

The cycle of poverty and violence

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On July 15, London Mayor Sadiq Khan explained his fears of a rise in violence among youngsters. He said there were new figures that revealed a definite link between poverty in the capital and the rise in violent behavior in youth. The data show that the poorest areas of London have the highest potential to develop serious levels of crime among young people, and that the city has had the highest murder rate in the years between 2012 and 2018.

Previous research, carried out by Manchester University, financed by the European Research Council and released in October 2018, indicated that kids growing up in poverty were seven times more likely to hurt themselves and participate in violent crime as adolescents. The research utilized information from Denmark as an attempt to understand the root causes of self-harm and violent behavior in youth.

Poverty has always been connected in a variety of aspects to violence. It is generally believed to be a cause of violence. The general public sees this concept as common knowledge, and most scholars recognize it as such. However, it is always important to understand preconceived ideas tackling what could be pushing young people toward violence.

Are youth living in poverty more inclined to respond by engaging in violent acts? To address this question in a rapidly evolving area is not an easy task.

For years now, experts have been examining different perspectives on the links between poverty, economic and social inequality and youth violence.

It has been advocated that economic pressures decrease the capacity of families in societies to provide the social support and informal social control necessary to avoid adolescent violence.

Most academics and social scientists think that those living in poverty are more frequently engaged in forms of violence as a result of the circumstances to which they are subjected. Debates among the latter appear to be about which cultural and social processes allow poverty to influence violence. Still, there is no doubt that there are other scholars that promote different scenarios.

Thus, debates as to which circumstances are crucial and how and why they contribute to violence often include conditions of poor households and troubled neighborhoods and families. Such living circumstances define the socio-structural effects of poverty. Although some academics regarded poverty as the independent variable and violence as the dependent one, others have suggested that violence can trigger poverty at the aggregate stage by generating a volatile atmosphere that is not conducive to financial development or growth.

Furthermore, violence is a symptom of greater demands and vulnerability to most adolescents. By reducing inequalities, the fatal connections between violence and severe poverty could be broken. The profound feeling of collective anger and perceived and real oppression may lead to legitimizing the use of violence.

With over 1.8 billion youth worldwide and around 408 million people living in settings affected by armed conflict or organized violence, young individuals are often the most susceptible to violence.

According to the OECD's "Youth Stocktaking Report," the instability of employment rates, especially for youth, is still far too common, despite the reality that many youth are now better trained and more motivated. The report indicates that young people have little trust in their government and have the least influence on policies and strategies that affect them the most. Climate change and increasing poverty are two instances of worldwide problems that will have a far greater effect on young people than those who presently decide how to address them.

High figures of qualified, disappointed, jobless youth are a problem in many emerging countries and may fuel grievances and feelings of disenfranchisement. In an evaluation of young people who are not involved in useful jobs, results show that they are more inclined to engage in violence acts.

Indeed, while statistical data suggest that there is some type of association between violence and an absence of financial possibilities and income inequality, unemployment offers fertile ground for engaging in violence. However, other findings should be kept in perspective. Empirical studies on the effect of economic growth on disputes, including those related to violence, are still limited.

Thus, it is noteworthy to understand when youth use violence as a solution and when poverty, financial inequalities and its associated frustrations become the leading driver of youth violence.

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