

Conclusion

Many factors influence the community, social, and school environments in which Illinois youth live. Although state and county-level data cannot reveal the degree to which any single youth is differentially exposed to factors that increase his or her risk for delinquency, they can be useful to policymakers and juvenile justice practitioners as indicators of potential challenges to successful youth development. Knowledge of risk factors and the prevalence of these factors are useful in planning and implementing prevention activities. Policies and programs that support the development and enhancement of the many pro-social or protective factors of youth in Illinois may help curtail a youth's involvement in the juvenile justice system.

Policymakers and practitioners should be aware that many rural counties have community, social, or school environments that increase the risk of youth engaging in delinquency. Rural counties had risk factor rates greater than the statewide averages in several areas. It may be important to note, however, that because rural counties have smaller populations, change in rural rates can be sensitive to slight changes in numbers.

Research has shown that exposure to one or more risk factors increases the risk of delinquency significantly.¹ Officials should investigate more thoroughly the reasons behind high risk factor rates and seek out opportunities to reduce them.

Notes

¹ Oman, Roy F., Sara Vesely, Cheryl B. Aspy, Kenneth McLeroy, Sharon Rodine, and LaDonna Marshall, "The Potential Protective Effect of Youth Assets on Adolescent Alcohol and Drug Use". *American Journal of Public Health* (August 2004): 1425-1430.