
At the completion of this lesson, you will be able to:

- Describe what it means to “move upstream” and prevent violence
- Describe the continuum of prevention strategies
- Define risk and protective factors

There is an often quoted parable that tells of a man and woman fishing downstream. Suddenly a person comes down the river struggling for life. The fisherfolk pull her out. Then another comes and again must be rescued. This happens all afternoon and the fisherfolk are getting very tired from constantly pulling people from the river.

Photo: WHO/TDR/Crump
Eventually they think, “We need to go upstream and find out why so many people are falling in the water”.

When they go upstream, they find that people are drawn to the edge to look at the river, but there is no safe way to do this. Many of them fall. The fisherfolk go to the community leaders and report the number of people who have fallen into the river. They also report that this is due to the lack of a protective barrier on the cliff. Community leaders build a wall behind which people may safely view the water. Some still fall, but there are many fewer victims to rescue.

Photo: Michael Jyce

This is the “moving upstream” analogy for prevention. Instead of expending all resources and energy on rescuing people, why not stop the problem from even happening? This is not to say that the problem can be totally eliminated—or at least not right away-- but there may be fewer people to rescue downstream.
Primary Prevention

- Behavioral
- Environmental
- Economic
- Social and cultural
- Social justice

The upstream analogy describes primary prevention—a key concept in population health or public health approach. In addition to focusing on primary prevention, population-based health consists of population-wide efforts to prevent disease or injury. This differentiates it from medicine which focuses on one individual at a time. Population-based health takes into account a wide array of factors:

- Behavioral
- Environmental
- Economic
- Social and cultural
- Social justice

Primary prevention deals with both risk and protective factors. A risk factor is a behavior or condition that, on a basis of scientific evidence, is thought to increase vulnerability to a specific condition. Within violence prevention there are risk factors for both perpetration and victimization.

Assignment of risk factors is not meant to blame the victim. Women are at higher risk for breast cancer, but we don’t blame women for having more breast tissue than men. Risk factors are meant to suggest vulnerabilities. For example a risk factor for domestic violence victimization is social and physical isolation.
Protective Factor

A protective factor is a behavior, social influence or policy that, on the basis of scientific evidence, is thought to reduce vulnerability to a specific condition or other behaviors.

Just as there are risk factors for violence or any public health problem, there are protective factors that share the same complexities of biological, social, cultural, economic and political influences. Violence prevention capitalizes on these protective factors.

Prevention – “When”

- Primary
- Secondary
- Tertiary

There are three levels of prevention: Primary, secondary and tertiary. These levels of prevention focus on “When” in the process of the development of a problem that the intervention has its effect.

Primary Prevention

Stopping violence from happening in the first place

Primary prevention represents interventions aimed at stopping violence from happening in the first place. It is the only level of prevention that focuses on the “before”. Think back to the prevention parable. Primary prevention would be the building of the safety wall.

Primary prevention can employ a wide variety of strategies that address a range of factors including:

- Media campaigns
- Policy changes
- Parenting education
- Home visiting for new parents
- Mentoring programs
- Community policing

These programs and policies address risk factors in an effort to counteract them before they create a problem.
Secondary prevention consists of efforts to identify those who are already affected, while still at an early stage. In the parable, secondary prevention would be rescuing those who fall with a net to keep them from hitting the water or rescuing them as soon as the hit the water.

An example of secondary services would be rape crisis centers that assist a victim immediately following the attack.

Tertiary prevention refers to strategies designed to address problems through policies, programs and services for people who have already experienced a problem – for example been victims of violence already. Tertiary prevention for violence includes interventions taken after an event or condition that lessen the effect and reduce long term consequences.

Examples of violence prevention at this level are:
- physical and mental health services to rehabilitate people who have experienced rape.

The rest of this lesson will focus only on primary prevention – that is keeping violence from occurring at all.

Many people in violence prevention also use another set of concepts that help us consider to whom primary prevention efforts are directed.

These three levels of intervention are:
- Universal
Universal approaches are those that are aimed broadly at a population group regardless of whether individuals within the group have specific risk factors.

Population groups may be defined geographically, such as a whole nation, state, or community. Sometimes one might think of a universal approach directed at a smaller unit within a community – such as a whole school.

Examples might include taxes on alcohol that affect everyone, or creating safer schools by designing buildings with better lighting. As a result of these interventions, everyone is protected whether they experience increased risk factors or not and everyone shares the burden of the intervention (e.g. if it requires finances or loss of individual freedom).

Selected interventions are those that are aimed at people who have been identified in some way as being at heightened risk for violence victimization or perpetration – usually because they have certain risk factors associated with a type of violence (e.g. drug or alcohol using adolescents or young single parents who have not been violent yet but who may need extra help with positive parenting skills).
Indicated approaches are those aimed at groups who have already been victimized or have perpetrated violence. Examples would be mental health services for victims and/or perpetrators.

Universal and selected approaches are those aimed at stopping violence before it starts. Some organizations are better positioned to take on universal approaches than others. Some will be more comfortable with selected approaches, while others will remain best suited to delivering services that qualify as indicated. Overall, however, the goal is to move organizations toward finding ways to do primary prevention using universal and selected approaches. There are many factors that will determine how and when any given organization or collection of organizations decide to tackle these types of approaches. These issues will be discussed in other modules of this curriculum.
Part 1: Story of Prevention

Contributing Factors

- Poor educational opportunities
- Access to lethal weapons
- Social norms of male dominance
- Lack of mental and physical health services
- Social and geographical isolation

The value of universal approaches is that they can address risk factors that are known to contribute to multiple forms of violence such as:

- Poor educational opportunities
- Access to lethal weapons and
- Social norms of male dominance
- Lack of mental and physical health services
- Social and geographical isolation

So let’s look at examples which are primary-selected and primary-universal.

Examples-Selected

- Mentoring or recreational programs for youth with risk factors for violence
- Early childhood education for children from low income families.

Universal examples might include:

- Public awareness campaigns about violence
- Job training programs
- Ensuring that alcohol and weapons laws are enforced

In summary,

“Moving upstream” refers to stopping violence before it starts.
There are three levels of prevention: primary, secondary and tertiary.

There are three levels of intervention focusing on the “who”: Universal, Selected and Indicated.

There are both risk and protective factors.

These key points remind us that we can stop violence before it starts by creating primary prevention programs.