

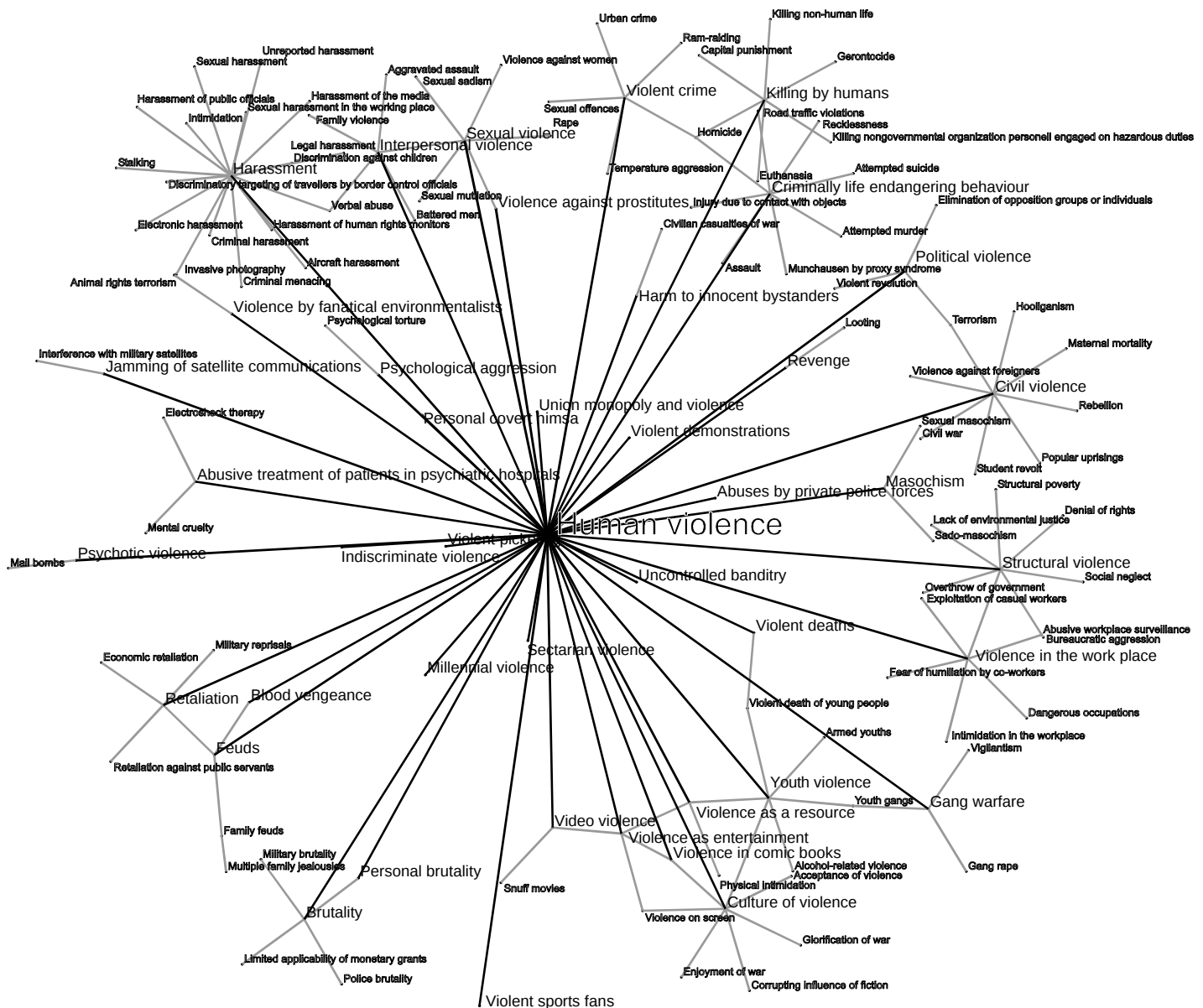
Figure 10.2.2.
Human violence

Database: World Problems and Issues

Link type: narrower problems

Network nodes: 136

UIA database: <http://db.uia.org/scripts/sweb.dll/uiaf?DD=PR&CL=2&DR=A0429>



In its more limited sense, violence is an overt act of destruction, the exertion of physical force which is meant to affect another, or a type of behaviour that is designed to inflict personal injury on people or damage to property. When sanctioned by custom or tradition through the institutions of society it becomes institutionalized, especially in the most dramatic form as war. Human acts of violence may be defensive as well as offensive. When offensive they may be premeditated or not; if not premeditated they may be provoked or unprovoked, as in the case of so-called senseless violence. Acts of violence may be perpetrated by individuals of any sex or age, or by groups in concerted and pre-planned acts, or spontaneously as in mob-violence. A major form of non-physical violence is structural violence. In a broader sense, as denoted by the Jain term himsa, violence also includes other harmful acts which do not involve physical assault. These may encompass violent thought, hurtful speech, deceit, greed, and pride or any forms of violation of personhood when applied to humans. The concept can also apply in relation to other life forms. In these broader senses, any act, whether intentional or unintentional, which depersonalizes can be an act of himsa through its transformation of the person into a mere object to be used or manipulated. Hoarding resources may not be an act of violence in its narrow sense but as an act of himsa it is a form of violence in the broader sense. The Jains distinguish 432 types of himsa, some of which do not involve negative intent. Society has never experienced a period without violence. In all previous periods it appears to have been accepted as part of the natural order. With the industrial and political revolutions, and the emancipation of the individual, perceptions changed and violence was "denaturalized" and became unacceptable. A vision of a civilized society without violence emerged. But this shift required a distinction between unacceptable and "legitimate" violence understood as a response to unlawful rule and domination. This legitimate violence (e.g. structural violence) has become characteristic of modern life.