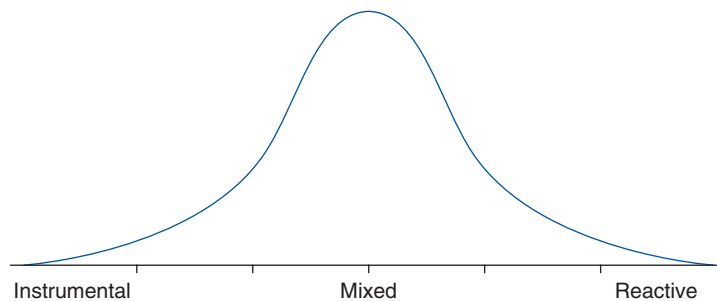


advance their own cause and exhibited little empathy or concern for their victims. Woodworth and Porter were surprised, though, at the overall level of instrumental violence characterizing *all* homicides, whether committed by psychopaths or nonpsychopaths. The majority of the offenders did not simply “snap” and kill their victims in an uncontrollable emotional rage. The researchers suggest that future study should examine whether the results might generalize to other types of criminal violence, offenders, and subcultures.

❖ **Figure 8.3** Continuum of Violence



The Causes of Violence

The causes of violence are multiple. The psychological literature usually divides these causes into four highly overlapping categories: (1) biological, (2) socialization, (3) cognitive, and (4) situational factors.

The **biological factors** refer to the wide array of neurological, physiological, or chemical influences on aggression and violence. Recent advances in the neurosciences have revealed that biological factors, interacting with the social environment, may have some significant influences on child development. The exact nature of these influences remains largely unknown. Child development researchers have found links between aggression and brain damage resulting from a variety of environmental factors. These include (1) toxic materials found in the environment (e.g., lead paint), (2) traumatic head injury (e.g., as the result of child abuse or accident), (3) dietary deficiencies (especially prenatal), (4) alcohol and drug ingestion by the mother during critical fetal developmental stages, and (5) birth trauma. Once the deficits occur, attempts to remove or remedy the biological cause may include active biological treatment in the form of medication. However, and more important, a supportive and competent social environment has also been found to neutralize or reduce the effects that these biological factors exert on any propensity toward violence.

Socialization factors refer to those processes through which a person learns patterns of thinking, behavior, and feeling from his or her early life experiences (APA,

1996). More specifically, “Scientists use the term socialization to describe the process by which a child learns the ‘scripts’ for specific social behavior, along with the rules, attitudes, values, and norms that guide interactions with others” (p. 3). Furthermore, children can learn as much from observing significant or admired others in their environment as from their own experiences. Considerable research indicates that aggressive, antisocial, and violent behaviors are often learned from significant others (including TV, movie, or fictional characters) and are held in reserve for response to specific social situations.

Cognitive factors refer to the ideas, beliefs, and patterns of thinking that emerge as a result of interactions with the world during a person’s lifetime. Research has revealed that violent individuals have different ways of processing and interpreting that information. “They tend to perceive hostility in others when there is no hostility” (APA, 1996, p. 5). As the reader may recall from Chapter 7, this notable tendency is referred to as *hostile attribution bias*. Violent people are also less efficient at thinking of nonviolent ways to solve social conflicts and disagreements. They also tend to be more accepting of violence in general and believe it is acceptable to behave that way. Some young males—especially members of violent groups or gangs—have adopted the belief that it is acceptable to react to every perceived or imagined sign of disrespect with aggression. Aggressive children and adolescents have more antisocial, violent beliefs than their nonaggressive peers (Shahinfar, Kupersmidt, & Matza, 2001).

Situational factors refer to the characteristics of the environment, such as stress or aggression in others, that encourage or engender violent behavior. As pointed out by many researchers, “Often we seek the causes of violence in the person and ignore the contributing effects of the situation” (APA, 1996, p. 6). Almost any aversive situation—such as continuous loud noise; unpleasant smells; and crowded, unpleasant living conditions—can provoke aggression and violence in those persons submitted to such conditions. Neighborhoods, schools, family, and peers can all be conducive to the development of violent behavior. The presence of weapons increases the chances that the conflict will occur in the first place and that it will have lethal consequences once it does occur.

It is also clear that children who grow up in deprived environments where poverty, frustration, and hopelessness are prevalent are at much greater risk for later involvement in violence than other children. Childhood aggression can predict adult violence in some individuals. Research has discovered that approximately 10% of highly aggressive children grow up to account for 50 to 60% of the majority of violent crimes (Bartol, 2002). During their childhood, these individuals exhibit aggression, disobedience, and disruptions at home and in the school; are disliked and avoided by peers; are neglected by parents and teachers; and are likely to fail in school, eventually dropping out. Unsupervised and susceptible to the pernicious influence of other delinquent youth, they grow up to be antisocial, aggressive, and violent young adults. They are likely to become involved in abusive spousal relationships, and they often abuse their own children. But not every child growing up under these conditions follows this destructive path, and the example of such children has provided valuable insights into how to design prevention programs.