

An Angry Society: Why Rage Is Becoming the New Normal

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From homes and hospitals to roads and workplaces, anger is becoming increasingly common in modern life. Understanding its causes, consequences and control is essential for building a healthier and more peaceful society.

Anger has been recognised throughout recorded history and has deep linguistic roots. The word is linked to the German word Angst, meaning anxiety, anguish and fear. It is also associated with the Latin word Angere, meaning to choke, strangle or cause pain, and the Old English word Enge, meaning narrow. These origins trace back to the Proto-Germanic and Indo-European cultures and civilizations, reflecting that anger has always been a part of human existence.

Anger is basically an emotion. It usually arises when a person perceives that something is wrong, unfair, harmful or threatening. It is often accompanied by feelings of displeasure, annoyance, hostility or resentment. While anger itself is a natural human emotion, uncontrolled anger can become destructive to individuals, families and society.

A glance at today's world reveals that anger appears to be everywhere. International events frequently demonstrate this. Following the FIFA World Cup final a few days ago, millions witnessed a brawl involving players from Argentina and Spain, highlighting how even elite sporting events are not free from aggression and uncontrolled emotions.

Closer home, road rage has become an unfortunate reality on Goan roads. Many motorists lose their temper over minor incidents, resorting to abusive language, shouting and even physical assault. In extreme situations, firearms have reportedly been discharged into the air. Such incidents not only endanger lives but also reflect the declining tolerance within society.

Hospitals, both government and private, have also become places where healthcare workers increasingly face the anger of patients' relatives, well-wishers and even political leaders. Doctors, nurses and hospital staff often become targets of frustration despite working under challenging circumstances. Members of the public as well as those in authority appear to have become less patient, reacting with fury and sometimes violence.

Unchecked anger can lead to crime, physical injury and even death. It also fuels the growing number of protests, agitations and conflicts witnessed across society. On the international stage, anger and hostility among political leaders have frequently contributed to wars and armed conflicts, resulting in immense human suffering.

Today, anger is visible in families, among neighbours, in markets, shopping malls, schools, colleges, universities and workplaces. It has entered the entertainment industry, sporting arenas and even legislative, judicial and administrative institutions. Municipal bodies, panchayats, public transport, flights, buses, trains, hotels, restaurants and hospitals are increasingly witnessing episodes of aggression. In summary, anger appears to have become almost omnipresent.

Modern society is fast-paced and constantly racing against time. Individuals strive to outperform others by moving faster, achieving more and venturing into uncharted territories. Material success has become a dominant goal. Money, wealth, property, luxury vehicles, power and status are increasingly viewed as measures of success. The pursuit of fashionable lifestyles, expensive clothing, attractive hairstyles and luxurious living has also become widespread.

When expectations are not fulfilled, disappointment often turns into anger. This emotion can affect people of every age, from children and adolescents to young adults and the elderly. It may present as bitterness, resentment, fury, wrath or intense irritation.

The body's response to anger is immediate and significant. Heart rate, pulse and blood pressure rise. Muscles become tense, the face may flush, sweating increases and the body releases adrenaline and noradrenaline, the principal stress hormones. While these responses prepare the body for immediate action, repeated activation over time can damage health.

The physical, mental and behavioural changes associated with anger can have disastrous consequences. Episodes of severe rage have been known to precipitate heart attacks and strokes. Long-term exposure to stress hormones may also contribute to chronic health problems.

The causes of anger are numerous. They include unfair treatment, injustice, discrimination, disrespect, blocked goals, direct threats, hatred, fear, hurt and insecurity. At times, reactions are far stronger than the triggering event would justify.

Anger activates the body's classic "fight or flight" response. People may shout, argue, insult others or even become physically aggressive. Anger can be short-lived or persistent. It may be openly aggressive, passive, sarcastic or judgemental. Some individuals become overwhelmed and retaliatory, while others suppress their emotions only to express them later.

In workplaces, many supervisors shout at their subordinates and conflicts among employees have become increasingly common. Disagreements between staff and their superiors are being witnessed more frequently than in the past. Such reactions are often intense, uncomfortable and difficult to control.

Domestic violence, child abuse, alcohol misuse, drug consumption and mental instability frequently coexist with uncontrolled anger. Loneliness also plays an important role in increasing emotional vulnerability. Besides raising the pulse, heart rate and blood pressure,

anger may contribute to headaches, gastrointestinal disturbances, anxiety, depression and other mental health disorders.

Property disputes, competition for promotions, admissions to higher educational institutions and rivalry in schools, colleges and universities have all contributed to rising tensions in society. Many of these situations create frustration, which may eventually erupt into anger.

Fortunately, anger can be prevented and controlled. Learning social skills, overlooking minor irritations, practising forgiveness, obtaining adequate sleep, maintaining a healthy diet, following a good lifestyle, practising meditation and engaging in prayer can all help reduce emotional stress. When anger arises, one should pause, move away from the situation if possible and practise deep breathing before responding.

Mental health education today should include structured programmes on anger prevention and anger management for people of all ages. Developing emotional intelligence and self-control is just as important as academic or professional achievement.

Anger is increasing both in frequency and intensity in modern society. It threatens relationships, public safety and physical as well as mental health. Every individual has a responsibility to promote patience, understanding, respect and self-restraint. By controlling anger and encouraging peaceful behaviour, we can contribute towards building a healthier, safer and more compassionate society.

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