
Youth Violence: Risk and Protective Factors

<http://www.cdc.gov/ViolencePrevention/youthviolence/riskprotectivefactors.html>

Risk Factors for the Perpetration of Youth Violence

Research on youth violence has increased our understanding of factors that make some populations more vulnerable to victimization and perpetration. Risk factors increase the likelihood that a young person will become violent. However, risk factors are not direct causes of youth violence; instead, risk factors contribute to youth violence (Mercy et al. 2002; DHHS 2001).

Research associates the following risk factors with perpetration of youth violence (DHHS 2001; Lipsey and Derzon 1998; Resnick et al. 2004):

Individual Risk Factors

- History of violent victimization
- Attention deficits, hyperactivity or learning disorders
- History of early aggressive behavior
- Involvement with drugs, alcohol or tobacco
- Low IQ
- Poor behavioral control
- Deficits in social cognitive or information-processing abilities
- High emotional distress
- History of treatment for emotional problems
- Antisocial beliefs and attitudes
- Exposure to violence and conflict in the family

Family Risk Factors

- Authoritarian childrearing attitudes
- Harsh, lax or inconsistent disciplinary practices
- Low parental involvement
- Low emotional attachment to parents or caregivers
- Low parental education and income
- Parental substance abuse or criminality
- Poor family functioning
- Poor monitoring and supervision of children

Peer/Social Risk Factors

- Association with delinquent peers
- Involvement in gangs
- Social rejection by peers

- Lack of involvement in conventional activities
- Poor academic performance
- Low commitment to school and school failure

Community Risk Factors

- Diminished economic opportunities
- High concentrations of poor residents
- High level of transiency
- High level of family disruption
- Low levels of community participation
- Socially disorganized neighborhoods

Protective Factors for the Perpetration of Youth Violence

Protective factors buffer young people from the risks of becoming violent. These factors exist at various levels. To date, protective factors have not been studied as extensively or rigorously as risk factors. However, identifying and understanding protective factors are equally as important as researching risk factors.

Most research is preliminary. Studies propose the following protective factors (DHHS 2001; Resnick et al. 2004):

Individual/Family Protective Factors

- Intolerant attitude toward deviance
- High IQ
- High grade point average
- Positive social orientation
- Religiosity
- Connectedness to family or adults outside the family
- Ability to discuss problems with parents
- Perceived parental expectations about school performance are high
- Frequent shared activities with parents
- Consistent presence of parent during at least one of the following: when awakening, when arriving home from school, at evening mealtime or going to bed
- Involvement in social activities

Peer/Social Protective Factors

- Commitment to school
- Involvement in social activities