

Prescription Drug Misuse Risk and Protective Factors

Multiple contributing factors can affect an individual's risk of substance misuse. Risk factors increase the likelihood of someone misusing substances, while protective factors counter an individual's risk. These factors can be variable or fixed; cumulative; and they can exist in multiple contexts, such as in a community. The Socio-ecological model is a developmental framework to examine an individual's risk and protective factors through multiple contexts and include the following domains.

Figure: Socio-ecological Model



- **Individual:** These factors include a person's age, education, income, genetics, health, and psychosocial strengths.
- **Relationship:** These factors include an individual's family members, peers, teachers, and other close relationships that affect their experiences and can influence their behavior.
- **Community:** These include settings where social relationships occur, such as schools, workplaces, online communities, and neighborhoods.
- **Societal:** These factors, often called the social determinants of health, include historical trauma, discrimination, social constructions of gender, laws limiting access to substances, and media portrayal of substance use (SAMHSA, 2019).

Risk and protective factors are important in planning community prevention efforts. The following information is a systematic review of studies that examine these factors related to prescription drug misuse through the socio-ecological lens (Nargiso *et al.*, 2014). Most of the prevention research on risk and protective factors related to prescription drug misuse has examined youth (ages 12-17) and young adults (ages 18-25).

Table: Risk and Protective Factors Associated with Prescription (Rx) Drug Misuse

Risk and Protective Factors Associated with Prescription (Rx) Drug Misuse Populations of Focus: Adolescents (ages 12-17) and Adults 18 and older		
Socio-Ecological Domain	Risk Factors	Protective Factors
Individual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is an inverse relationship between perceived harm in Rx drug use and Rx drug misuse. This means that when individuals or local communities believe there is no real harm, Rx drug misuse is higher. • Many studies show an extreme overlap between tobacco and e-cigarette use and Rx drug misuse. • Risk takers have higher rates of Rx drug misuse. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education regarding harms associated with Rx drug misuse lowers individual risk for misuse. • Increased religious attendance reduced risk of Rx drug misuse.
Interpersonal /family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth of parents that are 'tolerant' of drug use <u>or</u> those with family history of drug misuse are at a significant risk of misuse themselves. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Friend/peer disapproval of Rx drug use markedly decreases risk for Rx drug misuse. • Parental monitoring and involvement reduces risk for Rx drug misuse.
School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a significant association between Rx misuse and educational attainment. • In high school, Rx misuse is correlated with lower GPAs and dropping out of school. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family and parental involvement in education and behaviors at school may protect against risk of Rx misuse.
Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community environments that include Rx drug misuse or tolerant attitudes toward Rx misuse increase the risk for Rx drug misuse. • Availability of Rx drugs relates to misuse. This is attributable to development of new drugs and prescribing practices. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education on a community-wide level regarding harms associated with Rx drug misuse lowers Rx misuse. • Community connectedness
Societal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low socioeconomic status, poverty, homelessness, and incarceration are risk factors for substance misuse. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to health care

*Source: Nargiso et al., 2014

It is important to note that certain factors influence risk for prescription drug misuse across multiple domains (individual, interpersonal, school, community and societal). As noted earlier, perception regarding the potential harm of a substance is associated with risk of misuse. When perceptions of harm are low, then the risk for prescription drug misuse is higher. This is why community education about the risks of prescription drugs is a critical prevention strategy.

Another significant component that affects multiple domains is family and parental involvement. A lack of parental involvement can put adolescents at a higher risk for misusing prescription drugs. Furthermore, if parents or family members are misusing prescription drugs or are more 'tolerant' of substance misuse, then adolescents (and adults) are at a higher risk to misuse prescription drugs. On the other hand, family involvement is a protective factor in reducing prescription drug misuse.