Risk Assessment for Violence

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Objectives

To be able to:
- Identify predictors of violence.
- Learn interview techniques in the assessment of dangerousness.
- Develop violence reduction plans.

Did the psychiatrist fall below the standard of care by allowing the steelworker to go home?

Hindsight Bias

The tendency to see events that have already occurred as being more predictable than they were before they took place.


Teaching Points

- A building crescendo of paranoid fear creates a high risk of violence
- A clinician should not surrender professional judgment to family.
- Posing a threat is different from making a threat

Psychosis and Homicide

The rate of homicide during first-episode psychosis is 15 times greater than the annual rate after treatment.

First Episode Psychosis

- One third of patients commit violence before receiving treatment.
- The longer the symptoms are untreated, the more the serious violence.


Demographics of Violence

- Age - late teens and early 20’s.
- Sex - males more than females.
- IQ - the lower, the more violence.
- Social class - the lower, the more street violence.


Violent Behavior in the Last Year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Diagnosis</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No disorder</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major depression</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mania or bipolar disorder</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schizophrenia</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol abuse or dependence</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other drug abuse or dependence</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Modified from Swanson et al., 1990

Co-Morbidity of Drug or Alcohol Diagnoses

- Schizophrenia
- Antisocial P.D.
- Bipolar I
- Unipolar

Regier et al, 1990

Probability of Violence


Dangerousness Factors

- Magnitude
- Likelihood
- Imminence
- Frequency
Commitment Criteria

"...A substantial risk of physical harm to others as manifested by..."

Definitions

"Substantial risk" means a strong possibility, as contrasted with a remote or significant possibility, that a certain result may occur.

"Risk" means a significant possibility...(ORC 2901.01)

Dangerousness Factors

- Magnitude
- Likelihood
- Imminence
- Frequency

Standardized Instruments

- Psychopathy Checklist-Revised (PCL-R)
- Violence Risk Appraisal Guide (VRAG)
- Historical/Clinical/Risk Management 20 Item (HCR-20)
- Classification of Violence Risk (COVR)

Accuracy

- Actuarial risk assessment is more accurate due to stability of historical factors.
- Clinical factors more relevant in acutely psychotic patients.

Violence in Psychosis

Schizophrenia & Violence: CATIE

- Positive symptoms ↑ violence
- Negative symptoms ↓ violence
- Serious violence
  - Persecution/suspiciousness
  - Grandiosity
  - Hallucinations

Swanson et al., Arch Gen Psychiatry 63:490-99, 2006

Positive Symptoms

- Delusions
- Hallucinations
- Disorganization
- Grandiosity
- Suspiciousness

Negative Symptoms

- Blunted affect
- Emotional withdrawal
- Poor rapport
- Apathy
- Lack of spontaneity
- Poor abstract thinking

Swanson, JW, Swartz, MS, Van Dorn, RA et al., Arch Gen Psychiatry, 63:490-499, 2006

Hallucinations & Violence

- Negative emotions (anger, anxiety, sadness)
- Less successful strategies to cope with voices
- Command hallucinations


Command Hallucinations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Suicide</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homicide</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Injury to self or others</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-violent acts</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unspecified</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Obey Harmful Commands**
- Related delusion
- Familiar voice
- Personal superiority
- Benefit hallucinator

**Threat and Control-override Symptoms**
- Mind feels dominated by external forces
- Thoughts are being put into head
- Feeling that people wish you harm

**Non-violent Delusions**
- Feeling dead or not existing
- Thoughts are broadcast
- Thoughts are removed

**Gender Response to Threats**
- Men respond with violence
  -- "Fight or flight"
  -- Become aggressive
- Women respond without violence
  -- "Tend and befriend"
  -- Seek nurturing relationships

**Paranoid Psychotics**
- More violent in community
- Less violent in hospitals
- Violence is well planned
- Target is misperceived persecutors

**Delusions and Violence**
- Persecutory delusions
- Systematized delusions
- Fearful or angry mood
- Delusions of being poisoned

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Dangerousness History

- Past use of violence
- Substance abuse
- Weapons history
- Criminal arrests

Assess Violent Acts

- Why did it occur?
- Who said what?
- Intoxicated?
- Degree of injury

Patterns of Violence

- Only when psychotic
- Insult-evoked violence
- Ego dystonic v. ego syntonic
- Affective v. predatory

Insult Evoked Violence

"I possess only my personal dignity. My life has been reduced to nothing by an intolerable insult. Therefore, I have nothing to lose except my life, which is nothing."
Patterns of Violence
- Only when psychotic
- Insult-evoked violence
- Ego dystonic v. ego syntonic
- Affective v. predatory

Types of Violence
- **Affective aggression** - patterned activation of the autonomic nervous system; threatening vocalizations and postures.
- **Predatory aggression** - planned, goal directed, emotional detachment. Seen in antisocial personality.

Preparation for Affective Violence
- Clenched fist
- Tightened jaw
- Expanded chest
- Staring
- Feet apart

Path to Affective Violence
- Grievance
- Idea/emotion
- Attack

Path to Predatory Violence
- Grievance
- Idea
- Research/planning
- Preparation
- Attack

Stimulants and Violence
- Disinhibition
- Grandiosity
- Paranoia
Dangerousness Assessment

- Anger without empathy
- Subjective feelings
- Feelings of helplessness
- Elucidation of threats

Pre-Assault Behaviors

- Verbal abuse
- Raised voice
- Swearing
- Standing uncomfortably close

Unabomber Fantasy

When I see a motorcyclist tearing up the mountain meadows…I just want to watch a bullet rip through his flesh, and I want to kick him in the face while he is dying.

Dangerousness Assessment

- Confrontation of paranoid with persecutor
- Perceived intentionality
- Assess suicide risk
- Consider counter-transference

Assessment of Dangerousness

- Evaluate potential victim
- Assess suicide risk
- Consider counter-transference

Risk Factor Classification

- Dynamic
  -- subject to change by intervention
- Static
  -- not subject to change by intervention

Scott CL, Resnick PJ. Aggress Violent Behav. 2006;11: 598-611.
Dynamic Risk Factors

- Living setting
- Access to weapons
- Psychotic symptoms
- Probationary supervision

Static Risk Factors

- Demographic data
- History of violence
- Childhood abuse history
- Antisocial personality traits

Violence Prevention Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Risk Factor</th>
<th>Management/Treatment</th>
<th>Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Psychosis</td>
<td>Depot antipsychotic</td>
<td>1.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substance abuse</td>
<td>AA + urine screens</td>
<td>2.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living with mother</td>
<td>Not live with mother</td>
<td>3.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to guns</td>
<td>Limit access to guns</td>
<td>4.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Tarasoff v. U.C. (1976)

When a therapist determines, or should determine, that his patient presents a serious danger of violence to another, he incurs an obligation to use reasonable care to protect the intended victim from danger.

Video Exercise

- List risk factors for violence
- Prepare a violence reduction plan
Summary

• Violence history
• Crescendo of fear in a paranoid psychotic
• Write a formal violence reduction plan

"True genius resides in the capacity for evaluation of uncertain, hazardous, and conflicting information."

Winston Churchill


