



RPS FACT SHEET

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Risk & Protective Factors Among Adults

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Over the past two decades, considerable gains have been made in our understanding of the ways in which risk and protective factors influence the development of alcohol, tobacco, other drug (ATOD) use, delinquency, criminal activity, and other maladaptive behaviors (e.g., Hawkins, Catalano, & Miller, 1992). The majority of this research has examined risk and protective factors among children and adolescents, with less attention given to investigating these processes in adult populations. *The purpose of this fact sheet is to summarize some of the key findings from recent research examining risk and protective factors among adults.*



A recent study examining risk and protective factors for post-high school alcohol use patterns among young adults (White, Fleming, Kim, Catalano, & McMorris, 2008) found that higher levels of drinking in the spring of 12th grade placed individuals at risk for associating with pro-alcohol peer influences after graduation. Attending college and living *at home* protected against alcohol consumption and pro-alcohol peer relationships, while attending college and living *away* from home increased risk for these outcomes. Prosocial involvement in religious activities and/or volunteer work protected students who were living away from home from alcohol use and involvement with peers with pro-alcohol attitudes.

Leonard & Homish (2008) studied risk and protective factors for heavy drinking and drinking problems over the first four years of marriage among 634 couples. Greater drinking problems during the early years of marriage were predicted by their partners' drinking levels, peers' drinking levels, and positive expectancies about the social and physical pleasure associated with alcohol use. Further, for men, increases in negative affect and the positive expectancy that alcohol increases feelings of power and aggression predicted heavier drinking and drinking problems. For women, these outcomes were predicted by increases in a range of antisocial behaviors. Finally, couples with a higher self-reported quality of marriage were protected from alcohol problems, though not from heavy drinking.

Given the association between substance use and crime, Kosterman et al. (2005) examined protective factors for multiple indicators of both outcomes. The authors found that involvement in group activities and neighborliness were modestly protective against financial crime, marijuana and alcohol use. Further, constructive engagement (including productive activity and work, or constructive use of time), financial responsibility, and honesty, provided strong protection from almost all types of crime and substance use examined. Finally, volunteerism and a sense of interpersonal connection provided considerable protection against crime and substance use.



Looking more specifically at substance use outcomes among African American and Hispanic populations, Wang, Matthew, Chiu, Yan, and Bellamy (2007) examined the role of family- and neighborhood-level protective influences. Among African Americans, a sense of attachment to one's neighborhood predicted less abusive relationships and greater family cohesion, which in turn protected against ATOD use. Lower ATOD use was a key protective influence against risky sexual behavior and drug-related sexual activity. Similarly, among Hispanics, neighborhood attachment and social support predicted less abuse in relationships, which for this population, was a key predictor of less ATOD use. Neighborhood attachment was also predictive of greater family cohesion.

The findings summarized in this fact sheet can be used as a starting point for a more detailed review in particular areas of interest. Please contact your Regional Prevention Consultant for more information (see map on next page), or visit our website at www.rpscolorado.org

List of References

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