

## What are Risk Factors?

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A risk factor is a part of personal behavior or lifestyle, an environmental exposure, or an inborn or inherited (genetic) characteristic that is associated with an increased occurrence of disease, injury, or other health-related event or condition.<sup>1</sup>

Injury prevention programs are most likely to be effective in reducing the frequency of injuries if they target individuals who experience the most injuries or are at risk to more injuries. This information can be gathered by injury surveillance (data collection).

***Look at your data, and ask.....***

***What part(risk) of the problem is contributing to the most injuries?***

***What risk is the root of your injury prevention problem?***

***Which risk, if intervened, would have the greatest preventative success?***

### **Example**

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.<sup>2</sup> See chart next column.<sup>2</sup>

#### **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/School 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

#### **References**

1. <http://www.cdc.gov/reproductivehealth/EpiGlossary/glossary.htm>
2. <http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/dvp/YVP/YVP-risk-p-factors.htm>