

17 Preventing violence and reducing its impact

How development agencies can help

World Health Organization

An internationally accepted definition of violence

Since the launch of the *World report on violence and health* in October 2002, an increasing number of global and national agencies have adopted the World Health Organization definition of violence:

The intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation.

This definition covers a broad range of outcomes, going beyond physical acts. The definition reflects a growing recognition of the need to address violence that does not necessarily result in injury or death, but that nonetheless imposes a substantial burden on individuals, families, communities, and health care systems worldwide.

Accompanying the definition is a typology that subdivides violence into three broad categories according to who commits the violent act:

- Self-directed violence is subdivided into suicidal behaviours including suicidal thoughts, attempted suicide, and completed suicide; and self-abuse including acts such as self-mutilation.
- Interpersonal violence is subdivided into family violence (including child abuse and neglect, intimate partner violence, and elder abuse) and community violence (including youth violence, rape or sexual assault involving strangers, and violence in institutional settings such as schools, workplaces, prisons, and nursing homes).
- Collective violence is subdivided into social violence including crimes of hate or terrorist acts committed to advance a social agenda; political violence including war and related violent conflicts, state violence and similar acts carried out by larger groups; and economic violence including attacks by larger groups motivated by economic gain.

Cross-cutting each of these categories is the nature of the violent acts, which can be physical, sexual, psychological, and involving deprivation or neglect.