

# Aggression need not rise with temperature alone

Author: The New Indian Express

- Published Date: Aug 12, 2013 7:10 AM
- Last Updated: Aug 12, 2013 7:10 AM

While social commentators have long suggested that extreme heat releases the beast in man, a formal study of the so-called heat hypothesis — the theory that high temperatures fuel aggressive and violent behaviour — is relatively new. Using examples as disparate as road rage, ancient wars and major baseball matches, scientists have tried to quantify the potential influence of global warming on human conflict. Three researchers at the University of California, Berkeley, have put together data from these and other studies to conclude that incidents of war and civil unrest may increase by 56 per cent by 2050 because of higher temperatures and extreme rainfall patterns predicted by climate change scientists.

Likewise, episodes of interpersonal violence — murder, assault, rape, domestic abuse — could increase by 16 per cent, according to a recent report in *Science*. It is understandable, however, why a group of scientists differ over a direct link between temperature and violence. Perhaps one example will suffice to show why the supposed connection may be erroneous. It is known that much of the violence on the South American civilisations of the Incas and Aztecs was unleashed by conquistadores who came from the cold climate of Europe. The argument that their behaviour worsened as they entered the warmer zones can be countered by the fact that European nations themselves have fought repeatedly among themselves in the last few centuries, including two world wars.

It is possible that heat is a contributory factor to human aggression. But, clearly, there are several others, such as genetic predisposition, racial bias and greed for gold and land. Africa, for instance, which is the hottest continent, was relatively peaceful before the Europeans arrived. So was Asia. Evidently, hasty conclusions cannot be drawn on so complicated a subject as human behaviour.

Copyright © 2012 The New Indian Express. All rights reserved.