

Risk and Protective Factors



For Everyone

FEBRUARY 8, 2024

KEY POINTS

- Many factors can increase or decrease the likelihood of someone experiencing or perpetrating violence.
- Risk factors can increase the risk of experiencing or perpetrating violence and protective factors can reduce the risk.
- Preventing intimate partner violence requires understanding and addressing risk and protective factors.

What are risk and protective factors?

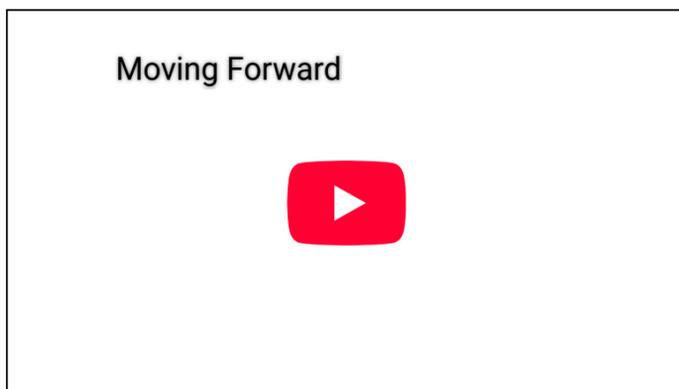
Intimate partner violence is not caused by a single factor. Instead, a combination of factors at the individual, relationship, community, and societal levels can increase or decrease the risk of violence.

Risk factors are characteristics that may increase the likelihood of experiencing or perpetrating intimate partner violence. However, they may or may not be direct causes.

Protective factors are characteristics that may decrease the likelihood of experiencing or perpetrating intimate partner violence.

Understanding and addressing risk and protective factors can help identify various opportunities for prevention.

Watch the **Moving Forward** video to learn more about how increasing what protects people from violence and reducing what puts people at risk for it benefits everyone.



[Moving Forward](#)

Risk factors for perpetration

Individual risk factors

- Low self-esteem. [\[1\]](#)
- Low education or income. [\[2\]](#)
- Young age. [\[2\]](#) [\[3\]](#)
- Aggressive or delinquent behavior as a youth. [\[3\]](#)
- Heavy alcohol and drug use. [\[2\]](#) [\[3\]](#)
- Depression and suicide attempts. [\[2\]](#) [\[3\]](#)
- Anger and hostility. [\[2\]](#) [\[3\]](#)
- Lack of nonviolent social problem-solving skills. [\[4\]](#)
- Antisocial personality traits and conduct problems. [\[3\]](#)
- Poor behavioral control and impulsiveness. [\[5\]](#)
- Traits associated with borderline personality disorder. [\[1\]](#)
- History of being physically abusive. [\[2\]](#) [\[3\]](#)
- Having few friends and being isolated from other people. [\[1\]](#)
- Economic stress (e.g., unemployment). [\[2\]](#) [\[6\]](#)
- Emotional dependence and insecurity. [\[1\]](#)
- Desire for power and control in relationships. [\[7\]](#)
- Hostility towards women. [\[1\]](#)
- Attitudes accepting or justifying violence and aggression. [\[2\]](#) [\[3\]](#)
- History of physical or emotional abuse in childhood. [\[1\]](#) [\[2\]](#) [\[3\]](#)

Relationship risk factors

- Relationship conflicts including jealousy, possessiveness, tension, divorce, or separations. [\[1\]](#) [\[3\]](#) [\[8\]](#)
- Dominance and control of the relationship by one partner over the other. [\[6\]](#)
- Families experiencing economic stress. [\[1\]](#)
- Unhealthy family relationships and interactions. [\[3\]](#)
- Association with antisocial and aggressive peers. [\[1\]](#) [\[3\]](#)
- Parents with less than a high school education. [\[9\]](#)
- Witnessing violence between parents as a child. [\[1\]](#) [\[3\]](#)
- History of experiencing poor parenting as a child. [\[1\]](#) [\[3\]](#)
- History of experiencing physical discipline as a child. [\[3\]](#)

Community risk factors

- Communities with high rates of poverty and limited educational and economic opportunities. [\[1\]](#)

- Communities with high unemployment rates. [\[1\]](#)
- Communities with high rates of violence and crime. [\[1\]](#)
- Communities where neighbors don't know or look out for each other and there is low community involvement among residents. [\[1\]](#)
- Communities with easy access to drugs and alcohol. [\[10\]](#)
- Weak community sanctions against intimate partner violence (e.g., unwillingness of neighbors to intervene in situations where they witness violence). [\[1\]](#)

Societal risk factors

- Cultural norms that support aggression toward others. [\[11\]](#)
- Income inequality. [\[12\]](#)
- Weak health, educational, economic, and social policies or laws. [\[11\]](#)

Protective factors for perpetration

Relationship protective factors

- Strong social support networks and stable, positive relationships with others. [\[1\]](#)

Community protective factors

- Neighborhood collective efficacy, meaning residents feel connected to each other and are involved in the community. [\[1\]](#)
- Coordination of resources and services among community agencies. [\[13\]](#) [\[14\]](#)
- Communities with access to safe, stable housing. [\[15\]](#) [\[16\]](#)
- Communities with access to medical care and mental health services. [\[17\]](#)
- Communities with access to economic and financial help. [\[6\]](#) [\[18\]](#) [\[19\]](#)

SOURCES

CONTENT SOURCE:

[National Center for Injury Prevention and Control](#)

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