

Youth Violence: Risk and Protective Factors

Risk Factors for the Perpetration of Youth Violence

A combination of individual, relationship, community, and societal factors contribute to the risk 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 are characteristics associated with youth violence, but they are not direct causes of youth violence.

Research associates the following risk factors with perpetration of youth violence:

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 and 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

Top of Page

Protective Factors for the Perpetration of Youth Violence

Protective factors buffer young people from the risks of becoming violent. To date, protective factors have not been studied as extensively or rigorously as risk factors. Identifying and understanding protective factors are equally as important as researching risk factors.

Individual Protective Factors

- Intolerant attitude toward deviance
- High IQ
- High grade point average (as an indicator of high academic achievement)
- High educational aspirations
- Positive social orientation
- Popularity acknowledged by peers
- Highly developed social skills/competencies
- Highly developed skills for realistic planning
- Religious beliefs

Family Protective Factors

- 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 when going to bed
- Involvement in social activities
- Parental/family use of constructive strategies for coping with problems (provision of models of constructive coping)

Peer and Social Protective Factors

- Possession of affective relationships with those at school that are strong, close, and prosocially oriented
- Commitment to school (an investment in school and in doing well at school)
- Close relationships with non-deviant peers
- Membership in peer groups that do not condone antisocial behavior
- Involvement in prosocial activities

- Exposure to school climates with the following characteristics:
 - Intensive supervision
 - Clear behavior rules
 - Consistent negative reinforcement of aggression
 - Engagement of parents and teachers

Top of Page

Resources

- [A Comprehensive Technical Package for the Prevention of Youth Violence and Associated Risk Behaviors](#)[4.09 MB, 64 Pages, 508]
- [Preventing Youth Violence: Opportunities for Action](#)[2.86 MB, 54 Pages, 508]
- [Connecting the Dots: An Overview of the Links Among Multiple Forms of Violence](#)[2.51 MB, 16 Pages, 508]

References

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Top of Page