

OASAS Risk and Protective Factors

Definitions

Community Domain



RISK FACTORS

Availability of Alcohol and Other Drugs

Where alcohol, cigarettes and other drugs are easier to obtain, rates of drug use are higher.

Community Laws and Norms Favorable Toward Substance Use

The laws and norms a community holds about drug use are communicated in a variety of ways: through regulations and written policies, informal social practices, and through the expectations members of the community have of young people. Research has shown that legal restrictions on alcohol and tobacco use, such as raising the legal drinking age, restricting sales to minors, restricting smoking in public places, and increased taxation have been followed by decreases in youth consumption and injuries. National studies of high school students have shown that shifts in normative attitudes toward substance use have preceded changes in prevalence of use.

Transitions & Mobility

Neighborhoods with high rates of residential mobility have been shown to have higher rates of juvenile crime and drug selling, while children who experience frequent residential moves and stressful life transitions have been shown to have higher risk for school failure, delinquency, and drug use.

Low Neighborhood Attachment

A low level of bonding to the neighborhood is related to higher levels of substance use, juvenile crime and drug selling.

Community Disorganization

Research has shown that neighborhoods with high population density, lack of natural surveillance of public places, physical deterioration, and high rates of adult crime also have higher rates of substance use, juvenile crime and drug selling.

Extreme Economic Deprivation

Children who live in deteriorating neighborhoods characterized by extreme poverty are more likely to develop problems with delinquency, teen pregnancy, school dropout, and violence. Children who live in these areas --and have behavior and adjustment problems early in life--are also more likely to have problems with drugs later on.

PROTECTIVE FACTORS

Opportunities for Prosocial Involvement

When more opportunities in a community are available for youth to get actively involved, they are less likely to engage in substance use and other problem behaviors. Prosocial activities for youth are often structured and supervised by positive role models, but they always provide opportunities for youth to practice and build stronger social skills.

Rewards for Prosocial Involvement

Rewards for participation in prosocial activities help children and young adults bond to the community, thus lowering their risk for substance use.

Family Domain



RISK FACTORS

Family History of Problem Behavior

When children are raised in a family with a history of substance use, the children are more likely to engage in these behaviors. The potential for genetic inheritance of a predisposition to addiction, for negative behavioral role modeling and increased substance availability are mediators that increase youth risk for substance use. When children are raised in a family with a history of antisocial behaviors (e.g., violence or other crime), the children are more likely to engage in these behaviors.

Poor Family Management

Parents' use of inconsistent and/or unusually harsh or severe punishment with their children places them at higher risk for substance use and other problem behaviors. Also, parents' failure to provide clear expectations and to monitor their children's behavior makes it more likely that they will engage in drug abuse, whether or not there are family drug problems.

Family Conflict

Children raised in families with higher levels of conflict, whether or not the child is directly involved in the conflict, are at greater risk for both delinquency and substance use.

Parental Attitudes Favorable Toward Drugs / Other Problem Behavior

In families where parental attitudes are favorable towards illegal drug use, heavy alcohol use, or are tolerant of their children's use, children are more likely to become substance abusers during adolescence. The risk is further increased if parents involve children in their substance using behavior.

Family Domain **PROTECTIVE FACTORS**

Family Opportunities for Prosocial Involvement

Young people who are exposed to more opportunities to participate meaningfully in the responsibilities and activities of the family are less likely to engage in drug use and other problem behaviors.

Family Rewards for Prosocial Involvement

When parents, siblings, and other family members praise, encourage, and attend to things done well by children, the children are less likely to engage in substance use and problem behaviors.

Family Attachment

Young people who feel close to their parents and feel they are a valued part of their family are less likely to engage in substance use and other problem behaviors.

School Domain



RISK FACTORS

Academic Failure (grades 4-6)

Beginning in the late elementary grades (grades 4-6); academic failure increases the risk of drug abuse, delinquency and other antisocial behaviors. It appears that the experience of failure itself, for whatever reasons, increases the risk of problem behaviors.

Low Commitment to School

Surveys of high school seniors have shown that the use of hallucinogens, cocaine, heroin, stimulants, and sedatives or non-medically prescribed tranquilizers is significantly lower among students who expect to attend college than among those who do not. Lack of enjoyment of school, perceiving coursework as not important or meaningful and greater truancy all indicate a lower commitment to school and an increased likelihood of substance use.

School Domain

PROTECTIVE FACTORS

School Opportunities for Positive Involvement

When young people are given more opportunities to participate meaningfully in important activities at school, such as extra-curricular activities or after school academic activities, they are less likely to engage in drug use and other problem behaviors.

School Prosocial Involvement

Students with greater participation in after-school activities such as music, sports, arts, academic related groups (e.g., French club, school newspaper, science clubs), community service clubs or other prosocial structured activities report decreased rates of alcohol and other substance abuse.

School Rewards for Positive Involvement

When young people are recognized and reinforced for their involvement and contributions at school, they are less likely to be involved in substance use and other problem behaviors.

Peer-Individual Domain



RISK FACTORS

Early Initiation of Drug Use / Other Problem Behavior

Early use of substances by an individual predicts greater likelihood of substance abuse and addiction. The earlier the onset of any one drug the greater the use of multiple drugs and the greater the frequency (amount) of use. Onset of drug use prior to the age of 15 is a consistent predictor of later drug abuse, and a later age of onset of drug use has been shown to predict lower drug involvement and a greater probability of discontinuation of use. This same pattern has been found for early delinquency and other problem behaviors.

Rebelliousness

Young people who do not feel part of society, who feel they are not bound by rules, who don't believe in trying to be successful or responsible, or who take an active rebellious stance toward society are at higher risk of substance abuse. In addition, a high tolerance for deviance and a strong need for independence have been linked with greater drug use.

Friends' Who Use Drugs / Engage in Other Problem Behaviors

Young people whose close friends engage in alcohol or other substance use are much more likely to engage in the same behavior. Friends' substance use has consistently been found to be one of the strongest predictors of substance use among youth. Even when young people come from well-managed families and do not experience other risk

factors, spending time with friends who use drugs greatly increases the risk of that problem developing. Young people who associate with peers who engage in other problem behaviors are also at higher risk for engaging in the problem behavior themselves.

Favorable Attitudes Toward Drug Use / Other Problem Behavior

During the elementary school years, most children express anti-drug, anti-crime, and pro-social attitudes. They have difficulty imagining why people use drugs or engage in antisocial behaviors. However, in middle school, as more youth are exposed to peers who use drugs and engage in antisocial behavior, their attitudes often shift toward greater acceptance of these behaviors. Youth who express positive attitudes toward drug use and antisocial behavior are more likely to engage in a variety of problem behaviors, including drug use.

Perceived Risk of Drug Use

Young people who do not perceive drug use to be risky are far more likely to engage in drug use. Results from the national Monitoring the Future survey over two decades provide strong evidence of this predictive relationship. Students who perceive less risk of harm from substance use consistently report greater levels of substance use.

Peer Rewards for Drug Use

Young people who perceive peer approval for drug use are at higher risk for engaging further in drug use. If youth perceive a peer norm that drug use is "cool", they are more likely to begin or continue to use. The research has also found that young people who highly value peer acceptance are more likely to conform to their friend's substance use behaviors.

Depressive Symptoms

Studies have shown that youth who are depressed are more likely to engage in youth problem behaviors such as substance abuse. In addition, young people who report depressive symptoms are more likely to report substance use. Research has found that youth with a diagnosis of Major Depressive Disorder by age 11 are twice as likely to report first time alcohol and other substance use by age 14.

Peer-Individual Domain

PROTECTIVE FACTORS

Religiosity

Young people who regularly attend religious services are less likely to engage in problem behaviors. Conversely, the research has shown that youth who do not attend church/religious services regularly are more likely to engage in substance use.

Belief in the Moral Order

Young people who have strong beliefs in what is “right” or “wrong” are less likely to use drugs.

Social Skills

Young people who are socially competent can engage in positive interpersonal relations with their peers are less likely to use drugs and engage in other problem behaviors.