

Violence against Women: Why the UN Secretary-General Got It Wrong

By [Robert J. Burrowes](#)

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Theme: [Poverty & Social Inequality](#), [United Nations](#), [Women's Rights](#)

In his remarks on the recent International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women – see [‘Violence Against Women is Fundamentally About Power’](#)– United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres inadvertently demonstrated why well-meaning efforts being undertaken globally to reduce violence against women fail to make any progress in addressing this pervasive crisis.

Hence, while the UN might be ‘committed to addressing violence against women in all its forms’ as he claimed, and the UN might have launched a range of initiatives over the past twenty years, including awarding \$129 million to 463 civil society initiatives in 139 countries and territories through the UN Trust Fund to End Violence against women, his own article acknowledges that ‘Attacks on women are common to developed and developing countries. Despite attempts to cover them up, they are a daily reality for many women and girls around the world.’

And, without realizing it, the Secretary-General effectively nominated (by omission) why so little progress has been made on this vital issue: ‘As Prime Minister of Portugal, one of my most difficult battles was to win recognition that family violence and especially against women was a serious issue’. The omission here is appalling and yet few reading the line will be able to identify it.

While I want to acknowledge the commitment of those within and outside the UN who work on this critical issue, it is simply the case that *if we do not understand the cause of violence against women then any ‘strategy’ to address the problem must fail*, as the record in recent decades (since the issue gained a significant profile in response to feminist agitation) demonstrates.

In fact, of course, if we do not understand the fundamental cause of violence, then attempts to address it *in any context* must either fail outright or meet with only limited success.

So what is the cause of violence, including violence against women?

Perpetrators of violence learn their craft in childhood. If you inflict violence on a child, they learn to inflict violence on others. The terrorist suffered violence as a child. The political leader who wages war suffered violence as a child. The man who inflicts violence on women suffered violence as a child. The corporate executive who exploits working class people and/or those who live in Africa, Asia or Central/South America suffered violence as a child. The racist or religious bigot suffered violence as a child. The individual who perpetrates violence in the home, in the schoolyard or on the street suffered violence as a child.

If we want to end violence against women then we must finally end our longest and greatest

war: the adult war on children. And here is an additional incentive: if we do not tackle the fundamental cause of violence, then our combined and unrelenting efforts to tackle all of its other symptoms must ultimately fail. And extinction at our own hand is inevitable.

How can I claim that violence against children is the fundamental cause of all other violence? Consider this. There is universal acceptance that behaviour is shaped by childhood experience. If it was not, we would not put such effort into education and other efforts to socialize children to fit into society. And this is why many psychologists have argued that exposure to war toys and violent video games shapes attitudes and behaviours in relation to violence.

But it is far more complex than this and, strange though it may seem, it is not just the 'visible' violence (such as hitting, screaming at and sexually abusing) that we normally label 'violence' that causes the main damage, although this is extremely damaging. The largest component of damage arises from the 'invisible' and 'utterly invisible' violence that we adults unconsciously inflict on children during the ordinary course of the day. Tragically, the bulk of this violence occurs in the family home and at school. See ['Why Violence?'](#) and ['Fearless Psychology and Fearful Psychology: Principles and Practice'](#).

So what is 'invisible' violence? It is the 'little things' we do every day, partly because we are just 'too busy'. For example, when we do not allow time to listen to, and value, a child's thoughts and feelings, the child learns to not listen to themselves thus destroying their internal communication system. When we do not let a child say what they want (or ignore them when they do), the child develops communication and behavioral dysfunctions as they keep trying to meet their own needs (which, as a basic survival strategy, they are genetically programmed to do).

When we blame, condemn, insult, mock, embarrass, shame, humiliate, taunt, goad, guilt-trip, deceive, lie to, bribe, blackmail, moralize with and/or judge a child, we both undermine their sense of Self-worth and teach them to blame, condemn, insult, mock, embarrass, shame, humiliate, taunt, goad, guilt-trip, deceive, lie, bribe, blackmail, moralize and/or judge.

The fundamental outcome of being bombarded throughout their childhood by this 'invisible' violence is that the child is utterly overwhelmed by feelings of fear, pain, anger and sadness (among many others). However, mothers, fathers, teachers and other adults also actively interfere with the expression of these feelings and the behavioral responses that are naturally generated by them and it is this 'utterly invisible' violence that explains why the dysfunctional behavioral outcomes actually occur.

For example, by ignoring a child when they express their feelings, by comforting, reassuring or distracting a child when they express their feelings, by laughing at or ridiculing their feelings, by terrorizing a child into not expressing their feelings (e.g. by screaming at them when they cry or get angry), and/or by violently controlling a behavior that is generated by their feelings (e.g. by hitting them, restraining them or locking them into a room), the child has no choice but to unconsciously suppress their awareness of these feelings.

However, once a child has been terrorized into suppressing their awareness of their feelings (rather than being allowed to have their feelings and to act on them) the child has also unconsciously suppressed their awareness of the reality that caused these feelings. This has

many outcomes that are disastrous for the individual, for society and for nature because the individual will now easily suppress their awareness of the feelings that would tell them how to act most functionally in any given circumstance and they will progressively acquire a phenomenal variety of dysfunctional behaviors, including some that are violent towards themselves, others and/or the Earth.

From the above, it should also now be apparent that punishment should never be used. 'Punishment', of course, is one of the words we use to obscure our awareness of the fact that we are using violence. Violence, even when we label it 'punishment', scares children and adults alike and cannot elicit a functional behavioural response. See ['Punishment is Violent and Counterproductive'](#).

If someone behaves dysfunctionally, they need to be listened to, deeply, so that they can start to become consciously aware of the feelings (which will always include fear and, often, terror) that drove the dysfunctional behaviour in the first place. They then need to feel and express these feelings (including any anger) in a safe way. Only then will behavioural change in the direction of functionality be possible. See ['Nisteling: The Art of Deep Listening'](#).

'But these adult behaviors you have described don't seem that bad. Can the outcome be as disastrous as you claim?' you might ask. The problem is that there are hundreds of these 'ordinary', everyday behaviors that destroy the Selfhood of the child. It is 'death by a thousand cuts' and most children simply do not survive as Self-aware individuals. And why do we do this? We do it so that each child will fit into our model of 'the perfect citizen': that is, obedient and hardworking student, reliable and pliant employee/soldier, and submissive law-abiding citizen.

Moreover, once we destroy the Selfhood of a child, it has many flow-on effects. For example, once you terrorise a child into accepting certain information about themselves, other people or the state of the world, the child becomes unconsciously fearful of dealing with new information, especially if this information is contradictory to what they have been terrorized into believing. As a result, the child will unconsciously dismiss new information out of hand.

In short, the child has been terrorized in such a way that they are no longer capable of learning (or their learning capacity is seriously diminished by excluding any information that is not a simple extension of what they already 'know'). If you imagine any of the bigots you know, you are imagining someone who is utterly terrified. But it's not just the bigots; virtually all people are affected in this manner making them incapable of responding adequately to new (or even important) information. This is one explanation why some people are 'climate deniers' and most others do nothing in response to the climate catastrophe.

Of course, each person's experience of violence during childhood is unique and this is why each perpetrator becomes violent in their own particular combination of ways. This explains, for example, why the violence of some men against women manifests as sexual violence, including rape.

So what is happening psychologically for the rapist when they commit the act of rape? In essence, they are projecting the (unconsciously suppressed) feelings of their own victimhood onto their rape victim. That is, their fear, self-hatred and powerlessness, for example, are projected onto the victim so that they can gain temporary relief from these

feelings. Their fear, temporarily, is more deeply suppressed. Their self-hatred is projected as hatred of their victim. Their powerlessness is temporarily relieved by a sense of being in control, which they were never allowed to be, and feel, as a child. And similarly with their other suppressed feelings. For example, a rapist might blame their victim for their dress: a sure sign that the rapist was endlessly, and unjustly, blamed as a child and is (unconsciously) angry about that.

The central point in understanding violence is that it is psychological in origin and hence any effective response must enable both the perpetrator's and the victim's suppressed feelings (which will include enormous fear about, and rage at, the violence they have suffered) to be safely expressed. For an explanation of what is required, see ['Nisteling: The Art of Deep Listening'](#).

Unfortunately, this nisteling cannot be provided by a psychiatrist or psychologist whose training is based on a delusionary understanding of how the human mind functions. See ['Defeating the Violence of Psychiatry'](#). Nisteling will enable those who have suffered from trauma to heal fully and completely, but it will take time.

So if we want to end violence against women, we must tackle the fundamental cause. Primarily, this means giving everyone, child and adult alike, all of the space they need to feel, deeply, what they want to do, and to then let them do it (or to have the feelings they naturally have if they are prevented from doing so). See ['Putting Feelings First'](#). In the short term, this will have some dysfunctional outcomes. But it will lead to an infinitely better overall outcome than the system of emotional suppression, control and punishment which has generated the incredibly violent world in which we now find ourselves.

This all sounds pretty unpalatable doesn't it? So each of us has a choice. We can suppress our awareness of what is unpalatable, as we have been terrorized into doing as a child, or we can feel the various feelings that we have in response to this information and then ponder ways forward.

If feelings are felt and expressed then our responses can be shaped by the conscious and integrated functioning of thoughts and feelings, as evolution intended, and we can plan intelligently. The alternative is to have our unconscious fear controlling our thinking and deluding us that we are acting rationally.

It is time to end the adult war on children so that all of the other violence that emerges from this cause can end too.

So what do we do?

Well, if you are willing, you can make the commitment outlined in ['My Promise to Children'](#). If you need to do some healing of your own to be able to nurture children in this way, then consider the information provided in the article ['Putting Feelings First'](#).

You might also deeply consider, and act in response to, the extraordinary damage inflicted on children by sending them to school. See ['Do We Want School or Education?'](#)

Why are these so important? Because if you want a boy (or girl) who is nonviolent, truthful, compassionate, considerate, patient, thoughtful, respectful, generous, loving of themselves and others, trustworthy, honest, dignified, determined, courageous and powerful, then the boy (or girl) must be treated with - and experience - nonviolence, truth, compassion,

consideration, patience, thoughtfulness, respect, generosity, love, trust, honesty, dignity, determination, courage and power.

So each one of us has an important choice. We can acknowledge the painful truth that we inflict enormous violence on our children (which then manifests in all directions) and respond powerfully to that truth. Or we can keep deluding ourselves and continue to observe, powerlessly, as the violence in our world proliferates until human beings are extinct.

In addition to addressing this violence, you are also welcome to consider participating in [‘The Flame Tree Project to Save Life on Earth’](#) which maps out a fifteen-year strategy for creating a peaceful, just and sustainable world community so that everyone has an ecologically viable planet on which to live. And, if you like, you can join the worldwide movement to end all violence by signing online [‘The People’s Charter to Create a Nonviolent World’](#).

In essence, if you want a man who doesn’t inflict violence on women, then his mother and father should not inflict (visible, invisible and utterly invisible) violence on him as a boy.

Robert J. Burrowes has a lifetime commitment to understanding and ending human violence. He has done extensive research since 1966 in an effort to understand why human beings are violent and has been a nonviolent activist since 1981. He is the author of [‘Why Violence?’](#) His email address is flametree@riseup.net and his website is [here](#).

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