



December 2022 Op Ed:
Violence Prevention as a Public Health Issue

Violence is a widespread, complex public health issue that impacts all of us. Its various forms (intimate partner violence, sexual violence, child abuse and neglect, bullying, teen dating and youth violence, suicidal behavior, elder abuse or neglect and more) are interconnected with overlapping causes. Learning about the factors that influence violence, can help with prevention.

The Division of Violence Prevention of the *Center for Disease Control* (CDC) for about 40 years, has been doing research to identify what works, bringing together data, science, and action. Their framework uses a four-level model showing the complex interaction among individual, relationship, community, and society factors. In order to prevent violence, it's necessary to act across these multiple levels at the same time. Some of the *protective factor* the CDC identifies for *individuals* includes skill development in solving problems non-violently, assertiveness, and conflict resolution; for *relationships*, connections to family, a caring adult, and school are critical; at the *community* support level, employment with living wages, access to mental health and substance abuse services, and coordination of resources and services are essential; at the *society* level, policies supporting economic, gender, and ethnic equity are important. For educational resources go to: <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/index.html>

At the federal level, the Violence Against Women Act, reauthorized in March of 2022, provides improved prevention and response to sexual violence and expands criminal jurisdiction of Tribal courts to include non-Native perpetrators of sexual assault. But people of any gender can be at risk of violence. Another recent federal law ended forced arbitration for sexual assault and harassment, which stops companies from forcing workers to give up their right to a jury trial with such claims. According to an article in Forbes (March 4, 2022), companies generally prefer arbitration instead of courts, because arbitration is not public and has fewer costs to the business.

In Doña Ana County, we are fortunate to have resources for addressing *risk* (unemployment, crime, access to guns, prolonged toxic (dis)stress, antisocial beliefs, authoritarian attitudes) and *protective* factors. The *Doña Ana County Resilience Leaders* are working to limit adverse childhood experiences (ACEs, trauma and adversity) to ensure that children, students, and families are safe. They released a survey for Doña Ana County in 2020, identifying levels of need and access to ten basic family services. The survey described a number of barriers to accessing the ten survival services (medical care, behavioral health care, food, housing, transportation, parent supports, early childhood education, community schools, youth mentors, and job training). They have provided educational events and developed a strategic planning process to guide their mission. <https://www.dacrl.org/reports-publications>

The League has positions that support many of the protective factors cited by the CDC. Violence prevention programs need to train child care providers, teachers, administrators, and coaches; and to be in school curricula. Individuals, businesses, agencies, institutions, and governments need to take a more active roles in preventing violent behavior. There are no easy solutions for preventing violence, but we all have a right to feel and be safe in our families, work, and communities.

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