

Risk and Protective Factors Associated with Involvement in Crime

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Understanding what makes one person more likely to be involved in crime than another person in a similar situation or from a similar situation has been a source of considerable research and interest for many years. If we were to be able to accurately predict who will be most likely to engage in crime, then we could help to prevent their involvement in crime.

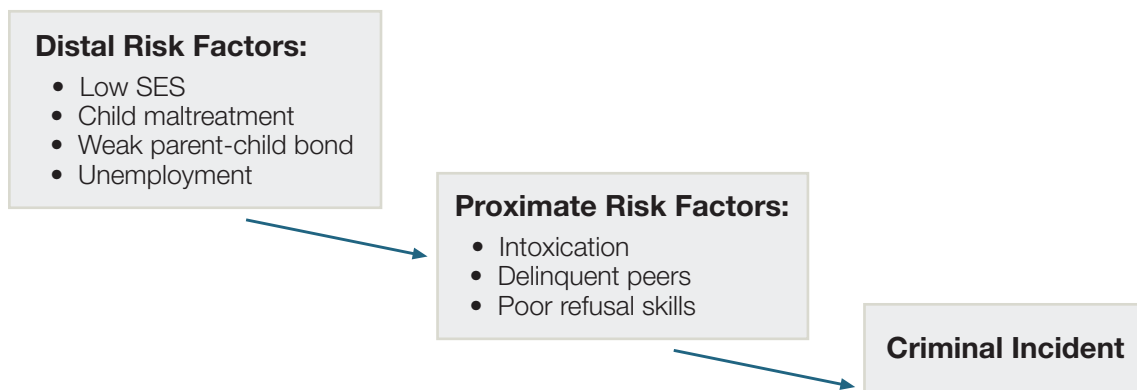
Unfortunately, we are not able to accurately predict who will get involved in crime. Some of the most successful business people engage in criminal activities, while some people who grow up in very difficult circumstances do not get involved in crime.

While we cannot accurately predict later involvement in crime, there is increasing evidence of factors that can increase the likelihood of involvement in crime. These factors are known as risk factors. Factors that reduce the chances of being involved in crime are protective factors. Both risk and protective factors tend to be clustered into the following groups:

- Child
- Family
- School
- Life events
- Community and cultural factors¹

This means that personality, social circumstances, family environment, schooling experience and life events can either protect an individual against becoming involved in crime or increase their chances of involvement in crime.

Some risk factors can have a more immediate contribution to a crime; while others are important background factors, but have a less direct relationship with a crime. For example, many people will be in a position of being taunted by another person at some point in their life. Not all people react to a taunt with violence. If a fight does start, it might be because the person is not very good at controlling their emotions (proximate risk factor). Years of being exposed to violence in the home (distal risk factor) might have contributed to this short temper.



Tackling the immediate and long-term causes of crime will ultimately prove to be the most effect way to prevent crime.

¹ National Crime Prevention (1999) **Pathways to prevention: Developmental and early intervention approaches to crime in Australia;** National Crime Prevention, Attorney-General's Department, Canberra.