

Understanding the Meaning and Role of Violence among Youth: A Qualitative Study from Sri Lanka

N. Rathnayake^{1*}, K. Abhayasinghe^{2,3}, J. De Silva⁴, G.N.D. Guruge^{1,3}

¹*Department of Health Promotion, Faculty of Applied Sciences, Rajarata University of Sri Lanka, Mihintale, 50300, Sri Lanka*

²*Department of Nursing and Midwifery, Faculty of Allied Health Sciences, General Sir John Kotelawala Defence University, Ratmalana, 10390, Sri Lanka*

³*Institute for Research and Development in Health and Social Care, Battaramulla, 10120, Sri Lanka*

⁴*Department of Psychiatry, Faculty of Medical Sciences, University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Nugegoda, 10250, Sri Lanka*

**nadeeka93@as.rjt.ac.lk*

Violence, a learned behaviour that occurs in a cultural context, holds diverse meanings for different people. Youth violence is a significant public health problem. A comprehensive understanding of what violence is meant for youth will facilitate effective prevention strategies. The objective of this study was to explore views and perceptions about violence among youth attending a technical college in the Central Province of Sri Lanka. This was a qualitative study and data was collected until saturation. Six focus group discussions with 54 students (31 female, 23 male) aged 20-27 years were conducted and employed the thematic analysis method. Under the theme; meaning and role of violence, four sub-themes emerged. Sub-theme I: definitions of violence- participants defined violence as “*harming anyone either physically or mentally*” and “*a way of releasing aggression, and stress*”. Sub-theme II: acceptance of violence- participants accepted violence to secure social justice, and equity and solve problems. They viewed violence as a form of “*power*” to assert their rights by citing recent events against social or political injustice like the “*Aragalaya*” or the “*struggle of people*” in 2022. Participants described that violent behaviour to some extent would enhance survival and give experiences to one’s life. Sub-theme III: normalisation of violence- participants normalized certain forms of violence and considered name-calling as an “*innocent form*” that did not need strict attention. Sub-theme IV: masculinity and violence- we found an association between masculinity and violence where male students viewed aggression as intrinsic to masculinity and justified its use in dating relationships. The data revealed multifaceted insights into the participants' conceptualizations of violence. The meaning and role of violence varied among students and emphasised the nuanced and complex nature of views and attitudes towards violence. Effectively addressing youth violence requires a concerted effort to challenge and redefine these underlying meanings and justifications.

Keywords: Youth, Meaning of Violence, Role of Violence, Qualitative