Gender-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.1

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.2,3,4 Economic inequality between a couple and infidelity have also been identified as risk factors.5

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.4

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.7
**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 suggests that educational levels in women can protect against experiencing violence; however, a minimum level of schooling may be needed.

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


5 Ibid.


10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.