

WHO/FCH/CAH/01.20  
(Revised)  
Original: English  
Distribution: General



# Broadening the horizon

## Balancing protection and risk for adolescents



Department of Child and Adolescent Health and Development  
Family and Community Health  
World Health Organization, Geneva

## Why focus on adolescents?

Adolescence is a period of rapid development when young people acquire new capacities and are faced with new challenges. It is a time of opportunity but also of vulnerability to risk behaviours which can have lifelong consequences, especially for health.

Health risk behaviours may undermine adolescent health and development. For example, unprotected sexual relations may lead to unplanned pregnancy or a sexually transmitted infection, including HIV.

So far, programming for adolescent health and development has focused mainly on providing information and services to reduce risk behaviours and mitigate their consequences. But this is not enough. The evidence now shows that enhancing protective factors, in addition to reducing risk, is equally important. Programming strategies need to strike a balance, addressing both risk and protective factors.

## What do adolescents need?

*"A world fit for children is one in which ... all children, including adolescents, have ample opportunity to develop their individual capacities in a safe and supportive environment".<sup>W</sup>*

Whether in Beijing, Berlin, Cairo, Kathmandu, Kingston or Lomé, adolescents say they need an environment which reduces risky behaviour and supports their development.

Such an environment consists of:

- Meaningful relationships with adults, peers and partners.
- Structure and boundaries for behaviours.
- Encouragement of self-expression.
- Educational, economic and social opportunities.
- Opportunities for participation with their contributions being valued.
- Minimal risk of injury, exploitation, or disease.



## Adolescents matter because:

1. They are a demographic force

Adolescents comprise one-fifth of the world's population, or 1.2 billion people.

2. They are an economic force

Adolescents contribute significantly to their families and communities through paid and unpaid labour.

3. They are the future health

Adolescence is a formative stage which presents a unique opportunity to shape young people's health behaviours and social attitudes.

4. They have a right to participate

"...Adolescents are capable of helping to build a better future for all. We must respect their right to express themselves and to participate in all matters affecting them, in accordance with their age and maturity."<sup>W</sup>

*WDraft outcome document:  
A world fit for children,  
September 2001.*



## Risk and Protective Factors from around the World

### *We asked:*

Why it is that most adolescents grow up healthy, while some engage in behaviours that jeopardise healthy development? What accounts for these differences?

### *We found:*

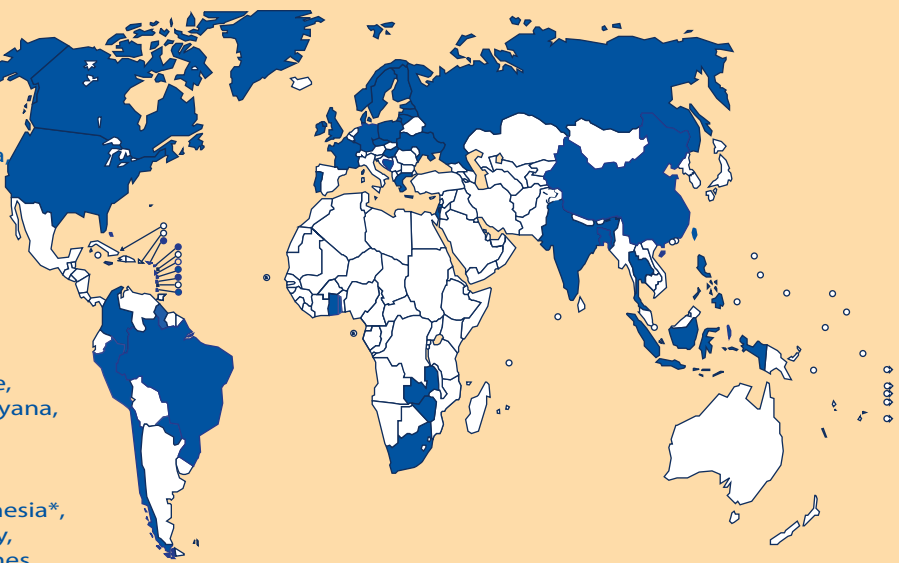
Certain risk and protective factors can explain the differences in adolescent behaviour and health outcomes, even after accounting for age, socio-economic status, sex, and ethnic group differences.

The following tables present results from studies of risk and protective factors in 53 countries from all regions of the world. The three health risks presented can lead to devastating health consequences for adolescents:

- **Early sexual initiation** is associated with unprotected intercourse, which can lead to unplanned pregnancies and to sexually transmitted infections, including HIV.
- **Substance use**, including tobacco, alcohol and other psychoactive drugs, can lead to illness and even death, and is also related to unsafe sex, accidents, violence and loss of productivity.
- **Depression** affects the capacity to function, is associated with the use of alcohol and other psychoactive drugs, and can lead to loss of productivity and even suicide.

The health consequences of these three health risks combined account for one quarter of the burden of disease among adolescents.

### *Our data come from:*



Antigua and Barbuda, Austria, Bahamas, Bangladesh, Barbados, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, British Virgin Islands, Canada, Chile, China, Colombia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Dominica, England, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Greenland, Grenada, Guyana, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Israel, Jamaica, Latvia, Lithuania, Micronesia\*, Northern Ireland, Norway, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Ireland, Russia, South Africa, St. Lucia, Thailand, Togo, Tonga\*, United States of America, Vanuatu\*, West Bank and Gaza, Zambia, Zimbabwe

*\* HBLPY surveys run by UNICEF*

The designations employed and the presentation of material on this map do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the World Health Organization concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries. Dotted lines represent approximate border lines for which there may not yet be full agreement.

## EARLY SEXUAL INITIATION

Risk or protective factors for adolescents	Africa	Asia	Caribbean	South America	North America
A positive relationship with parents	●	●	●	●	■
A positive relationship with teachers	●	●	■	●	ns
Friends who are sexually active	▲	■	▲	▲	■
Engaging in other risky behaviours	▲	■	▲	■	■
Having spiritual beliefs	■	●	●	■	●

### What do these findings on **depression** tell us?

- **Families matter:** Adolescents who have a positive relationship with parents, and whose parents encourage their self-expression, are less likely to experience depression. However, adolescents in families where there is conflict are more likely to experience depression.
- **School matters:** Adolescents who like school and who have educational goals are less likely to experience depression.
- **Community connections matter:** Adolescents who have a positive relationship with other adults in the community are less likely to experience depression.
- **Beliefs matter:** Adolescents who have spiritual beliefs are less likely to experience depression.

## SUBSTANCE USE (tobacco, alcohol, and other psychoactive substances)

Risk or protective factors for adolescents	Africa	Asia	Caribbean	Europe	Americas
A positive relationship with parents	ns	●	●	●	●
Parents provide structure and boundaries	●	●	■	ns	ns
Conflict in the family	▲	▲	■	ns	ns
A positive school environment	●	●	●	●	●
Friends who use substances	▲	▲	■	ns	▲
Having spiritual beliefs	■	●	●	■	●

Legend for all tables:



= not measured



= protective factor

## What do these findings on **early sexual initiation** tell us?

- **Families matter:** Adolescents who have a positive relationship with their parents are less likely to initiate sexual intercourse early.
- **Schools matter:** Adolescents who have a positive relationship with teachers are less likely to initiate sexual intercourse early.
- **Friends matter:** Adolescents who believe that their friends are sexually active are more likely to initiate sexual intercourse early.
- **Risk behaviours are linked:** Adolescents who engage in other risk behaviours, such as using alcohol and drugs, are more likely to initiate sexual intercourse early.
- **Beliefs matter:** Adolescents who have spiritual beliefs are less likely to initiate sexual intercourse early.

### DEPRESSION

Risk or protective factors for adolescents	Africa	Asia	Europe	Middle East	Americas
A positive relationship with parents	●	●	●	●	●
Parents encourage self-expression	●	●	●	●	●
Conflict in the family	▲	ns	▲	▲	▲
A positive attitude towards school	ns	●	●	ns	●
Positive relationship with adults in the community	●	●	●	ns	ns
Having spiritual beliefs	●	●	●	ns	ns

## What do these findings on **substance use** tell us?

- **Families matter:** Adolescents who have a positive relationship with their parents are less likely to use substances. In addition, adolescents whose parents provide structure and boundaries are also less likely to use substances. However, adolescents in families where there is conflict are more likely to use substances.
- **Schools matter:** Adolescents who have a positive relationship with teachers, who attend school regularly, and who do well in school are less likely to use substances.
- **Friends matter:** Adolescents who believe that their friends are using substances are more likely to use substances themselves.
- **Beliefs matter:** Adolescents who have spiritual beliefs are less likely to use substances.



= risk factor

ns = not significant

## What can we conclude?

Across cultures, health risk behaviours share many of the same risk and protective factors

Risk or protective factors for adolescents	Early Sex	Substance Use	Depression
A positive relationship with parents	●	●	●
Conflict in the family		▲	▲
A positive school environment	●	●	●
Friends who are negative role models	▲	▲	
Positive relationship with adults in the community			●
Having spiritual beliefs	●	●	●
Engaging in other risky behaviours	▲		

**Families matter:** Adolescents who live in a social environment which provides meaningful relationships, encourages self-expression, and also provides structure and boundaries, are less likely to initiate sex at a young age, less likely to experience depression, and less likely to use substances. On the other hand, adolescents who live in a family where there is conflict are more likely to experience depression and use substances.

**Schools matter:** Adolescents who have a positive relationship with teachers, and who have positive attitudes toward school are less likely to initiate sexual activity early, less likely to use substances, and less likely to experience depression.

**Community connections matter:** Adolescents who have positive relationships with adults in the community are less likely to experience depression.

**Beliefs matter:** Adolescents who have spiritual beliefs are less likely to initiate sexual intercourse too early, less likely to experience depression and less likely to abuse substances.

**Risk behaviours are linked:** Adolescents who engage in other risk behaviours (such as substance use) are more likely to initiate sexual activity early.

Adolescents whose environment includes positive relationships with adults at home and in the broader community, a positive school environment, and peers

预览已结束，完整报告链接和二维码如下：

[https://www.yunbaogao.cn/report/index/report?reportId=5\\_30419](https://www.yunbaogao.cn/report/index/report?reportId=5_30419)

