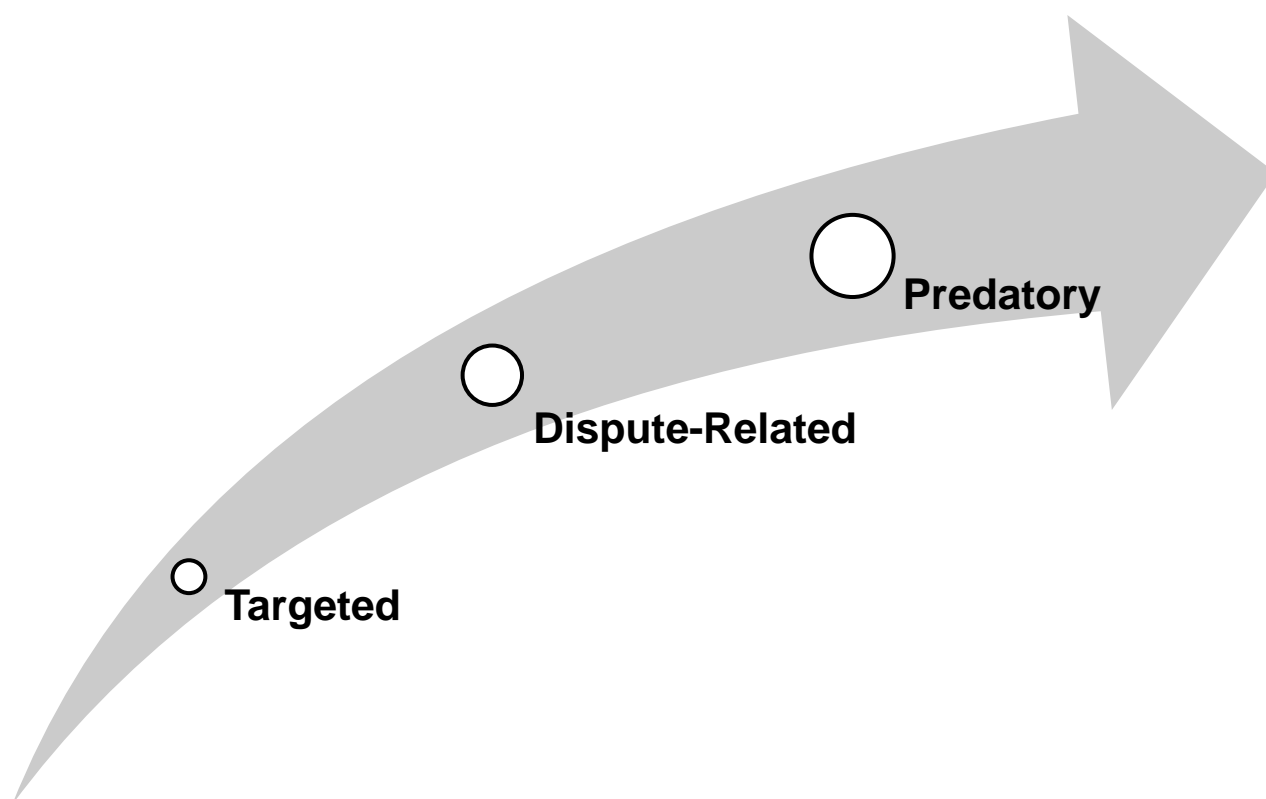
INTRODUCTION

Violent crimes represent a small but significant portion of the reported crime in the United States. Categorically, violent crimes occur at a much lower frequency as compared to property crimes and disorder crimes. However, violent crimes can cause significant harm. While a robust body of knowledge regarding the effectiveness of crime prevention measures for property and disorder crimes exists, far less evidence exists regarding the effectiveness of security measures used to prevent violent crime. In other words, criminals engaged in disorder crimes (e.g., vandalism) and property crimes (e.g., theft) are more likely to be deterred via common security measures, while those engaged in violent crimes (e.g., robbery) are less likely to be deterred. Criminologists have long theorized that violent crimes are difficult to prevent (Taylor et al 2010; Douglas 2013) due to the *spontaneous* and *irrational* (Felson 1993) nature of violent incidents and due to the *impulsive* and *expressive* (Taylor et al 2010) nature of violent criminals. The majority of homicides in 2017 were found to be caused by disputes of some kind (Abt 2019).

The objective of this article is to explore the nuanced nature of violent crime by disaggregating the disparate forms of violence. Disaggregating crime provides a more complete understanding of risk factors and patterns (Newton and Felson 2015; Irvin-Erickson 2014; Haberman and Ratcliffe 2015) and can inform decisions on preventability (Cordner et al 2020; Andresen et al 2017). Criminological research on disaggregated violence types have identified three distinct forms of violence: (1) stranger/predatory violence, (2) dispute-related violence, and (3) targeted violence. Each of these forms of violence is explored below along with a discussion of evidence-based research and challenges for preventing these crimes.

VIOLENT CRIME CONTINUUM

Violent crime exists on a continuum; a continuous sequence in which adjacent elements may not be perceptibly different from each other, although the extremes are quite distinct. Violent crimes contain various situational and contextual elements. At times, these elements may overlap and share similarities in such a way that a single violent incident can exist at multiple points along the continuum.



Aggression and violent crime are often referred to in a dichotomous nature; instrumental or expressive. The idea of conceptualizing aggression as either instrumental or expressive, arguably, originated from Feshbach (1964). Feshbach asserted that the development of each aggressive theme depends on the specific needs of the individual in relation to the victim or the target. This means that the instrumental acts may be regarded as qualitatively disparate from the expressive acts (Adjorolo, 2017). However, much like the predatory, dispute-related, non-stranger and targeted forms of violence, instrumental and expressive acts should also be viewed as a continuum rather than a dichotomy. In fact, some have argued that dichotomizing crime into either instrumental or expressive acts ignores the basic commonalities between the two. Block (1999) has suggested that the expressive-instrumental continuum would be improved by an added dimension, planned versus spontaneous. In violent incidents closer to the planned pole (targeted violent crime) of the continuum, the offender had prepared or arranged to commit violence prior to the violent interaction. In contrast, violent incidents closer to the spontaneous pole (predatory) of the continuum begin without the offender preparing to commit violence (Park and Salfati).

Expressive Violence: Expressive violence can best be defined as aggression that occurs as a reaction to provocation or anger, and the ultimate intention is to inflict pain on the victim (Adjorolo, 2017). Expressive homicides are typically defined as acts committed spontaneously, "in the heat of the moment," because of a physical or verbal altercation between the agents involved, and as an expression of feelings of anger, rage, revenge,

or frustration (Miethe & Regoeczi). Expressive homicides include arguments, brawls, romantic triangles, and youth gang killings. Arguments are by far the most common triggering event for all homicides and for this presumed group of expressive homicides. (Miethe & Drass, 1999).

Instrumental Violence: In the case of instrumental violence, the violent act functions as a means to an ulterior end, usually obtaining something from the victim (Salfati, 2000). These crimes are conducted for explicit, future goals (like to acquire money or improve one's social position). (see Block & Christakos, 1995; Block, 1976; Block & Zimring, 1973; Decker, 1993, 1996; Siegel et al, 1998) (From Miethe, 1999). Instrumental homicides can involve all felony-type circumstances in the UCR Supplemental Homicide Report data, including robbery, rape, burglary, drug offenses, motor vehicle theft, and other felony-type situations. (Miethe, 1999). Usually there is no premeditated intent to harm anyone, although if someone interferes with the objective, the offender may feel forced to harm that person or risk losing the desired goal (Miethe, 1999).

TYOLOGY AND DEFINITIONS

Stranger/Predatory Violence

Predatory violence is often characterized as being instrumental, calculated, premeditated, and 'cold-blooded.' This type of violence requires the convergence of target and offender. Sometimes this is a chance meeting, a purse snatch robbery in a parking lot or a street encounter between strangers (Block, 2007). If one target fails to converge in time and space with the offender, the offender is perfectly happy to substitute a different target (Dugan 2005). However, highly motivated offenders who display instrumental characteristics, will often spend much more time and consideration when selecting a target or victim.

Predatory offenders are motivated by the end goal of obtaining something, be it money, sex or some other thing the victim possesses. Because of this, the predatory offender does not set out to physically harm the victim. Instead, the offender will use threats of force to compel the target to comply with their demands.

Predatory violence is most likely to occur in neighborhoods with many resident offenders. Predatory offenders may find it easier to commit crimes in their own neighborhood or in a nearby shopping district than to incur the additional costs and dangers of traveling further (Block, 2007) Although committing crimes in their own neighborhoods, predatory offenders will typically victimize strangers who are unable to identify them.

The most common example of predatory violence is robbery. A robber will strike a victim out of opportunity; a target that possesses something the offender wants; most often the target will be a stranger to the offender; and physical violence is not the primary goal of the offense.

Dispute-Related Violence

A dispute is a disagreement, an argument, or a quarrel (Klofas et al 2019). Dispute-related violence has two sub-types: Retaliatory Violence and Non-Stranger Violence. In general, dispute-related violence occurs as the result of a perceived insult or wrongdoing. Provocation is the key situational factor leading to dispute-related violence (Felson, 2015). Some conflicts involve an exchange of insults-going no further, whereas others escalate to fistcuffs resulting in serious injuries. In fact, most homicides usually begin when someone expresses a grievance, and a verbal disagreement ensues (Luckenbill, 1977).

Homicides arising from brawls, arguments, and interpersonal disputes are often labeled as expressive homicides (Miethe & Drass, 1999); however, from a rational-choice perspective, dispute-related violence is instrumental aggression; harming others is a means to an end. Individuals are motivated to harm victims for three reasons (1) to deter them from engaging in some offensive behavior; (2) to attain retribution or justice -they believe those who have engaged in an offense deserve punishment; (3) to lower their adversary's status or image in order to improve their own status or image (Tedeschi & Felson, 1996).

Many dispute-related violent incidents are the result of character contests. The victim is sometimes seen as playing some role in the offense. For example, a bar patron may insult a fellow patron and the conflict ends there. However, if the aggrieved party then retaliates, there is likely to be an escalation to violence. Classifying an event as dispute-related violence is not intended to place blame on a victim, but rather offers perspective for understanding the crime and what factors may have prevented it.

Dispute-related targets can be both strangers and non-strangers. The Department of Justice defines stranger crime as a classification of the victim's relationship to the offender for crimes involving direct contact between the two. Incidents are classified as involving strangers if the victim identifies the offender as a stranger, did not see or recognize the offender, or knew the offender only by sight.

Non-Stranger crime is the second classification of a crime victim's relationship to the offender. An offender who is either related to, well known to, or casually acquainted with the victim is a non-stranger. For crimes with more than one offender, if any of the offenders are non-strangers, then the group of offenders as a whole is classified as non-stranger. This category only applies to crimes which involve contact between the victim and the offender; the distinction is not made for crimes of theft since victims of this offense rarely see the offenders (Bureau of Justice Statistics). A violent encounter at a bar is likely to occur between two strangers, however retaliatory violent disputes, a subset of dispute-related violence, can occur between people known to each other.

Retaliatory Violence

Retaliatory violent disputes, a subset of dispute-related violence, includes gang violence, family feuds, and interpersonal violence. Although similar to dispute-related violence, retaliatory violent disputes possess the following elements:

- An interaction involving conflict;
- Over a period of time;
- Between two or more individuals and/or people associated with them;
- Marked by two or more events involving confrontation or intimidation; and
- In which at least some of those events involve violent acts or credible threats of violence (Klofas et al 2019).

The key difference distinguishing a dispute as retaliatory is the involvement of two or more events involving a confrontation. In a study conducted in Rochester, New York, as many as 75% of homicides in any given year are the direct result of a violent dispute. Many of these disputes stem from a minor altercation subsequently erupting into violence. Not only are these disputes often over seemingly minor issues, they can accelerate rapidly to violence. The escalation of a dispute into violence occurs in stages; however, those stages are just as likely to play out over months as seconds. Retaliatory violent disputes are not a new phenomenon. The legendary dispute between the Hatfields and McCoys started in 1878 with the alleged theft of a pig. Retaliation ensued after the trial for the theft did not result in a criminal conviction. Authorities made several attempts to intervene in the dispute but were unsuccessful. The ensuing dispute lasted over 10 years and resulted in several deaths. It did not officially end until eight disputants on the Hatfield side were convicted of murder and received sentences (Klofas, et al 2019).

Non-Stranger Violence

Non-stranger violence is usually committed by intimates, family members, friends, and acquaintances (Hessick, 2007). It is often driven by interpersonal conflict, and that conflict may significantly predate any one particular incident of violence (Hessick, 2007). Domestic violence is the most common form of non-stranger violence.

In contrast to stranger violence, non-stranger violent offenders are perceived to have acted spontaneously out of anger and the non-stranger victim is thought to have played some role in the events leading up to the violent incident (Hessick, 2007). Gillis (1986) found that the closer the tie between offender and victim, the more often homicides were spontaneous and emotion-laden acts. However, there is a flaw in the assumption that a non-stranger uses violence to express himself and not as an instrument. When an individual resorts to violence within an existing personal relationship, it does not mean the violent actions are purely expressive-the individual does not act violently simply to demonstrate that he is angry. Rather, violence in relationships is often used instrumentally, i.e., to achieve certain ends. Violence in non-domestic personal disputes is also likely to be used instrumentally. (Hessick 2007).

The key distinction of non-stranger violence is therefore the victim selection-- the target is someone known to the offender- and level of emotion involved in the violent act--non-stranger violence is more "hot-blooded," and spontaneous than its predatory counterpart which is cold and calculated. Because of this, non-stranger crime is more difficult to prevent than predatory violence.

Targeted Violence

The term targeted violence refers to an incident where a known or knowable assailant chooses a particular target prior to a violent attack. The chosen target may be one or more individuals, a class or category of individuals, or an institution. It is a highly individualized crime based upon highly individualized and unique motivators (U.S. Department of Justice, 2017). The targeted violent offender shows a clear preference for a specific target. This preference may stem in part from a standing relationship between the offender and target and is particularly true of victimization by someone who has direct access to the personal space of the potential target (Dugan 2005).

Mass attacks are an example of targeted violence. These attacks are not spontaneous emotion-driven, impulsive crimes emanating from a person's immediate anger or fear. Rather, the perpetrators often have a grievance, and they take time to consider, plan and prepare their attack (U.S. Department of Justice, 2017). Dugan and Apel (2005) explains that whether a specific grievance exists or can be pinpointed, there are only a few general motives for mass targeted violence: (1) revenge for a perceived injury or grievance, (2) quest for justice (as defined by the offender), (3) desire for notoriety or recognition, (4) desire to solve a problem believed to be unbearable, and (5) desire to kill or be killed (Dugan and Apel 2005).

LIMITATIONS OF VIOLENT CRIME PREVENTION RESEARCH

There is a fundamental lack of empirical research on the prevention of violent crime, and an even larger gap in quality studies that address preventing specific forms of violent crime such as the predatory, dispute-related, non-stranger, and targeted categories discussed here. Because violent crime occurs along a continuum, and any one single crime can encompass numerous contributing elements and motives, traditional prevention methods that have viewed crime in a dichotomous nature, are likely to fail at preventing these incidents.

These traditional prevention methods place emphasis on assigning crimes as either instrumental or expressive. Generally, because of their spontaneous and impulsive nature, expressive crimes are viewed as being less deterrable. The argument is that the offender acts off of emotion and does not consider the costs/benefits or risk/rewards of the crime. The lack of rational thought, it is posited, makes prevention efforts less effective. What these rigid prevention methods fail to consider is that expressive crimes can still include elements of rationality and risk/reward considerations, in much the same way that instrumental/predatory crimes can include elements of impulsivity. Take the

example of an offender who carefully plans a robbery without using physical violence, but ends up shooting and killing the victim in a moment of spontaneity when things go awry. The effectiveness of crime prevention methods are situational, not one-size fits all. Because violent crime exists on a continuum, a prevention approach that addresses instrumental/predatory crime may not be effective against targeted, dispute-related, or non-stranger crime. Viewing crime as a rigid dichotomy or static categories will inevitably lead to failed attempts to control or prevent violence. For example, the place-space distinction suggests that differential crime prevention strategies are advisable. Crimes in space are more likely to be instrumental and thus can be prevented by increasing surveillance and risk of capture. Crimes in place, however, are somewhat different. They are generally more difficult to prevent as offenders are more influenced by emotions and less concerned about risk. For this reason, a simple increase in surveillance may be less effective unless it is combined with other efforts (Kim, LaGrange, Willis, 2012).

Crime control efforts such as environmental design and situational crime prevention techniques may be equally effective for both instrumental and expressive crimes, by increasing the “costs” for the reasoning instrumental offender and decreasing the opportunities for spontaneous or expressive criminality (Miethe & Drass, 1999). However, sanctions alone will not be able to deter an offender who “desperately desires revenge or is prepared to die to achieve his objective” (Fein et al., 1995).

With such a scarcity of research available to advise prevention efforts, practitioners should 1) continue to conduct research on the topic; 2) continue to monitor the literature, and; 3) not place too much emphasis on any one study’s results.

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