

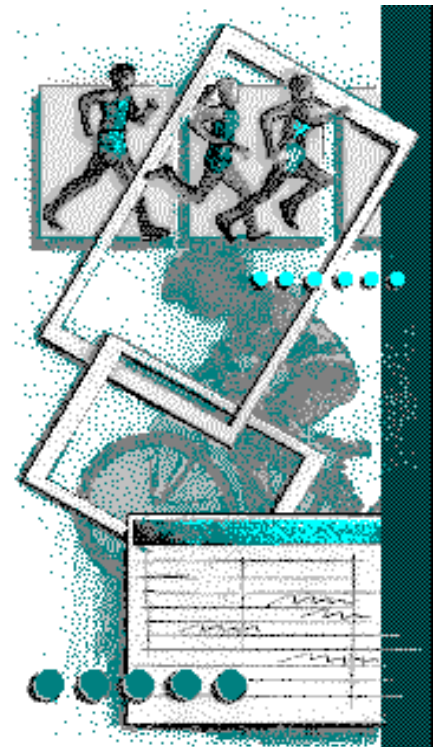


# 2000 Children's Services Priority Study: Child & Adolescent Risk Factor Analysis

*Broward County, Florida*

## *Community Report*

*Prepared for  
The Children's Services  
Administration Division of the  
Broward County Human Service Department*



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# Project Overview

The *2000 Children's Services Priority Study* was conducted for the Children's Services Administration Division of the Broward County Human Services Department as a representative, quantitative and statistically reliable means of attaining community-wide input regarding the prioritization of issues facing children and adolescents in Broward County.

## Methodology

The study involved a 50-question survey administered by telephone to 400 adults in Broward County in July 2000. Professional Research Consultants, Inc. (the research firm which conducted the *1994-2000 Broward County Quality of Life Survey* assessments) managed this project and was responsible for the sample design and survey administration. The sample of adults interviewed for this study is proportional to the county population at the ZIP Code level, and is representative of the county as a whole with regard to key demographic characteristics (as they were reported in the Census' *1998 American Community Survey*).

The survey itself addressed 18 risk factors within four social groups (domains): community, schools, family and individual/peer groups. Respondents were initially posed a series of questions which presented various combinations of pairs of risk factors, and they were asked to identify which of the presented pair should be addressed first in Broward County. Then the respondents were similarly asked to prioritize pairs representing the social groups (domains) themselves.

The results of these paired comparisons were subsequently analyzed, and a standardized score (on a 100-point scale) was generated for each domain and each risk factor, representing the community's perceived priority in both rank and magnitude.

**IMPORTANT:** It is important to note that the five relative importance scales presented in this report (one scale to prioritize domains, and four individual scales prioritizing risks within each domain) are independent; it is not appropriate to compare domain or risk factor scores between scales (i.e., graphs).



## Paired Comparison Analysis

In any study of human perception, **people** (survey respondents) respond to **stimuli** (child/adolescent behavioral risk factors) relative to their perception of the importance of these stimuli. A data matrix of all people and their responses to all stimuli is then generated. The goal of this perception study is to scale the stimuli (risk factors) by summarizing and analyzing the responses from a representative sample of the people who are respondents to the survey. From the data collected, statistically reliable scale values can be derived to reflect the importance of the risk factors in evaluating what the community should focus on to improve the health of its young people.

The technique used in these studies is known as the "Law of Comparative Judgment" created by the psychometrician, L. L. Thurstone. This technique yields an interval scale of a set of stimuli (risk factors) that allows not only rank ordering of the stimuli from most to least important, but also to make judgments regarding the distance from one stimulus to another. Are two stimuli fairly close to each other in importance, or is there a wide discrepancy in the importance between them?

The response process that is used to create the data for analysis through the Law of Comparative Judgment is called "pair comparisons." This process is usually preferred over a simple rank ordering of stimuli, because the person responding needs only to indicate their preference between two risk factors at a time. Psychometric experts would argue that it is not likely that respondents would be able to reliably create an interval scale through their own subjective judgment, but that they can very reliably and validly discriminate between two stimuli paired together. The interval scale can then be derived through the statistical analysis of the Law of Comparative Judgment.

The pair comparisons technique asks the respondent to simply state which of a given pair of stimuli (risk factors) is more important relative to the potential problematic behavior exhibited by young people. Each of the factors under consideration is paired with each other factor so that all possible pairs of factors are compared by each respondent. Statistical analysis of these data yields a stimulus scale that is in standard deviation units of measure. In other words, a value of **0** is the average scale value, a value of **+1.00** is one statistical standard deviation above the average, and a value of **-1.00** is one statistical standard deviation below the average. These scale values indicating the importance of each stimulus will usually range from a high of 2.00 to a low of -2.00. To create a scale of the stimuli (risk factors) that is more easily interpreted by the lay consumer, it is appropriate to transform the above scale values into a new scale with a mean (average) value of 50 and a standard deviation of 25. Thus, a value of 75 is one statistical standard deviation above the average and a value of 25 is one standard deviation below the average.

# Overview of Risk Factors

*Risk factors* are those conditions that increase the likelihood that a child will develop one or more health and/or behavior problems in adolescence: <sup>1</sup>

Risk and protective factor-focused prevention is based on the work of J. David Hawkins, Ph.D., Richard F. Catalano, Ph.D., and a team of researchers at the University of Washington in Seattle. In the early 1980s, they conducted a review of 30 years of youth substance abuse and delinquency research and identified risk factors for adolescent drug abuse, violence and delinquency in multi-ethnic communities.

Other researchers, including Joy Dryfoos (1990), Robert Slavin (1989), and Richard Jessor (1986) have reviewed the literature on behavior problems, such as school dropout and teen pregnancy, and identified risk factors for these problems. Not surprisingly, there is an interrelationship between identified risk factors – young people who are seriously involved in either juvenile delinquency, substance abuse, school dropout, teenage pregnancy, or violence are more likely to engage in one or more of the other problem behaviors. Furthermore, these teen problems share many common risk factors.

Following is a summary of the risk factors and the problem behaviors they predict:

Risk Factors	Adolescent Problem Behaviors				
	Substance Abuse	Delinquency	Teen Pregnancy	School Dropout	Violence
<b>COMMUNITY</b>					
Availability of Drugs	X				X
Availability of Firearms		X			X
Community Laws and Norms Favorable Toward Drug Use, Firearms and Crime	X	X			X
Transitions and Mobility	X	X		X	
Low Neighborhood Attachment and Community Disorganization	X	X			X
Extreme Economic Deprivation	X	X	X	X	X
<b>FAMILY</b>					
Family History of the Problem Behavior	X	X	X	X	X
Family Management Problems	X	X	X	X	X
Family Conflict	X	X	X	X	X
Favorable Parental Attitudes and Involvement in the Problem Behavior	X	X			X
<b>SCHOOL</b>					
Early and Persistent Antisocial Behavior	X	X	X	X	X
Academic Failure Beginning in Late Elementary School	X	X	X	X	X
Lack of Commitment to School	X	X	X	X	X
<b>INDIVIDUAL/PEER</b>					
Alienation and Rebelliousness	X	X		X	
Friends Who Engage in the Problem Behavior	X	X	X	X	X
Favorable Attitudes Toward the Problem Behavior	X	X	X	X	
Early Initiation of the Problem Behavior	X	X	X	X	X
Constitutional Factors	X	X			X

Source: Developmental Research and Programs, Inc. 5/97 *Promising Approaches Training*.

<sup>1</sup> *Communities That Care: Leader's Guide*. Development Research and Programs, Inc. May 1997.

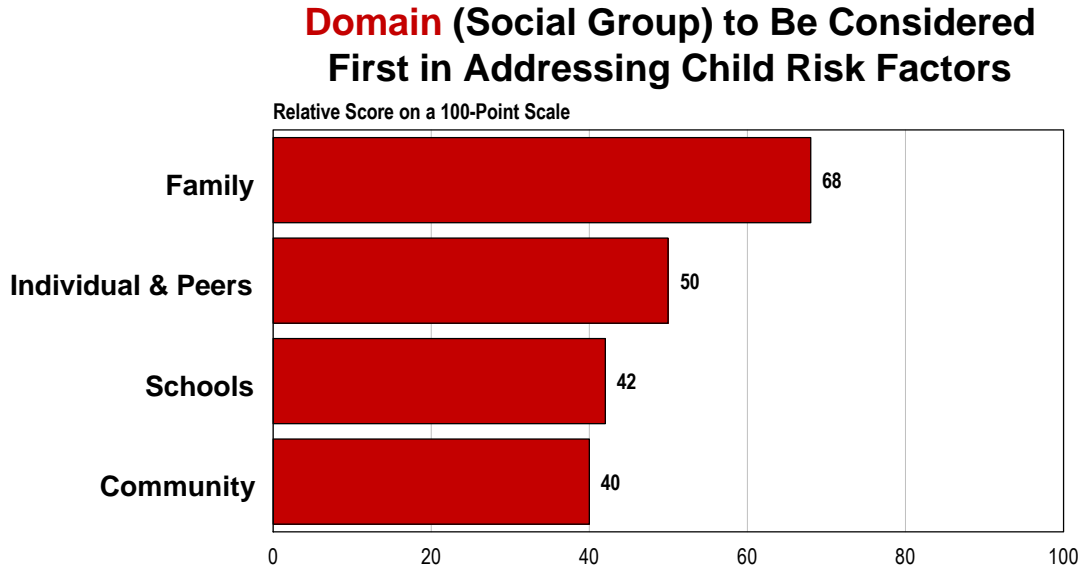
# Domain Prioritization

The 18 risk factors tested in this survey fall within four distinct domains, or social groups. These include: 1) Community; 2) Family; 3) School; and 4) Individual & Peers. While risk factors within each of these domains were rated and ranked, the domains themselves were also rated and ranked using paired comparison analysis.

## Ratings of Relative Importance

As can be seen in the following graph, **Family** emerges as the clear priority among Broward County residents as the social group to consider first when addressing child and adolescent risk factors (earning a relative importance of 68 on the 100-point scale).

The **Individual & Peers** domain follows the Family domain by a considerable distance (with a score of 50), and this is followed by the closely rated domains of **Schools** (score of 42) and **Community** (score of 40).



## Findings Among Paired Comparisons by Demographic Characteristics

Possibly a function of sample size (ergo, small cell sizes when segmenting the results by respondent characteristics), few statistically significant differences are noted when examining key demographic groups:

### Gender

- *Individual & Peers vs. Community*: women more often choose *Individual & Peers* than do men (75.5% vs. 64.5%).

No significant differences were found in comparing by **income** (households earning less than \$40,000 annually vs. those earning \$40,000 or more); **race** (White vs. Nonwhite); **presence of children** (households with children vs. those without); or **education level** (those with a high school education or less vs. those with postsecondary education).

# Domain 1: Family

## Risk Factors Explained <sup>2</sup>

### Family history of the problem behavior

If children are born or raised in a family with a history of criminal activity, their risk of juvenile delinquency increases. Similarly, children who are raised by a teenage mother are more likely to be teen parents, and children of dropouts are more likely to drop out of school themselves.

### Family management problems

This risk factor has been shown to increase the risk of drug abuse, delinquency, teen pregnancy, school dropout and violence. Poor family management practices include lack of clear expectations for behavior, failure of parents to monitor their children (knowing where they are and who they are with), and excessively severe or inconsistent punishment.

### Family conflict

Persistent, serious conflict between primary caregivers or between caregivers and children appear to enhance risk for children raised in these families. Conflict between family members appears to be more important than family structure. Whether the family is headed by two biological parents, a single parent, or some other primary caregiver, children raised in families high in conflict appear to be at risk for all of the problem behaviors.

### Favorable parental attitudes & involvement in the problem behavior

Parental attitudes and behavior toward drugs, crime and violence influence the attitudes and behavior of their children. Parental approval of young people's moderate drinking, even under parental supervision, increases the risk of the young person's using marijuana. Similarly, children of parents who excuse their children for breaking the law are more likely to develop problems with juvenile delinquency. In families where parents display violent behavior towards those outside or inside the family, there is an increase in the risk that a child will become violent.

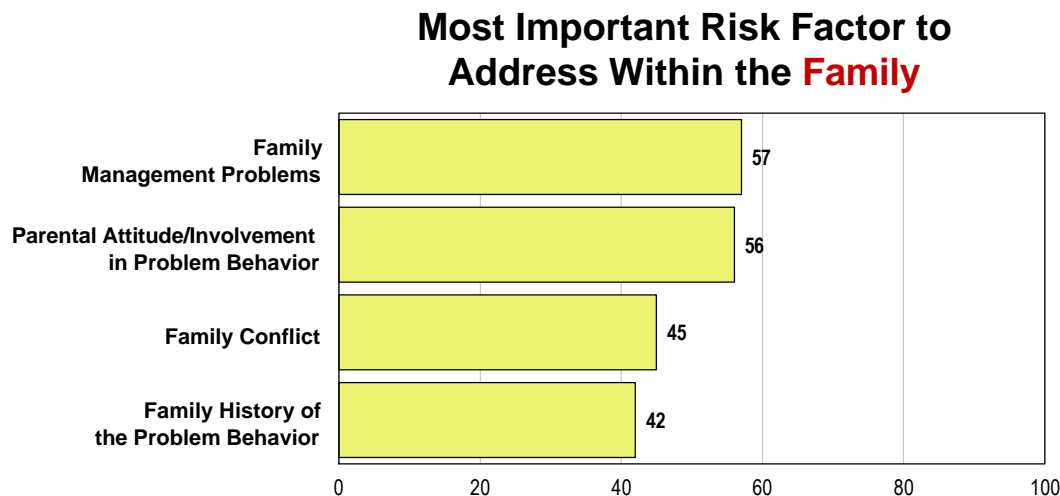
<sup>2</sup> *Communities That Care: Leader's Guide*. Development Research and Programs, Inc. May 1997.

Further, in families where parents involve children in their own drug or alcohol behavior—for example, asking the child to light the parent's cigarette or get the parent a beer from the refrigerator—there is an increased likelihood that their children will become drug abusers in adolescence.

## Ratings of Relative Importance

Within the *Family* domain, Broward County residents identify the closely ranked **family management problems** and **favorable parental attitudes and/or involvement in the problem behavior** as the key risk factors on which to focus efforts.

These factors are followed by a considerable margin by the risk factors related to **family conflict** and having a **family history of the problem behavior**.



## Findings Among Paired Comparisons by Demographic Characteristics

No significant differences were found in comparing paired *Family* risk factors by **gender**; **income** (households earning less than \$40,000 annually vs. those earning \$40,000 or more); **race** (White vs. Nonwhite); **presence of children** (households with children vs. those without); or **education level** (those with a high school education or less vs. those with postsecondary education).

## Domain 2: Individual & Peers

### Risk Factors Explained <sup>3</sup>

#### Alienation & rebelliousness

Young people who feel they are not part of society, are not bound by rules, don't believe in trying to be successful or responsible, or who take an active rebellious stance toward society, are at high risk of drug abuse, delinquency, violence and school dropout.

Alienation and rebelliousness may be an especially significant risk for young people of color. Children who are consistently discriminated against may respond by removing themselves from the dominant culture and rebelling against it. On the other hand, many communities of color are experiencing significant cultural change due to integration. The conflicting emotions about family and friends working, socializing or marrying outside of the culture may well interfere with a young person's development of a clear and positive racial identity.

#### Friends who engage in the problem behavior

Young people who associate with peers who engage in problem behavior—delinquency, substance abuse, violent activity, sexual activity or school dropout—are much more likely to engage in the same problem behavior. This is one of the most consistent predictors that research has identified. Even when young people come from well-managed families and do not experience other risk factors, just hanging out with friends who engage in problem behaviors greatly increases the child's risk. However, young people who experience a low number of risk factors are less likely to associate with friends who are involved in problem behavior.

#### Favorable attitudes toward the problem behavior

During the elementary school years, children usually express anti-drug, anti-crime, pro-social attitudes. They have difficulty imagining why people use drugs, commit crimes and drop out of school. However, in middle school, as others they know participate in such activities, their attitudes often shift toward greater acceptance of these behaviors. This acceptance places them at higher risk.

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<sup>3</sup> *Communities That Care: Leader's Guide*. Development Research and Programs, Inc. May 1997.

## Early initiation of the problem behavior

The earlier young people begin using drugs, committing crimes, engaging in violent activity, dropping out of school and becoming sexually active, the greater the likelihood that they will have problems with these behaviors later on. For example, research shows that young people who initiate drug use before the age of fifteen are at twice the risk of having drug problems as those who wait until after the age of nineteen.

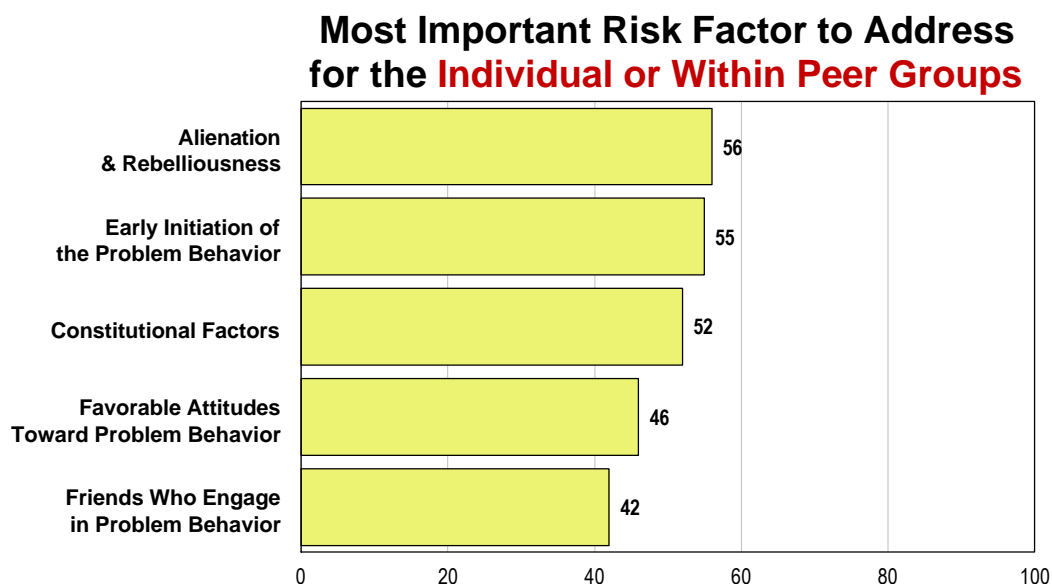
## Constitutional factors

Constitutional factors are factors that may have a biological or physiological basis. These factors are often seen in young people with behaviors such as sensation-seeking, low harm-avoidance and lack of impulse control. These factors appear to increase the risk of young people abusing drugs, engaging in delinquent behavior, and/or committing violent acts.

## Ratings of Relative Importance

In rating risk factors associated with individuals and within peer groups, three risk factors rank closely as the most important to address in Broward County. These include **alienation and rebelliousness**, **early initiation of the problem behavior**, and **constitutional factors**.

These risk factors are followed in rank by **favorable attitudes toward problem behavior** and having **friends who engage in the problem behavior**.



## Findings Among Paired Comparisons by Demographic Characteristics

### Gender

- *Alienation and Rebelliousness vs. Friends Who Engage in Problem Behavior*: women in Broward County choose *Alienation and Rebelliousness* as the risk factor to focus on more often than men (79.3% vs. 63.7%).

### Race

- *Alienation and Rebelliousness vs. Friends Who Engage in Problem Behavior*: white respondents give a higher response to the former than do nonwhite respondents (75.1% vs. 63.3%)
- *Constitutional Factors vs. Friends Who Engage in Problem Behavior*: nonwhites more often choose *Constitutional Factors* than do white respondents (73.2% vs. 61.7%)

### Education

- *Alienation and Rebelliousness vs. Friends Who Engage in Problem Behavior*: those with postsecondary education also give a higher response to *Alienation and Rebelliousness* than do persons with a high school education or less (77.2% vs. 62.1%).
- *Early Initiation of the Problem Behavior vs. Friends Who Engage in Problem Behavior*: those with postsecondary education more often choose *Early Initiation of the Problem Behavior* when compared to persons with no education beyond high school (79.0% vs. 60.2%).
- *Constitutional Factors vs. Favorable Attitudes Toward Problem Behavior*: individuals with a high school education or less more often choose *Constitutional Factors* than do those with postsecondary education (66.6% vs. 53.7%).

### Income

- *Alienation and Rebelliousness vs. Early Initiation of the Problem Behavior*: those at lower income levels (<\$40,000 annually) more often choose *Alienation and Rebelliousness* when compared to those at higher income levels (66.6% vs. 51.3%).

- *Alienation and Rebelliousness vs. Constitutional Factors*: higher income individuals more often choose *Alienation and Rebelliousness* than do those in households earning less than \$40,000 a year (59.4% vs. 48.0%).

## Presence of Children

- *Early Initiation of the Problem Behavior vs. Favorable Attitudes Toward Problem Behavior*: households with children give a higher response to *Early Initiation of the Problem Behavior* than do households without children (73.0% vs. 63.6%).

No other significant differences were found.

# Domain 3: School

## Risk Factors Explained <sup>4</sup>

### Early & persistent antisocial behavior

Boys who are aggressive in grades K-3 are at higher risk for substance abuse and juvenile delinquency. When a boy's aggressive behavior in the early grades is combined with isolation or withdrawal, there is an even greater risk of problems in adolescence. This increased risk also applies to aggressive behavior combined with hyperactivity or attention deficit disorder.

This risk factor also includes persistent antisocial behavior in early adolescence, like misbehaving in school, skipping school, and getting into fights with other children. Young people, both girls and boys who engage in these behaviors during early adolescence are at increased risk for drug abuse, juvenile delinquency, violence, school dropout and teen pregnancy.

### Academic failure beginning in late elementary school

Beginning in the late elementary grades, academic failure increases the risk of drug abuse, delinquency, violence, pregnancy and school dropout. Children fail for many reasons. It appears that the *experience of failure* not necessarily ability increases the risk of problem behaviors.

This is particularly troubling because, in many school districts, African-American, Native American, and Hispanic students have disproportionately higher rates of academic failure compared to white students. Consequently, school improvement and reducing academic failure are particularly important prevention strategies for communities of color.

### Lack of commitment to school

Lack of commitment to school means the young person has ceased to see the role of student as a viable one. Young people who have lost this commitment to school are at higher risk for all five problem behaviors.

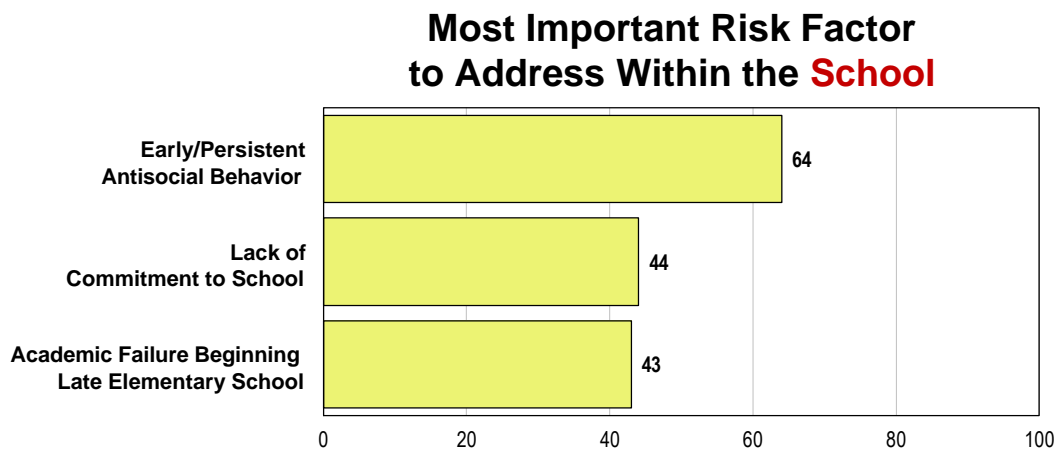
In many communities of color, education is seen as a way out, similar to the way early immigrants viewed education. Other groups in the same community may view

<sup>4</sup> *Communities That Care: Leader's Guide*. Development Research and Programs, Inc. May 1997.

education and school as a form of negative acculturation. In essence, if you get education, you have sold out to the majority culture. Young people who adopt this view are likely to be at higher risk for developing health and behavioral problems.

## Ratings of Relative Importance

Clearly, Broward County residents view **early and persistent antisocial behavior** as the most important risk factor to address within the *School* domain. Following in rank by a wide margin are the child's **lack of commitment to school** and **academic failure beginning in late elementary school**.



## Findings Among Paired Comparisons by Demographic Characteristics

### Gender

- Early and Persistent Antisocial Behavior vs. Academic Failure Beginning in Late Elementary School: Women choose *Early and Persistent Antisocial Behavior* more often than men (81.6% vs. 73.0%)

## Race

- Early and Persistent Antisocial Behavior vs. Academic Failure Beginning in Late Elementary School: white respondents much more often choose *Early and Persistent Antisocial Behavior* than do nonwhite respondents (82.6% vs. 62.4%).

## Education

- Lack of Commitment to School vs. Academic Failure Beginning in Late Elementary School: those with a high school education or less more often choose *Lack of Commitment to School* than do those with postsecondary education (65.8% vs. 52.2%).

No other significant differences were found.

# Domain 4: Community

## Risk Factors Explained <sup>5</sup>

### Availability of drugs

The more available drugs are in a community, the higher the risk that young people will abuse drugs in that community. Perceived availability of drugs is also associated with risk. For example, in schools where children just think that drugs are more available, a higher rate of drug use occurs.

### Availability of firearms

Firearm availability and firearm homicide have increased together since the late 1950s. If a gun is present in the home, it is much more likely to be used against a relative or friend than an intruder or stranger. Also, when a firearm is used in a crime or assault instead of another weapon or no weapon, the outcome is much more likely to be fatal. While a few studies report no association between firearm availability and violence, more studies show a positive relationship. Given the lethality of firearms, the increase in the likelihood of conflict escalating into homicide when guns are present, and the strong association between availability of guns and homicide rates, firearm availability is included as a risk factor.

### Community laws & norms favorable toward drug use, firearms & crime

Community norms—the attitudes and policies a community holds about drug use and crime—are communicated in a variety of ways: through laws and written policies; through informal social practices; and through the expectations parents and other members of the community have of young people.

One example of a community law affecting drug use is the taxation of alcoholic beverages. Higher rates of taxation decrease the rate of alcohol use at every level of use.

When laws, tax rates and community standards are favorable toward substance use or crime, or even if they are just unclear, children are at higher risk.

Another concern is when there are conflicting messages about alcohol/drugs from key social institutions. An example of conflicting messages about substance abuse can be found in the acceptance of alcohol use as a social activity within the community. The

<sup>5</sup> *Communities That Care: Leader's Guide*. Development Research and Programs, Inc. May 1997.

Beer Gardens popular at street fairs and community festivals frequented by young people are in contrast to the Just Say No messages that schools are parents may be promoting. These conflicting messages make it difficult for children to decide which norms to follow.

Laws regulating the sale of firearms have had small effects on violent crime that usually diminish after the law has been in effect for multiple years. In addition, laws regulating the penalties for violating licensing laws or using a firearm in the commission of a crime have also been related to reductions in the amount of violent crime, especially involving firearms. A number of studies suggest that the small and diminishing effect is due to two factors the availability of firearms from other jurisdictions without legal prohibitions on sales or illegal access, and community norms which include lack of proactive monitoring or enforcement of the law.

## Transitions & mobility

Even normal school transitions predict increases in problem behaviors. When children move from elementary school to middle school or from middle school to high school, significant increases in the rate of drug use, school misbehavior, and delinquency result.

Communities with high rates of mobility appear to be linked to an increased risk of drug and crime problems. The more often people in a community move, the greater the risk of both criminal behavior and drug-related problems in families. While some people find buffers against the negative effects of mobility by making connections in new communities, others are less likely to have the resources to deal with the effects of frequent moves, and are more likely to have problems.

## Low neighborhood attachment & community disorganization

Higher rates of drug problems, juvenile delinquency, and violence occur in communities or neighborhoods where people have little attachment to the community, where the rates of vandalism are high and where there is low surveillance of public places. These conditions are not limited to low-income neighborhoods: they can also be found in wealthier neighborhoods.

The less homogeneous a community in terms of race, class, religion and even the mix of industrial and residential areas the less connected its residents may feel to the overall community, and the more difficult it is to establish clear community goals and identity. The challenge of creating neighborhood attachment and organization is greater in these neighborhoods.

Perhaps the most significant issue affecting community attachment is whether residents feel they can make a difference in their own lives. If the key players in the neighborhood such as merchants, teachers, police, human and social services personnel live outside the neighborhood, residents sense of commitment will be less. Lower rates of voter participation and parental involvement in schools also indicate lower attachment to the community.

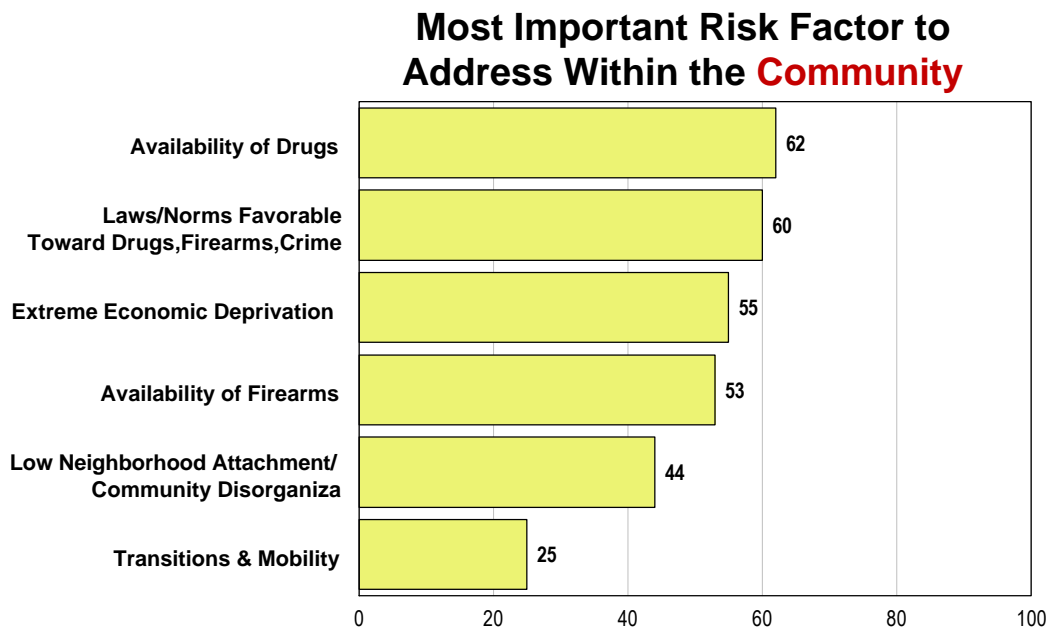
## Extreme economic deprivation

Children who live in deteriorating and crime-ridden 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 behavioral and adjustment problems early in life are also more likely to have problems with drugs later on.

## Ratings of Relative Importance

Regarding the community-related risk factors which Broward County residents believe need to be addressed first, the **availability of drugs** and **community laws and norms favorable toward drug use, firearms and crime** are ranked closely together at the top of the list.

These are followed in rank by **extreme economic deprivation** and the **availability of firearms**, which are closely ranked to each other. Lower scores are given to **low neighborhood attachment and community disorganization**, and particularly **transitions and mobility**.



## Findings Among Paired Comparisons by Demographic Characteristics

### Gender

- Availability of Drugs vs. Low Neighborhood Attachment & Community Disorganization: women more often choose the former than do men (72.1% vs. 58.8%).
- Availability of Drugs vs. Transitions and Mobility: women more often choose the former than do men (86.1% vs. 71.6%).
- Availability of Firearms vs. Transitions and Mobility: women more often choose the former than do men (77.6% vs. 63.9%).
- Availability of Firearms vs. Low Neighborhood Attachment & Community Disorganization: women more often choose the former than do men (69.8% vs. 53.5%).
- Availability of Firearms vs. Extreme Economic Deprivation: women more often choose the former than do men (58.1% vs. 44.2%).
- Availability of Drugs vs. Availability of Firearms: men more often choose *Availability of Drugs* than do women (68.0% vs. 54.5%). In this case, responses among women are much more evenly split between these two risk factors.
- Community Laws & Norms Favorable Toward Drug Use, Firearms & Crime vs. Availability of Firearms: men more often choose the former than do women (61.0% vs. 51.0%).

### Education

- Extreme Economic Deprivation vs. Transitions and Mobility: those with postsecondary education more often choose *Extreme Economic Deprivation* than do those with a high school education or less (84.8% vs. 74.8%).
- Availability of Drugs vs. Extreme Economic Deprivation: those with a high school education or less more often choose the *Availability of Drugs* than do those with postsecondary education (65.9% vs. 54.6%).

## Presence of Children

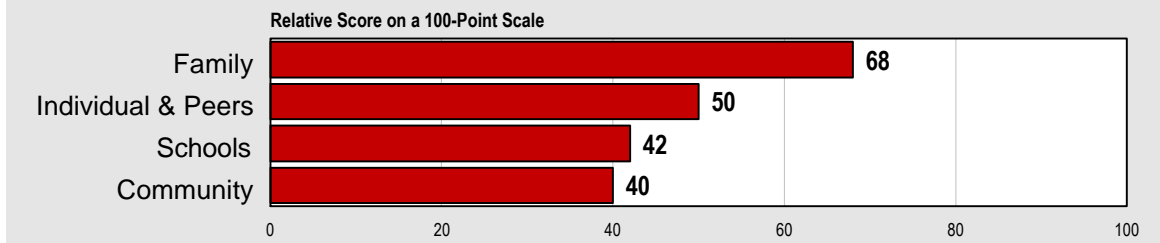
- Availability of Drugs vs. Availability of Firearms: persons in households without children more often choose *Availability of Drugs* than do those in households with children (64.6% vs. 53.8%). In this case, responses among households with children are much more evenly split between these two risk factors.

No other significant differences were found.

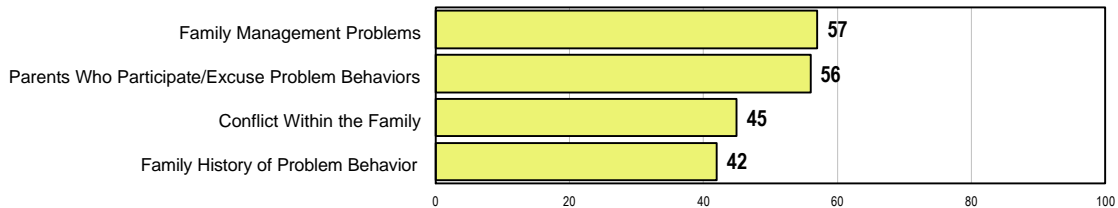
# Summary

## Child & Adolescent Risk Factor Analysis: Broward County, Florida

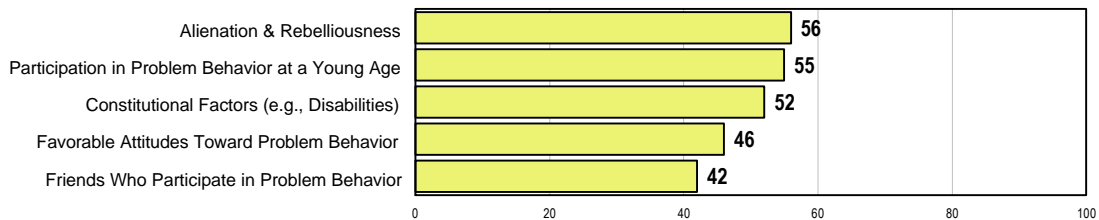
Which social group (domain) should be considered first in addressing risk factors?



Within the family, what are the most important risk factors to address?



For the individual & within peer groups what are the most important risk factors to address?



Within the school, what are the most important risk factors to address?



Within the community, what are the most important risk factors to address?

