

# Risk and protective factors

**G**ender-based violence is one of the greatest social, economic and development challenges facing the world today and, if not addressed, poses a significant barrier to achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.<sup>1</sup>

It is crucial to identify and understand the risk and protective factors in order to develop and implement effective violence prevention interventions, as well as inform advocacy and policies. The Sexual Violence Research Initiative (SVRI) has funded several studies that have identified risk and protective factors for gender-based violence in various low- and middle-income countries.



## Defining risk and protective factors

Risk factors are conditions or characteristics that increase the likelihood of an individual perpetrating or experiencing violence. By contrast, protective factors are conditions or characteristics that reduce the risk of an individual perpetrating or experiencing violence. These factors occur at the individual, relationship, family, community and societal level.

## RISK FACTORS

Although risk factors differ by context,

alcohol consumption, poverty and lower levels of education are commonly associated with a higher likelihood of perpetrating or experiencing violence.<sup>2,3,4</sup> Economic inequality between a couple and infidelity have also been identified as risk factors.<sup>5</sup>

A study undertaken in the Democratic Republic of Congo in 2015 focusing on youth violence found that young men who have experienced traumatic events are more likely to use violence. Peer influence, parental behaviours and not being enrolled in school were

also predictors of youth violence.<sup>6</sup>

Patriarchal gender norms, family hierarchies and an emphasis on disciplining children were predictors of violence in households in Kampala, Uganda, in which violence against both women and children occurred. Younger male caregivers, lower socioeconomic status, female caregivers with mental distress, and caregivers who report less emotional attachment to an intimate partner were identified as further predictors of this intersecting violence.<sup>7</sup>



## KEY TAKEAWAY

### PROTECTIVE FACTORS

Various protective factors emerged from the SVRI-funded research. Participants in the Democratic Republic of Congo study proposed a range of social, educational and economic activities for parents and youth to reduce young people's use of violence.

Levels of education and educational programmes often emerge as protective factors. A study conducted in Malawi and Uganda<sup>8</sup> suggests that educational levels in women can protect against experiencing violence; however, a minimum level of schooling may be needed.

A study in Moldova<sup>9</sup> aims to build on evidence that suggests school-based programmes may be effective in preventing violence among young people in relationships by piloting

**Risk and protective factors are context-dependent. Prevention interventions that have shown promise in certain contexts include increased educational attainment in women and economic empowerment; however, these interventions need to be evaluated further to determine their effectiveness in other contexts.**



a course designed to address relationship-level risk factors of partner violence in high schools.

Strategies to increase women's economic and social empowerment have shown some effectiveness in reducing intimate partner violence. For example, the "Together to End Violence Against Women" programme in Tanzania successfully combined savings and lending groups for women with gender-equality workshops for men to reduce violence against women.<sup>10;11</sup>

Strategies implemented on a wider scale that have been effective in reducing the prevalence of violence against women include a combination of improved legislation, national programmes, introducing women's police stations and crisis centres, and awareness campaigns.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>1</sup> United Nations. 2015. Transforming our world: The 2030 agenda for sustainable development. *United Nations Resolution A/RES/70/1 of 25 September 2015*. Available: [http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/1&Lang=E](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/1&Lang=E) [2017, May 26].

<sup>2</sup> Carlson, C., Namy, S., Norcini Pala, A., Wainberg, M., Michau, L., Nakuti, J., Knight, L., Allen, E., Naker, D. & Devries, K. (under review). Violence against children and intimate partner violence against women in Uganda: Overlap and common contributing factors.

<sup>3</sup> Kohli, A., Remy, M.M., Binkurhorhwa, A.K., Mitima, C.M., Mirindi, A.B., Mwinja, N.B., Banyewesize, J.H., Ntakwinja, G.M., Perrin, N.A. & Glass, N. 2017. Preventing risky behaviours among young adolescents in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo: A qualitative study. *Global Public Health*. DOI: 10.1080/17441692.2017.1317009.

<sup>4</sup> Messersmith, L.J., Halim, N., Kawemama, P., Steven, E. & Reich, N. 2016. A mixed methods study to test the preliminary effect of World Education's Together to End Violence Against Women (TEVAW), a program to address intimate partner violence in northern Tanzania: Baseline report. Available: <http://www.svri.org/sites/default/files/attachments/2016-08-22/TEVAW%20Baseline%20Report%20final.pdf> [2017, May 26].

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Kohli, A., Remy, M.M., Binkurhorhwa, A.K., Mitima, C.M., Mirindi, A.B., Mwinja, N.B., Banyewesize, J.H., Ntakwinja, G.M., Perrin, N.A. & Glass, N. 2017. Preventing risky behaviours among young adolescents in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo: A qualitative study. *Global Public Health*. DOI: 10.1080/17441692.2017.1317009.

<sup>7</sup> Carlson, C., Namy, S., Norcini Pala, A., Wainberg, M., Michau, L., Nakuti, J., Knight, L., Allen, E., Naker, D. & Devries, K. (under review). Violence against children and intimate partner violence against women in Uganda: Overlap and common contributing factors.

<sup>8</sup> Behrman, J. A., Peterman, A. & Palermo, T. 2017. Does keeping adolescent girls in school protect against sexual violence? Quasi-experimental evidence from East and southern Africa. *Journal of Adolescent Health*. 60(2): 184-190. DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2016.09.010>.

<sup>9</sup> Misail-Nichitin, D., Olaru, V. & Cheianu, D. 2016. Preventing gender-based partner violence among youth with a new school-based course: "Harmonious Couple Relationships". International Center for Women Rights Protection and Promotion "La Strada". Available: <http://www.svri.org/sites/default/files/DM%20GBV%20Prevention%20-%20Posters%20formatted%20by%20Greg%2005a%20-%20Moldova%20-%20%28Greg%20Wlosinski%2C%20April%207%2C%202016%29%201614018-GBV-PrestonPosters-v1.pdf> [2017, May 26].

<sup>10</sup> Messersmith, L.J., Halim, N., Kawemama, P., Steven, E. & Reich, N. 2016. A mixed methods study to test the preliminary effect of World Education's Together to End Violence Against Women (TEVAW), a program to address intimate partner violence in northern Tanzania: Baseline report. Available: <http://www.svri.org/sites/default/files/attachments/2016-08-22/TEVAW%20Baseline%20Report%20final.pdf> [2017, May 26].

<sup>11</sup> Messersmith, L.J., Halim, N., Kawemama, P., Steven, E. & Reich, N. 2017. A mixed methods study to test the preliminary effect of World Education's Together to End Violence Against Women (TEVAW), a program to address intimate partner violence in northern Tanzania: Final report. Available: [http://www.svri.org/sites/default/files/attachments/2017-05-15/WEI-B-BU-SVRI\\_TEVAW%20Endline%20Report\\_FINAL\\_4.12.17%20%288%29.pdf](http://www.svri.org/sites/default/files/attachments/2017-05-15/WEI-B-BU-SVRI_TEVAW%20Endline%20Report_FINAL_4.12.17%20%288%29.pdf) [2017, May 26].

<sup>12</sup> Ellsberg, M. (ongoing study). Candies in Hell +20: A mixed-methods study on the prevention of violence against women and girls in León, Nicaragua. Global Women's Institute.

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