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## **Youth Development Literature Review**

### **SUMMARY**

The top factors, aside from age and gender, that contribute positively or negatively to youth development include:

1. Parenting, parent-child communication/relationship
2. Child and/or adolescent trauma, maltreatment, or neglect
3. Individual and family mental/behavioral health
4. Antisocial family and/or peers
5. Individual aggressive and/or antisocial behavior from a very early age
6. Youth's engagement in and attendance at school
7. Connection to community
8. Youth's level of expectations for future
9. Community order
10. School climate

## DETAILED LITERATURE REVIEW

Applied Survey Research conducted a review of the literature pertaining to both youth developmental assets and juvenile delinquency. Provided below is a list of factors known to significantly influence youth development and delinquency. These are organized below by developmental domain: family factors, individual factors, peer factors, school factors, and community factors.

### Family-Level Factors

- **Family management practices** – Severe and inconsistent discipline, poor monitoring/supervision and failure to set clear expectations consistently predict later delinquency.<sup>1</sup>
- **Parental involvement** – Boys who are not involved in activities with their fathers are more likely to be violent as teenagers.<sup>2</sup> The benefits associated with family connectedness and parental involvement have also been reported in other studies.<sup>3,4</sup> The researchers found that family engagement, closeness, communication, and healthy role-modeling were all significantly related to youth self-esteem, health promoting behavior and social competence. These family assets were also linked to decreases in youth externalizing behaviors such as arguing, bullying, and disobedience.
- **Family meal time** – Family members play the largest role in positive youth development. One of the strongest predictors of positive youth development is the child and his or her family regularly eating dinner together.<sup>5</sup> Research shows positive associations between the frequency of family dinners and a youth's positive identity (i.e., self-esteem, feeling a sense of purpose, positive view of the future).<sup>6</sup>
- **Parental mental/behavioral health** – Poor parental mental health (ranging from high stress to severe psychiatric disorders) is a risk factor for juvenile delinquency and gang involvement. Parental substance abuse (i.e., poor behavioral health) poses a similar risk for youth. Research shows that it does not matter at what age the child experiences such parental issues, including ages 0-5; these are risk factors that affect children at any age.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Hawkins, J. D., Herrenkohl, T. I., Farrington, D. P., Brewer, D., Catalano, R. F., Harachi, T. W., & Cothorn, L. (2000). Predictors of youth violence. *Juvenile Justice Bulletin*, 1–12.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Youngblade, L.M., Theokas, C., Schulenberg, J., Curry, L., Chan-Huang, I., & Novak, M. (2007). Risk and promotive factors in families, schools, and communities: A contextual model of positive youth development in adolescence. *Pediatrics*, 199, S47-S53.

<sup>4</sup> Resnick, M.D., Bearman, P.S., Blum, R.W., Bauman, K.E., Harris, K.M., Jones, J., Tabor, J., Beuhring, T., Sieving, R.E., Shew, M., Ireland, M., Bearinger, L.H., & Udry, J.R. (1997). Protecting adolescents from harm: Findings from the National Longitudinal Study on Adolescent Health. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 278 (10): 823-832.

<sup>5</sup> Theokas, C., & Lerner, R.M. (2006). Promoting positive development in adolescence: The role of ecological assets in families, schools, and neighborhoods. *Applied Developmental Science*, 10(2), 61-74.

<sup>6</sup> Fulkerson, J.A., Story, M., Mellin, A., Leffert, N., Neumark-Sztainer, D., & French, S.A. "Family dinner meal frequency and adolescent development: Relationships with developmental assets and high risk behaviors." *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 39(3): 337-345, 2006.

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.nationalgangcenter.gov/SPT/Risk-Factors/Research-Review-Criteria>



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- **Antisocial family** – Having antisocial parents increases a child’s risk of delinquency; having siblings with antisocial behavior increases the risk to youth of both delinquency and gang involvement.<sup>8</sup>
- **Family transitions (divorce, separation, remarriage)** – Based on the data collected from three longitudinal studies, there is a statistically significant relationship between the number of family transitions and prevalence of delinquency.<sup>9</sup>
- **Child trauma, maltreatment, neglect** – Children who were maltreated in adolescence only and those who were maltreated throughout their childhood and adolescent years were significantly more likely to be involved in delinquent activities.<sup>10, 11</sup> Continued neglect increases adolescents’ risk of re-offending.<sup>12</sup> Maltreated youth who enter the juvenile justice system are likely to stay longer and penetrate further than non-maltreated youth.<sup>13</sup> Youth more at risk for trauma or maltreatment are also less likely to be engaged in school, and thus more likely to be delinquent.<sup>14</sup>
- **Violent victimization** – Being a victim of a violent crime is a significant risk factor for committing a violent offense.<sup>15</sup>

### **Individual Level Factors**

- **Mental/behavioral health** – Adolescents experiencing mental health concerns (from stress to severe mental health problems) are at risk for delinquency, violence, and gang involvement.<sup>16</sup> Rates of substance use disorder in the Juvenile Justice system are higher than in the general population. Youth who have been in jail or a detention center are more likely to have used illicit drugs, alcohol, or cigarettes than those who have not been in detention.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Thornberry, T.P., Smith, C.A., Rivera, C., Huizinga, D., & Stouthamer-Loeber, M. (1999). Family disruption and delinquency. *Juvenile Justice Bulletin*. U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

<sup>10</sup> Smith, C.A., Thornberry, T.P., & Ireland, T.O. (2005). Adolescent Maltreatment and Its Impact on Young Adult Antisocial Behavior. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 29(10), 1099-1119.

<sup>11</sup> Mersky, J. P., Topitzes, J., & Reynolds, A. J. (2012). Unsafe at any age linking childhood and adolescent maltreatment to delinquency and crime. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 49(2), 295-318.

<sup>12</sup> Ryan, J. P., Williams, A. B., & Courtney, M. E. (2013). Adolescent neglect, juvenile delinquency and the risk of recidivism. *Journal of youth and adolescence*, 42(3), 454-465.

<sup>13</sup> Herz, D. C., Ryan, J. P., & Bilchik, S. (2010). Challenges Facing Crossover Youth: An Examination of Juvenile-Justice Decision Making and Recidivism. *Family court review*, 48(2), 305-321.

<sup>14</sup> Bender, K. (2012). The mediating effect of school engagement in the relationship between youth maltreatment and juvenile delinquency. *Children & Schools*, 34(1), 37-48.

<sup>15</sup> Shaffer, J.N., Ruback, R.B. (2002). Violent victimization as a risk factor for violent offending among juveniles. *Juvenile Justice Bulletin*. U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.nationalgangcenter.gov/SPT/Risk-Factors/Research-Review-Criteria>

<sup>17</sup> Substance Use and Mental Health Services Administration. Substance Use, Abuse, and Dependence among Youths Who Have Been in Jail or a Detention Center, *National Survey on Drug Use and Health Report*, Office of Applied Studies ([www.DrugAbuseStatistics.samhsa.gov](http://www.DrugAbuseStatistics.samhsa.gov) [February 27, 2004])



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- **Antisocial/aggressive behavior** – Aggressive behavior from 6 to 13 years of age consistently predicts later violence in boys. According to a study conducted in Sweden, boys between 10-13 years of age who were rated as aggressive by their teachers, were six times more likely to be violent offenders.<sup>18</sup> Stealing, destruction of property, smoking, etc. and antisocial beliefs are associated with violent behavior.<sup>19</sup>
- **Future expectations** – While exposure to community violence can put youth at risk for delinquency, high future expectations serve as a protective factor that specifically buffer youth from the risk effects of community violence exposure.<sup>20</sup>
- **Gender** – A greater percentage of males are involved in violent offenses as compared to females.<sup>21</sup>
- **Age** – Studies indicate that juveniles typically commit their first offense before age 15.<sup>22</sup>
- Other individual factors mentioned in the literature include **hyperactivity, concentration, restlessness and risk-taking behaviors.**<sup>23</sup>

#### Peer Level Factors

- **Close association with anti-social peers** – Lacking social ties and having antisocial peers were found to be strong predictors of subsequent serious or violent offenses for youth age 12-14 years.<sup>24, 25</sup> Even for children as young as age nine, peer behavior is significantly associated with subsequent self-control,<sup>26</sup> which is related to later delinquency.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Hawkins, J. D., Herrenkohl, T. I., Farrington, D. P., Brewer, D., Catalano, R. F., Harachi, T. W., & Cothorn, L. (2000). Predictors of youth violence. *Juvenile Justice Bulletin*, 1–12.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Chen, P., Voisin, D. R., & Jacobson, K. C. (2013). Community Violence Exposure and Adolescent Delinquency: Examining a Spectrum of Promotive Factors. *Youth & Society*.

<sup>21</sup> Snyder, H., Sickmund, M. (1999). *Juvenile Offenders and Victims: 1999 National Report*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Hawkins, J. D., Herrenkohl, T. I., Farrington, D. P., Brewer, D., Catalano, R. F., Harachi, T. W., & Cothorn, L. (2000). Predictors of youth violence. *Juvenile Justice Bulletin*, 1–12.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Lipsey, M. W., and Derzon, J. H. (1998). Predictors of Violent or Serious Delinquency in Adolescence and Early Adulthood: A Synthesis of Longitudinal Research. In R. Loeber and D. P. Farrington (eds.), *Serious and Violent Juvenile Offenders: Risk Factors and Successful Interventions*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, pp. 86–105.

<sup>26</sup> Meldrum, R. C., & Hay, C. (2012). Do peers matter in the development of self-control? Evidence from a longitudinal study of youth. *Journal of youth and adolescence*, 41(6), 691-703.

<sup>27</sup> Moffitt, T.E. (1993) Adolescence-Limited and Life-Course-Persistent Antisocial Behavior: A Developmental Taxonomy. *Psychological Review*, 100(4), 674-701.

### School-Level Factors

- **School climate** – Research indicates that a positive school climate (including high expectations for youth, availability of meaningful participation, and caring relationships with adults) serves as a protective factor for youth at risk of delinquency.<sup>28</sup> **Safety in school**, an element of positive school climate, is related to youth social competence.<sup>29</sup>
- **School engagement** – Along with teacher educational expectations for youth, engagement in school leads to higher self-reported grades<sup>30,30</sup> and decreases the likelihood of depression, delinquency, and substance use.<sup>31</sup>
- **School attendance** – According to a study conducted in Los Angeles, chronic absenteeism was the strongest predictor of delinquency.<sup>32</sup> Truant youth between 12-14 years of age were more likely to engage in criminal behavior during adolescence and adulthood.<sup>33</sup>
- Additional school-level factors mentioned in the literature, related to youth development or delinquency include **academic achievement**, and **delinquency rate at school**.<sup>34</sup>

### Community-Level Factors

- **Integration in community networks** – Low neighborhood attachment is a risk factor for youth delinquency, violence, and gang involvement.<sup>35</sup> Youth who have personal relationships and linkages to important community resources (including extended-family, faith-based, and other resources) experience better family functioning and positive peer relations.<sup>36</sup> High-risk youths whose parents report high levels of social integration and neighborhood integration are less likely to experience violent outcomes than similar youth whose parents do not report high levels of integration.<sup>37</sup> Finally, to determine which of the known factors demonstrate the strongest association to subsequent violence, researchers conducted a meta-analysis of 66 studies

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<sup>28</sup> Bernard, B. & Slade, S. (2009). "Listening to Students: Moving from Resilience Research to Youth Development Practice and School Connectedness." In Gilman, R., Huebner, E.S., & Furlong, M.J. (Eds.) *Handbook of Positive Psychology in Schools*. New York, NY: Routledge.

<sup>29</sup> Youngblade, L.M., Theokas, C., Schulenberg, J., Curry, L., Chan-Huang, I., & Novak, M. (2007). Risk and promotive factors in families, schools, and communities: A contextual model of positive youth development in adolescence. *Pediatrics*, 199, S47-S53.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Li, Y., & Lerner, R. M. (2011). Trajectories of school engagement during adolescence: Implications for grades, depression, delinquency, and substance use. *Developmental psychology*, 47(1), 233.

<sup>32</sup> Garry, E. (1996). *Truancy: First Step to a Lifetime of Problems*. Washington, DC: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. ED 408 666.

<sup>33</sup> Hawkins, J. D., Herrenkohl, T. I., Farrington, D. P., Brewer, D., Catalano, R. F., Harachi, T. W., & Cothran, L. (2000). Predictors of youth violence. *Juvenile Justice Bulletin*, 1–12.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> <http://www.nationalgangcenter.gov/SPT/Risk-Factors/Research-Review-Criteria>

<sup>36</sup> Smith, E.P., Faulk, M., & Sizer, M.A. (2013). Exploring the Meso-System: The Roles of Community, Family, and Peers in Adolescent Delinquency and Positive Youth Development. *Youth & Society*.

<sup>37</sup> Kurlychek, M.C., Krohn, M.D., Dong, B., Hall, G.P., & Lizotte, A.J. (2012). Protection From Risk Exploration of When and How Neighborhood-Level Factors Can Reduce Violent Youth Outcomes. *Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice*, 10(1), 83-106.



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involving juvenile delinquency.<sup>38</sup> According to their research, for children between 12 and 14 years old, one of the top predictors of serious criminal behavior includes **unhealthy or unsupportive social ties**.

- **Organized pro-social activities** – Youth who are involved in youth programs, creative activities, and volunteer work have improved academic performance (i.e., GPA).<sup>39</sup> Lack of involvement in pro-social leisure activities is a risk factor for delinquency.<sup>40</sup>
- **Community order** - Research has found that community disorganization, physical disorder, and feeling unsafe in the neighborhood (e.g., exposure to violence or the threat of violence, availability of drugs and firearms, level of crime) are risk factors for youth delinquency and violence, as well as gang involvement.<sup>41</sup>

Risk factors may have a cumulative effect, in that the greater number of risk factors experienced by a youth, the greater the likelihood of youth violence and gang involvement.<sup>42</sup> The presence of risk factors in multiple domains increases the likelihood of gang involvement as well.<sup>43</sup> The precursors of gang involvement appear long before youth actually join a gang. For the highest risk youth, a stepping-stone pattern appears to begin as early as ages 3-4 with the emergence of conduct problems, followed by elementary school failure at ages 6–12, delinquency onset by age 12, gang joining around ages 13–15, and serious, violent, and chronic delinquency onward from mid-adolescence.<sup>44</sup> Thus programs seeking to interrupt this progression must address risk factors early and in multiple developmental domains. A full list of risk factors for serious and violence delinquency is available from the OJJDP National Gang Center.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Hawkins, J.D., Herrenkohl, T.I., Farrington, D.P., Brewer, D., Catalano, R.F., Harachi, T.W., & Cothorn, L. (2000). Predictors of youth violence. *Juvenile Justice Bulletin*, 1–12.

<sup>39</sup> Scales, P. C., Benson, P. L., Roehlkepartain, E. C., Sesma, A. Jr., & van Dulmen, M. (2006). The role of developmental assets in predicting academic achievement: A longitudinal study. *Journal of Adolescence*, 29(5): 692–708.

<sup>40</sup> Latessa, E.J. (presentation 2010). *What Works and What Doesn't in Reducing Recidivism with Youthful Offenders: The Principles of Effective Intervention*.

<sup>41</sup> <http://www.nationalgangcenter.gov/SPT/Risk-Factors/Research-Review-Criteria>

<sup>42</sup> Hill, K.G., Howell, J.C., Hawkins, J.D., & Battin-Pearson, S. (1999). Childhood risk factors for adolescent gang membership: Results from the Seattle Social Development Project. *Journal of Research in Crime & Delinquency*, 36, 300-322.

<sup>43</sup> Thornberry, T.P., Krohn, M.D., Lizotte, A.J., Smith, C.A., & Tobin, K. (2003). *Gangs and delinquency in developmental perspective*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>44</sup> Howell, J.C., & Egley, A., Jr. (2005). Moving risk factors into developmental theories of gang membership. *Youth Violence & Juvenile Justice*, 3, 334-354.

<sup>45</sup> <http://www.nationalgangcenter.gov/SPT/Risk-Factors/Research-Review-Criteria>