

Risk factor data

Juvenile delinquency at the local or county level may be more easily addressed with an understanding of associated **risk factors**. Risk factors that increase the likelihood that youth will engage in serious delinquency have been identified.

Pro-social factors and concepts that encourage positive attitudes and behavior also can guide policymakers and practitioners. Studies have shown that numerous youth and community factors can act as protective assets. For example, youth who are involved in their communities have a non-parental positive adult role model, and a peer group that engages in constructive activities are less likely to be involved in criminal behaviors.¹

This section begins with a general review of the literature examining juvenile delinquency risk factors. Rolf Loeber and David Farrington, members of the **Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's** (OJJDP's) Study Group on Serious and Violent Juvenile Offenders compiled the following research on risk factors.²

Types of risk factors

Delinquency research has focused on individual, situational, and environment risk factors.

Individual risk factors

Individual risk factors include individual traits or qualities, including various types of mental and physical health problems. Studies examining the effects of individual risk factors on juvenile delinquency have found that aggressive behavior, anti-social attitudes or beliefs, hyperactivity, impulsiveness, attention deficits, and risk-taking behaviors are strongly linked to juvenile delinquency. Several studies have also found evidence of links between medical or physical conditions impacting development, general problem behavior, and negative internalizing behaviors, such as nervousness, worrying, and anxiety, to juvenile delinquency. IQ, low resting heart rate, depression, substance abuse, and obsessive-compulsive behavior also have been identified as potential risk factors.

Situational risk factors

Situational risk factors are related to the circumstances that magnify the likelihood of a delinquent act occurring. Examples of potential situational risk factors include the presence of a weapon and behavior of the victim at the time of the incident. Situational risk factors act as triggers for minors who exhibit one or more of the other three types of risk factors.

Although a number of potential situational risk factors have been identified, researchers have not determined which situational factors exacerbate the likelihood that a minor will commit a delinquent act. Thus, situational factors are not addressed in this report.

Environmental risk factors

Environmental risk factors include community, social, and school risk factor subsets. *Table 2* lists the data examined in this section of the report, the data source, and the years on which the data were reported. The raw data can be found in the data tables section in Appendix H.

While county-level data on the environmental risk factors that Illinois youth are exposed to are available, the nature of these data places limits upon their ability to describe the environments in which specific youth live. While these data do show the level at which certain factors are present in a county, they are not indicative of any individual's exposure to risk factors.

Community risk factors

Community risk factors are related to the broader social environment in which minors reside. Studies examining the impact of environmental factors on juvenile delinquency have found evidence that communities with high levels of poverty or that are socially disorganized also tend to have high levels of juvenile delinquency. Research also has revealed that juvenile delinquency is correlated with drug availability, high levels of adult criminality, exposure to violence, and exposure to racial prejudice in the community.

Social risk factors

Social risk factors are circumstances that are present in a minor's immediate environments and typically include family relationships and peer relationships. Strong evidence suggests weak parent-child relationships including poor parental discipline style and lack of parental involvement, as well as relationships with antisocial or delinquent peers, are related to juvenile delinquency.

Researchers Mark Lipsey and James Derzon reported results of a statistical review of longitudinal research examining juvenile delinquency risk factors.³ They found that certain family-related risk factors, such as antisocial parents and parent criminality, were more predictive of serious and violent juvenile delinquency for six to 11 year olds than for 12 to 14 year olds. Peer-related risk factors including antisocial peers or peer criminality were more predictive of serious and violent juvenile delinquency among 12 to 14 year olds.

Family and/or marital conflict, separation from family, and sibling delinquency also are proven risk factors for juvenile delinquency. In addition, abusive parents, low family bonding, high family stress, weak social ties including unpopularity with peers and low levels of social activity, and high family residential mobility may be linked to juvenile delinquency. Additional research to further explore and support these findings is needed before conclusions regarding these potential risk factors can be made.

Table 2
Available Illinois youth environment risk factor data and data sources

Data element	Source	Years
<i>Community context</i>		
Number of youth (age 10-16) served by race	Div. of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse	FY04
Number of youth (age 10-16) served by service type	Div. of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse	FY04
Estimated educational attainment (age 25+)	U.S. Census Bureau	CY00
Number of unemployed (labor force)	Illinois Dept. of Employment Security	FY00, 05
Estimated median household income (families)	U.S. Census Bureau	CY05
Estimated number of youth (age 0-17) living in poverty	U.S. Census Bureau	CY05
Monthly average Illinois youth (age 0-18) receive TANF	Illinois Dept. of Human Services	FY00, 05
Youth population by race (age 10-16)	U.S. Census Bureau	CY00, 05
<i>Social context</i>		
Number of reported domestic offense incidents	Illinois State Police	CY00, 05
Number of reported cases of child abuse and neglect	IL Dept. of Children and Family Services	FY00, 05
Number of indicated cases of child abuse and neglect	IL Dept. of Children and Family Services	FY00, 05
Number of reported cases of child sex abuse	IL Dept. of Children and Family Services	FY00, 05
Number of indicated cases of child sex abuse	IL Dept. of Children and Family Services	FY00, 05
Number of reported crimes against youth offenses	Illinois State Police	CY00, 05
Number of adults admitted to IDOC with children	Illinois Dept. of Corrections	FY00, 04
<i>School context</i>		
Number of students (K-12) reported truant	Illinois State Board of Education	AY99-00 & 04-05
Number of students (K-12) reported chronically truant	Illinois State Board of Education	AY99-00 & 04-05
Number of students (K-12) suspended	Illinois State Board of Education	AY99-00 & 04-05
Number of students (K-12) suspended more than once	Illinois State Board of Education	AY99-00 & 04-05
Number of students (K-12) expelled	Illinois State Board of Education	AY99-00 & 04-05
Number of high school dropouts	Illinois State Board of Education	AY99-00 & 04-05
Number of truant minors in need of supervision (TMINS)	Illinois State Board of Education	AY99-00 & 04-05
Number of reported crimes against school personnel	Illinois State Police	CY00, 05

School risk factors

Research on predictors of serious and violent juvenile delinquency has revealed that truancy, dropping out of school, and poor academic performance are related to juvenile delinquency. Some evidence also suggests that school delinquency, such as truancy, occupational expectations, and new school transitions are also related to juvenile delinquency.

Notes

¹ Aspy, Cheryl B., Roy F. Oman, Sara K. Vesely, Kenneth McLeroy, Sharon Rodine, and LaDonna Marshall, "Adolescent Violence: The protective effects of youth assets". *Journal of Counseling & Development* 82 (Summer 2004): 268-276.

² Loeber, R., and D. P. Farrington, eds., *Serious and Violent Juvenile Offenders: Risk Factors and Successful Interventions*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 1998.

³ Lipsey, Mark W., and James H. Derzon, "Predictors of Violent or Serious Delinquency in Adolescence and Early Adulthood," in *Serious and Violent Juvenile Offenders: Risk Factors and Successful Interventions*, ed. Rolf Loeber and David P. Farrington, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 1998: 86-105.