

A Socio-Ecological Approach to Risk and Protective Factors Shared by Substance Abuse and Mental Health: Preliminary Findings

Introduction

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's Strategic Initiative #1 is "Prevention of Substance Abuse and Mental Illness". The first goal under this initiative is, with primary prevention as the focus, to build emotional health, prevent or delay onset of, and mitigate symptoms and complications from substance abuse and mental illness. Existing research and data suggest there are a number of 'common' or 'shared' risk and protective factors impacting both substance abuse and mental health outcomes.

The shared risk and protective factors included in this handout were identified through a multi-phase process that began with a pilot review of more than 100 articles and reports, including the references cited by the Institute of Medicine (IOM) report *Preventing Mental, Emotional, and Behavioral Disorders Among Young People: Progress and Possibilities*¹.

This preliminary review is currently being expanded to include a longer timeframe (i.e., research since 1983), a broader keyword search (i.e., to include terms identified in the pilot), and more detailed demographic information (i.e., variations in outcomes by gender and age). The factors presented in the tables that follow are based solely on the pilot literature review. They are likely to change once the systematic review is completed.

Socio-Ecological Model

There are numerous ways shared factors can be categorized; the Socio-Ecological Model allows for a more inclusive examination of the multiple effects and interrelatedness of social elements in an environment across the lifespan. Each level operates within, and is influenced by, the next.

Ecological Level	Description
Individual	Biological and personal history factors such as age, education, income, health and psychosocial problems
Relationship	A person's closest social circle-peers, partners and family members-influences their behavior and contributes to their range of experience
Community	The settings, such as schools, workplaces, and neighborhoods, in which social relationships occur
Societal	Social and cultural norms, and broad health, economic, educational, and social policies

Individual-Level Factors

Domain	Shared Risk Factors	Shared Protective Factors
Employment	Job loss Unemployment Retirement	
Health Issues	Chronic pain Traumatic brain injury HIV/AIDS Prenatal alcohol exposure Illness/poor physical health Senior impaired health	
Housing	Residential instability Shelterless/homeless	
Income	Poverty Low household income/financial problems	
Psychosocial Issues	Poor self-esteem Aggression/hostile to peers Alienation Difficult temperament Rebelliousness	Self-esteem
Psychosocial Issues (cont.)	High stress Insecure attachment Grief/death of a loved one	
Religiosity/Spirituality		Religiosity/spirituality

Relationship-Level Factors

Domain	Shared Risk Factors	Shared Protective Factors
Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)	Psychological abuse Physical abuse Sexual abuse Emotional neglect Physical neglect Household member w/ substance use disorder Household member w/ mental illness Incarcerated household member Divorced parents Witnessed domestic violence	

Domain	Shared Risk Factors	Shared Protective Factors
Family Conflict/Disruption	Family conflict Family dysfunction and disruption	
Harsh and/or Inconsistent Parenting	Harsh discipline Inconsistent parenting Lack of discipline Low parental warmth Parental hostility	
Parental Involvement	Low parental support Maternal inattention	Parental encouragement Parental support and bonding Positive involvement and reinforcement
Positive Involvement w/ Other Adults		Frequent contact with other relatives Access to mentors
Partner/Marital Problems	Critical, unsupportive partner Significant other with substance use, mental health, or co-occurring disorder	
	Ever abused by a sexual partner Spousal divorce	
Peer Interaction	Bullying and/or victimization Association with deviant peers Peer rejection Poor peer relationships	
Social Connectivity	Lack of social support Social isolation/deprivation	Social support
Lifetime Abuse/Assault	Physical abuse Sexual abuse/rape	

Community-Level Factors

Domain	Shared Risk Factors	Shared Protective Factors
Community Stress/Violence	Chronic community disorganization and stress (crime, economy) Acute community stressful events (school shooting, severe tornado) Exposure to violence (witness violent crime, gangs, wars)	
Community Involvement		Participation in social activities Participation in religious/spiritual activities
School	Poor grades/achievement	School connectedness

Domain	Shared Risk Factors	Shared Protective Factors
	Problems/difficulties in school	Success in academics Supportive school staff
	School transition Truancy	
Workplace	Problems at work Military (active duty, combat exposure, redeployment)	

Societal-Level Factors

Domain	Shared Risk Factors	Shared Protective Factors
Prejudice	Prejudice and perceived discrimination	
Culture	Lack of cultural identity	Culture

References

1. Institute of Medicine (U.S.), O'Connell, M. E., Boat, T. F., Warner, K. E., & National Research Council (U.S.). (2009). Preventing mental, emotional, and behavioral disorders among young people: Progress and possibilities. Washington, D.C: National Academies Press.