

## Risk Factors of Simple Assault

**Summary of Key Factors:** Restaurants, bars, and nightclubs; School buildings and school property; Entertainment venues; Gender; Age; Marital status; Socioeconomic status.

**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 simple assault 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, simple assault is defined as an “attack without a weapon resulting either in no injury, minor injury (for example, bruises, black eyes, cuts, scratches or swelling) or in undetermined injury requiring less than two days of hospitalization.”<sup>ii</sup> Simple assault also includes attempted assault without the use of a weapon.<sup>iii</sup>

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

#### Offense Locations

##### Restaurants, Bars, and Nightclubs

Restaurants, bars, and nightclubs are conducive to violence, including simple assault. Alcohol consumption causes heightened emotionality, risk taking behavior, limited perception of options during an altercation, a reduced fear of consequences and sanctions, and an impairment of communication which prevents individuals from talking their way out of a potentially violent situation. The environment of these facilities are often characterized by overcrowding, a lack of physical comfort, competitive situations, a low number of staff, tolerance of delinquent behavior, and a low level of police regulation which all contribute to possible violence and assault. Establishments that cater to prostitutes, traffic in stolen goods or drugs, or incorporate aggressive entertainment are at a higher risk for

violence. While a higher concentration of restaurants, bars, and nightclubs does not necessarily correlate with higher violence, if establishments have the same closing time, then patrons, possibly from different social groups, may encounter each other on the street leading to violent altercations.<sup>iv</sup>

##### School Buildings and School Property

According to the *Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Statistics*, 19.8% of simple assaults occurred inside of school buildings or on school property in 2007.<sup>v</sup>

##### Entertainment Venues

Entertainment venues such as stadiums, arenas, sporting grounds, and concert halls are conducive to simple assault as they are characterized by overcrowding, a high level of physical contact between attendees, alcohol availability, high-energy events, and the adversarial nature of athletic competitions.<sup>vi</sup>

#### Victim Characteristics

##### Gender

Males experience higher rates of simple assault victimization than females.<sup>vii</sup>

##### Age

Individuals aged 12-19 show the highest rate of simple assault victimization followed by individuals aged 20-24. Rates of simple assault victimization rapidly decrease after age 24.<sup>viii</sup>

### Marital Status

Largely due to their lifestyle or routine activities, individuals who have never married or are divorced or separated have higher rates of simple assault victimization than those individuals who are married or widowed.<sup>ix</sup>

### Socioeconomic Status

Households with a cumulative income of less than \$7,500 have the highest victimization rates of simple assault.<sup>x</sup>

### Temporal Differences

Simple assault that is related to alcohol consumption or patronage of a bar or nightclub are more likely to occur during weekend nights.<sup>xi</sup>

### Setting Effects

Urban environments, classified as metropolitan cities with populations exceeding 50,000, have the highest rates of simple assault as compared to suburban and rural communities.<sup>xii</sup>

According to the FBI's National Gang Assessment of 2009, gangs commit as much as 80% of the crime in many communities. The FBI notes assault as an example of a typical gang-related crime. Assault is often committed against rival gangs or rival drug distributors in the gang's territory.<sup>xiii</sup>

Communities with high rates of drug use and drug distribution experience higher levels of violence, which includes assault. Assault may occur as a result of disputes between drug dealers over territory, disputes within dealing hierarchies to enforce regulations, disputes over payment, arguments over drug quality or quantity, during attempts to steal drugs or drug paraphernalia, or due to violence associated with drug use.<sup>xiv</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> Bureau of Justice Statistics (n.d.). *Assault*. Retrieved November 16, 2010, from <http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/index.cfm?ty=tp&tid=316>
- <sup>iii</sup> Bureau of Justice Statistics (n.d.). *Assault*. Retrieved November 16, 2010, from <http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/index.cfm?ty=tp&tid=316>
- <sup>iv</sup> Scott, M. S., & Dedel, K. (2006). *Assault in and around bars* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Washington, DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, U.S. Department of Justice.
- <sup>v</sup> Maguire, K. (Ed.). *Sourcebook of criminal justice statistics*, (3.32.2007) [Online]. Available: <http://www.albany.edu/sourcebook/pdf/t3322007.pdf>
- <sup>vi</sup> Madensen, T. D., & Eck, J. E. (2008). *Spectator violence in stadiums*. Washington, DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, U.S. Department of Justice.
- <sup>vii</sup> Catalano, S. M. (2004). *Criminal Victimization, 2003*. Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics.
- <sup>viii</sup> Renzetti, C. M., & Edleson, J. L. (Eds.). (2008). *Encyclopedia of interpersonal violence* (Vol. 1). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- <sup>ix</sup> Levinson, D. (2002). *Encyclopedia of crime and punishment* (Vol. 1). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- <sup>x</sup> Catalano, S. M. (2004). *Criminal Victimization, 2003*. Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics.
- <sup>xi</sup> Scott, M. S., & Dedel, K. (2006). *Assault in and around bars* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Washington, DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, U.S. Department of Justice.
- <sup>xii</sup> Renzetti, C. M., & Edleson, J. L. (Eds.). (2008). *Encyclopedia of interpersonal violence* (Vol. 1). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- <sup>xiii</sup> U. S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation. (2009). *National gang threat assessment, 2009*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office
- <sup>xiv</sup> Goldstein, P. J. (1985). The drugs/violence nexus: A tripartite conceptual framework, *Journal of Drug Issues*, 39, 143-174.