

SPECIAL



SECTION

Violence:



Jonathan Barkat



Ripping the Fabric of Society.

Violence has woven its way into the fabric of our lives. In some lives, it is a factor from conception to death. This flaw throughout the warp and woof of society mars our cultural patterns and threatens to tear the tapestry of society apart.

This issue of *Health Progress* examines some of the ways that violence rips holes in lives and a few of the ways we attempt to patch or mend the damage it causes. Whether the rage rends one life, one family, or one city, it weakens the entire fabric and affects all of us.

As you read these articles, keep in mind four basic themes:

- Violence surrounds us in our daily existence.
- We are so submerged in violence that we usually ignore it.
- Violence is a systemic disease, but society has made no efforts to find a systemic cure.
- Without a holistic, collaborative, and systematic effort to eliminate violence and repair the damage it is causing in our communities, our society will suffer irreparable divisions.

A key factor in effectively addressing violence is the awareness among all in society that no instance of brutality is isolated. All violence is part of a continuum. That continuum can be seen in individuals who are reared in an atmosphere of silent or explosive rage and who become instruments of destruction in their own families, or on our streets, or in our executive offices.

The continuum also is evident in our social structures: from the infiltration of violence into our every-

day language and expressions of frustration (“Move your ugly car, you fool, or I’ll bash it in!”); to our entertainment (have you watched your children’s Saturday morning cartoons or played their electronic games lately?); to our barely disguised glee at the misfortunes of people spotlighted in media spectacles; to the brawling we cheer on playgrounds and playing fields; to the pervasive objectifying of people as sex objects; to our political actions, which demonstrate that the prosperity of the strong is more important than sustenance of the weak; to our expectation of stories of murder, abuse, and war on the front page of our daily paper.

This acid bath of violence that erodes our daily lives ought to prepare us for outbreaks of brutality and chaos. Yet they always take us by surprise. As health professionals, we pride ourselves in our skills of diagnosis, planning, and intervention. Isn’t it time to make full use of these skills in developing action plans to address the disintegration of the very threads from which our society was woven?

—Sr. Mary Louise Stubbs, DC



Sr. Stubbs, who assisted with the planning of this special section, staffs the Archbishop’s Commission on Community Health (ACCH) in the St. Louis region. The violent deaths of several children whose families received services through ACCH outreach programs catapulted her into involvement with antiviolence coalitions and then into educational and awareness workshops to assist healthcare executives in addressing violence in a systematic manner.