Traditionally when hearing the term “health problem” some of the things that come to mind are cancer, HIV, cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, lung disease, and malaria. What doesn’t come to the forefront of my mind as major health problems are “injuries and death caused by interpersonal violence.” In Annual Reviews, *A Bioarchaeological Perspective on the History of Violence* written by Phillip L. Walker, his opening sentence begins with this statement, in regards to violence causing an epidemic of health problems. The author’s purpose in writing the paper is from the perspective that anthropology could contribute to understanding the “causes and cultural correlates of violence.” That the bioarchaeologists perspective can aid in explaining factors that ultimately shape violence. By looking at conflict and peace that is representative from the skeletal and archaeological remains, bioarchaeologists may then be able to discover the factors that shape modern violence. This perspective makes sense, as bioarchaeology seeks to understand human behavior through analyzing human skeletal remains. Much can be gleaned through the use of bioarchaeological data, part of this is due to the range of perspectives and disciplines that bioarchaeology aims to pull from. The author discusses using this perspective instead of historical and ethnographic records, he states that the literature on violence is vast in these areas, but not from an anthropological perspective. My perspective is that historical and ethnographical accounts on violence can be biased and potentially misleading depending on perspectives. The saying that the victors write history is what comes to mind. He also points out that through written record a narrow view of violence is given and that by using the anthropological viewpoint and bioarchaeological data, the view on violence can be expanded.
The important aspect of the use of bioarchaeology is to refrain from assuming that all
injury is the result of violence, which I agree with the author wholeheartedly in that regard. He
states that it is best to refer to trauma on the bone as “skeletal injury”, and to use the term violent
injury when there is clear intent of violent injury. The term “accidental injury” should be used
when evidence for malevolent intent is lacking.

In the beginning of the article the author states that violence is a health problem. I do not
necessarily agree with this correlation that violence is a health problem. The view of violence as
an epidemic can be foreseeable and understandable, considering the proportions that violence
occurs at. This is very apparent after the overlay of the history of violence that he gives in the
paper. The author, after the introduction, and with the outlining of his hopes, states that with
bioarchaeology and the discipline of anthropology, that a more useful understanding of violence
in the modern world can be grasped by understanding the violence that occurred in the past, this
is the purpose with which he wrote the paper.

After illustrating this hope of utilizing the discipline of bioarchaeology for analyzing
conflict, the author points out that there are technical problems and definition issues with the
terms accidental injuries and intentional injuries (575). So the first step he takes is to define
violence, though he makes the point that the degree of intentionality behind the violence is
debatable. The definition that the author gives is that violence refers to “the behavior of people
relative to each other in ways that are likely to cause personal harm or injury. (575)” The classic
definition, that he mentions, is an interaction that results in the harm of an individual. After
defining and outlining the complexity of the loaded word of “violence”, he discusses the ways in
which to undergo interpreting skeletal injuries. In particular, Figure 2 of his paper (577), he
directs the reader to a flow chart in determining whether skeletal remains have evidence of interpersonal violence.

The author then incorporates five pictures of bones that have trauma along with context of the bone. Though this is useful in seeing some of the different types of trauma, it would have been beneficial to incorporate these photographs into how they can specifically be utilized in the identification of trauma, comparatively with accidental injuries in order to correctly identify violent trauma from accident. He does utilize two of the pictures in order to compare the difference in appearance between a perimortem fracture and a postmortem fracture. This type of visual representation of skeletal trauma is really useful.

From that point, the author discusses quantifiable statistics on the different types of modern trauma. He examines the percentages of violence enacted on females vs. males and also the bones that are most likely targeted and show trauma. The aspect of this is that these differences can vary among cultures, but sometimes there are commonalities in these ratios. His purpose in examining modern assault trauma is a lesson for the bioarchaeologist: “most assaults cause soft tissue injuries that would not be detected in ancient skeletal material (584).” This means that from the archaeological record we only detect a small frequency of the actual incidence of injury.

One critique that I have of the article is that Walker mentions that there is a lack of population perspective that is gleaned from the archaeological record, but he doesn't address a possible solution to this. He states that in spite of this limitation of knowing exact population that incurred violence and the exact statistics of this distribution of violence through time and space, case studies are fruitful in getting an idea of the roots of interpersonal violence. The problem with case studies is that they can get hyped up, when it might just be a small piece of the puzzle.
Unfortunately we do not know the exact frequency at which violence occurred. Through the archaeological record, only remnants of this data is available, which does not give a full interpretation of the population. Based on these factors of only a small frequency of trauma being visible on bones and the archaeological record only showing a fraction of the evidence for violence as a result, speaks to the volume that trauma likely occurred at a given site.

This article is from the Annual Review of Anthropology, and is a call from the author to anthropologists to utilize the field of bioarchaeology to ask questions in regards to why violence occurs and the cultural correlations that can be gleaned from this human behavior and the propensity of violence. Though there are peaceful periods, they are marked with violence throughout time. The bioarchaeological perspective is unique in its hopes to analyze human behavior from skeletal remains; this makes the discipline useful in identifying the causes of violence in the past and present.

Walker, Phillip L.  