

## Risk Factors of Loitering

**Summary of Key Factors:** Shopping centers and malls; Video arcades; Public parks, playgrounds, and amusement parks, School grounds; Apartment complex common areas; Public libraries; Convenience stores and fast food restaurants; Transportation facilities; Open-air drug markets; Gang activity; Prostitution; Homelessness.

**Aim:** To assist analysts with the identification of risk factors for the production of risk terrain maps. Specifically, this brief provides an annotated review of the factors related to loitering and the settings and times for which some factors may be most relevant. This information should be especially useful to help choose a time period for creating risk terrain maps (i.e., Step 3), to identify aggravating and mitigating risk factors to include in your risk terrain model (i.e., Steps 5 and 6), and to inform the operationalization of your risk factors to risk map layers (i.e., Step 7).<sup>i</sup>

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### Operational Definition

For the purpose of this research brief, loitering is defined as standing in public with no apparent purpose.<sup>ii</sup>

### Aggravating/Mitigating Risk Factors Based on a Review of Empirical Literature

#### Mitigating Factors Associated with Loitering Locations

Locations with poor comfort levels, convenience, and attractiveness are associated with lower levels of loitering behavior. For example, locations with limited places to sit or lean, little or no protection from the weather, intense lighting, unpopular music playing, enforced parking regulations, high levels of visibility, and increased surveillance techniques such as the use of CCTV.<sup>iii</sup>

#### Locations Commonly Associated with Loitering<sup>iv</sup>

- Shopping Centers and Malls
- Video Arcades
- Public Parks, Playgrounds, and Amusement Parks
- School Grounds
- Apartment Complex Common Areas
- Public Libraries
- Convenience Stores and Fast Food Restaurants
- Transportation Facilities

#### Open-Air Drug Markets

Open-air drug markets are characterized by the presence of a seller or sellers in a specific geographic area where potential buyers can easily locate a drug from the seller or sellers. Consequently, drug sellers will loiter in these areas in order to be identified by potential buyers and likewise, potential buyers may loiter in an area looking for an individual who is selling the drug or drugs he or she is seeking to purchase.<sup>v</sup>

#### Gang Activity

Gang members frequently engage in loitering in order to stake claim to a particular geographic area, to recruit new members, to intimidate other rival gangs, and to strike fear in local residents.<sup>vi</sup> Gangs may also engage in loitering when writing graffiti to mark their turf, convey threats, disrespect rival gangs, or show pride for their own gang.<sup>vii</sup>

#### Prostitution

Loitering often occurs when prostitutes remain in a specific geographic area and try to entice and solicit potential clients or when clients remain in a specific geographic area looking for the services of a prostitute. Pimps may also engage in loitering when trying to arrange meetings between a prostitute and a client.<sup>viii</sup>

#### Homelessness

Homeless men and women spend more time on the streets and in public areas as they often have nowhere else to go.

Homeless individuals may pass time on the streets and public places or may engage in panhandling behavior to procure money.<sup>ix</sup>

### Setting Effects

Open-air drug markets are frequently found in inner city or urban environments with poorly maintained, high-density low-income housing.<sup>x</sup> While gang activity is found in suburban and rural communities, gang activity is also a predominant element in inner city or urban environments with the majority of gang members identified as being from the underclass.<sup>xi</sup> Loitering behavior may also be more common in these environments because of a lack of entertainment, activities, or facilities for youths and teenagers and a lack of supervision.<sup>xii</sup>

### Endnotes

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<sup>i</sup> For steps of risk terrain map production, download the RTM Manual at [www.riskterrainmodeling.com](http://www.riskterrainmodeling.com)

<sup>ii</sup> Lippman, M. (2009). *Contemporary criminal law: Concepts, cases, and controversies* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.

<sup>iii</sup> Scott, M. S. (2001). *Disorderly youth in public places*. Washington, DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, U.S. Department of Justice.

<sup>iv</sup> Scott, M. S. (2001). *Disorderly youth in public places*. Washington, DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, U.S. Department of Justice.

<sup>v</sup> Harocopos, A., & Hough, M. (2005). *Drug dealing in open-air markets*. Washington, DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, U.S. Department of Justice.

<sup>vi</sup> Regini, L. A. (1998). Combating gangs. *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin*, 67(2), 5-12.

<sup>vii</sup> Weisel, D. L. (2002). *Graffiti*. Washington, DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, U.S. Department of Justice.

<sup>viii</sup> Lippman, M. (2009). *Contemporary criminal law: Concepts, cases, and controversies* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.

<sup>ix</sup> McNamara, R. H. (Ed.). (2008). Homelessness in America (Vol. 1). Westport, CN: Praeger Perspectives.

<sup>x</sup> Harocopos, A., & Hough, M. (2005). *Drug dealing in open-air markets*. Washington, DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, U.S. Department of Justice.

<sup>xi</sup> Walker, S., Spohn, C., & DeLeone, M. (2007). *The color of justice: Race, ethnicity, and crime in America*. Belmont, CA: Thompson Higher Education.

<sup>xii</sup> Scott, M. S. (2001). *Disorderly youth in public places*. Washington, DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, U.S. Department of Justice.