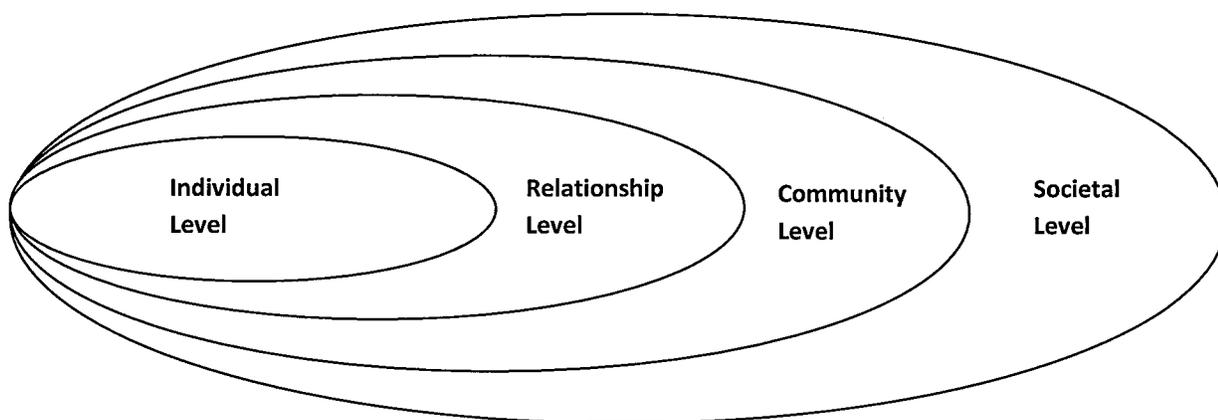


## Primary Prevention of Sexual Violence

### A Comprehensive Way to View Sexual Violence

Sexual violence is caused by the interaction of a number of factors that put an individual at risk. These risk factors occur at multiple levels in an individual's life, as described in the Socio-Ecological Model.<sup>[1]</sup>

### The Socio-Ecological Model



- **Individual level** – includes influences such as biological factors, beliefs and attitudes, and personal history of violence that influence a person's likelihood of becoming a victim or a perpetrator.
- **Relationship level** – includes influences like social relationships such as family and peers.
- **Community level** – relates to neighborhoods, workplaces and schools, and ways they contribute to or protect against violence.
- **Societal level** – involves underlying conditions like cultural or religious beliefs and social norms which contribute to protection from or vulnerability to sexual violence.<sup>[2]</sup>

### Risk Factors for Sexual Violence

Risk factors for sexual violence across the levels (individual, relationship, community and societal) include:

- gender inequality
- social norms supportive of traditional gender roles, intimate partner violence and sexual violence, and gender roles that support male entitlement
- poverty, economic stress and unemployment
- lack of institutional support from police and judicial systems
- weak community sanctions
- dysfunctional, unhealthy relationships characterized by inequality, power imbalance and conflict
- alcohol and substance misuse
- witnessing or being a victim of violence as a child<sup>[2]</sup>

## **The Need for a More Comprehensive Set of Primary Prevention Activities**

Much of the violence experienced in the United States and New Mexico occurs among people who are not strangers. **In 2012, NM sexual assault service providers reported that sexual violence offenders were known to their victims in 92% of the cases.**<sup>[3]</sup> Many sexual violence prevention activities and laws are geared toward preventing predatory violence that occurs among strangers, **while most perpetrators of sexual violence are acquaintances, friends and family members.**

Complex problems like sexual violence:

1. create the need for comprehensive solutions, that is – a more comprehensive set of primary prevention activities (for example, changes in social norms, organizational practices, public education, and policy) that go beyond working to change individual behaviors<sup>[4]</sup>
2. establish the context for cooperation between sexual violence service providers, public health, criminal justice and other traditional and non-traditional partners<sup>[5]</sup>

## **Primary Prevention**

Primary prevention is a **systematic process** that promotes healthy environments and behaviors and reduces the likelihood of an incident **before it occurs** in the first place.<sup>[6]</sup>

Successful primary prevention programs –

- are comprehensive, utilizing multiple strategies to initiate change at multiple levels (i.e., individual, peer and community),
- engage the community to identify what to change and how to change it,
- use interventions consistent with the social, cultural, economic and political context of the community,
- are based in theory both about the causes of sexual violence (e.g. feminist theory) and how to prevent it (e.g. stages of change theory),
- not only address risk factors, but also promote community strengths and resources, and
- target underlying causes contributing to sexual violence such as social norms and inequality.<sup>[7]</sup>

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