

Spotlight: The favorable attitudes to drug use and antisocial behaviors risk factor scales

April 2025



Utah
Prevention
Network



The risk and protective factor model of adolescent problem behaviors

The risk and protective factor model of adolescent problem behaviors was developed at the University of Washington’s Social Development Research Group.¹ The model identifies a variety of risk factors (RFs) and protective factors (PFs) that predict 5 problem behaviors in adolescence: substance abuse, school drop out, delinquency, teen pregnancy, and violence. RFs and PFs are organized into 4 domains that encompass the main areas of a young person’s life: community, family, school, and individual/peers. Each RF/PF in the model is connected to at least 1 of these problem behaviors (and most are connected to more than 1). Additional RFs have been added to the model over time as new research connects RFs to the problem behaviors. In Utah, we are fortunate to have the Utah Student Health and Risk Prevention (SHARP) Survey,² which collects data that are used by prevention professionals and communities to facilitate the delivery of effective prevention services throughout the state. In this data brief, we take a closer look at the data available for 2 of the model’s original risk factors: youth attitudes favorable toward the problem behavior, and parental attitudes toward the problem behavior. These risk factors are based on the simple idea that when youth or parents have attitudes that are favorable toward problem behaviors, youth will be more likely to engage in those (and related) problem behaviors. Because the model predicts a large range of problem behaviors, the (youth and parent) favorable attitudes RFs are each measured through 2 separate scales: a) the favorable attitudes toward drug use scale (alcohol, marijuana, etc.) and b) the favorable attitudes toward antisocial behaviors scale (picking a fight, stealing something, etc.).

The youth favorable attitudes toward drug use and antisocial behavior risk factor scales

The youth favorable attitudes toward antisocial behavior (ASB) scale includes 5 items covering a variety of problem behaviors, while the youth favorable attitudes toward drug use (DU) scale includes 4 items ranging from alcohol to illegal drug use (see below). Items for both scales are rated on a scale of: *Very wrong, wrong, a little bit wrong, or not at all wrong*. For each RF scale, an average score across the items is calculated, and each

| Youth favorable attitudes toward antisocial behavior risk factor scale items: | Youth favorable attitudes toward drug use risk factor scale items: |
|---|--|
| <i>How wrong do you feel it is for someone your age to:</i> | |
| - take a handgun to school? | - drink beer, wine, or hard liquor regularly? |
| - steal anything worth more than \$5? | - smoke cigarettes? |
| - pick a fight with someone? | - smoke marijuana? |
| - attack someone with the idea of seriously hurting them? | - use LSD, cocaine, amphetamines, or another illegal drug? |
| - stay away from school all day when their parents think they are at school? | |

survey participant is categorized as either low risk or higher risk based on the cut points established for each scale that predict a greater likelihood of problem behaviors. Figure 1 presents the trend data in Utah for all 4 favorable attitudes risk factor scales from 2017 through 2023. A national norm (orange diamond) is also provided for comparison purposes. Overall, among Utah youth, rates for both youth and parental attitudes favorable to drug use have been much lower than the national comparison, and have been stable over time. In contrast, the percentage of youth categorized as higher risk on both the youth and parent favorable attitudes toward ASB scales has trended upward. Rates for the youth attitudes favorable toward ASB scale in Utah have exceeded the national comparison for several years, while rates of the parental attitudes favorable toward ASB scale have increased, but remained below the national comparison (however, Utah's rate was nearly the same as the national rate in 2023).

Figure 1. Youth and parent favorable attitudes toward drug use and antisocial behavior risk factors: Utah vs. national comparison 2017-2023 (SHARP)

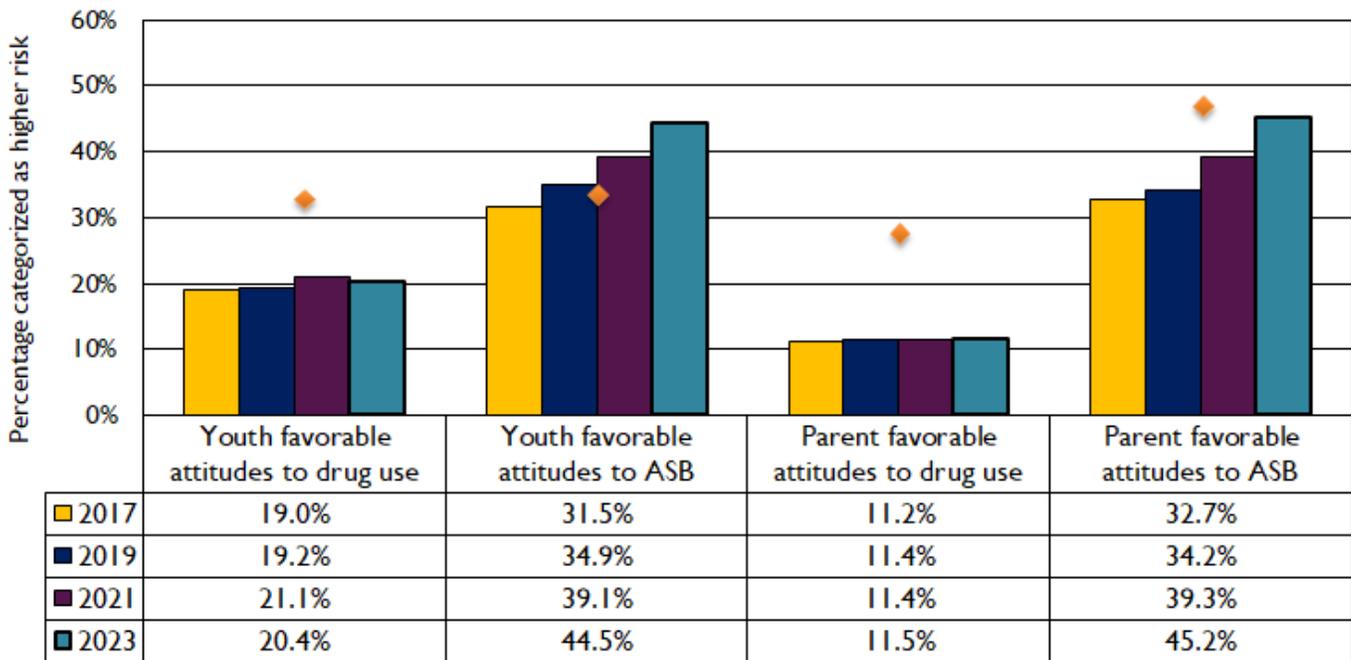
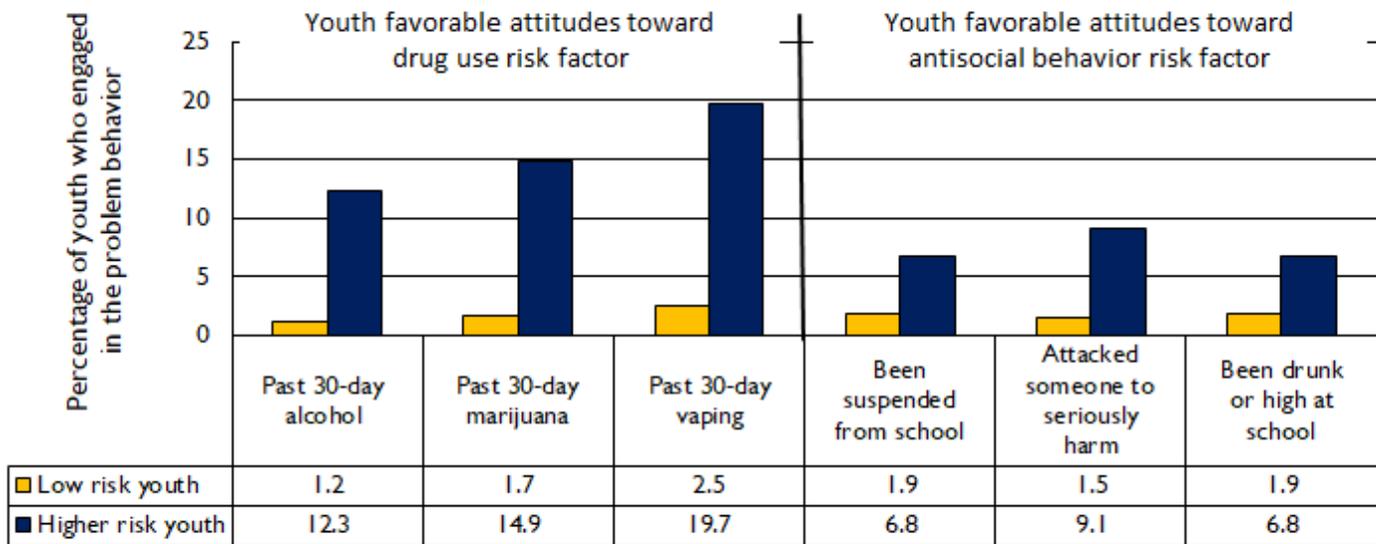


Figure 2 illustrates how the *youth* favorable attitudes toward DU and ASB risk factors predict a variety of substance use and antisocial behavior outcomes. As seen in Figure 2, youth categorized as higher risk on the favorable attitudes toward DU scale were much more likely to report 30-day use of alcohol, marijuana, and vaping than those who were categorized as low risk (12.3% of higher risk youth indicated alcohol use vs. only 1.2% of lower risk youth; 14.9% vs. 1.7% for marijuana use, etc.). In fact, higher risk youth were 9 times more likely to report past 30-day marijuana use, 10 times more likely to have used alcohol, and 8 times more likely to have vaped than their low risk counterparts. In regard to antisocial behaviors, higher risk youth on the favorable

attitudes toward ASB scale were much more likely to have been suspended from school, attacked someone to harm, and have been drunk or high at school during the past year (9.1% of higher risk youth reported attacking someone to harm vs. only 1.5% of low risk youth; 6.8% vs. 1.9% had been suspended, etc.).

Figure 2. Substance use and antisocial behaviors in relation to favorable attitudes toward drug use and antisocial behavior risk factor scales categorization-Utah 2023 (SHARP)



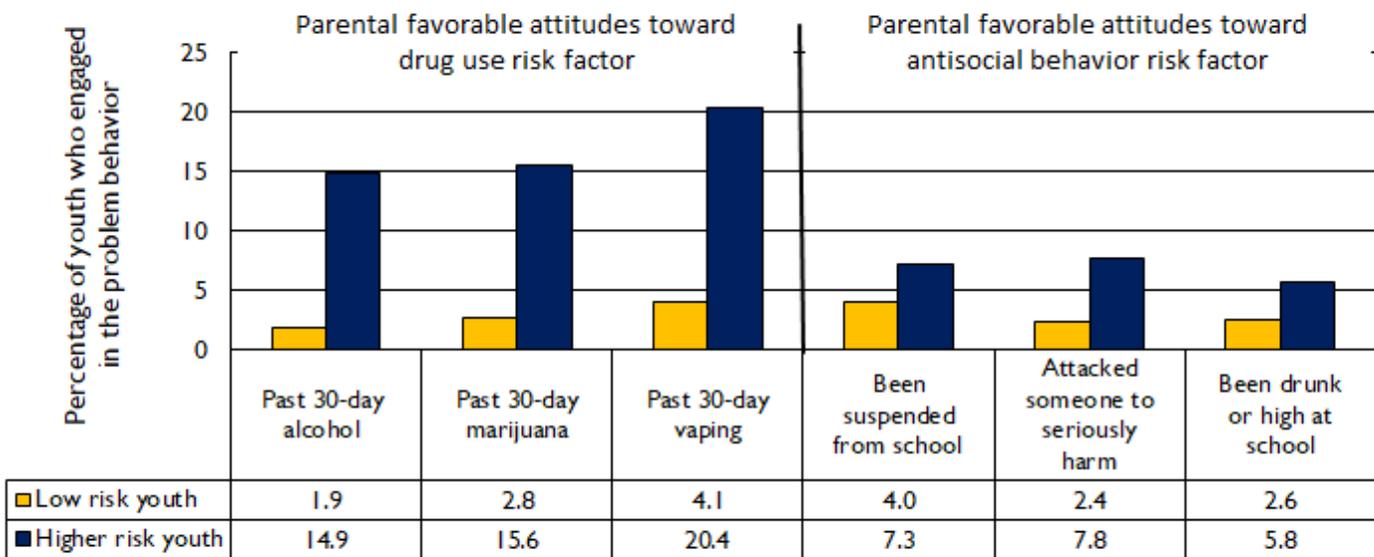
The parental favorable attitudes toward drug use and antisocial behavior risk factor scales

The *parental* favorable attitudes toward ASB and DU scales both include 3 items. The parental favorable attitudes toward DU scale includes measures of perceived parental disapproval of the use of alcohol, cigarettes, and marijuana, while the ASB scale includes perceived disapproval for stealing, picking a fight, and vandalising property (see below). Similar to the youth favorable attitudes risk factors, a scale score is computed by averaging the items from each scale, and youth are categorized as higher risk or low risk according to a cut point that predicts greater likelihood of problem behaviors.

| Parent favorable attitudes toward antisocial behavior risk factor scale items: | Parent favorable attitudes toward drug use risk factor scale items: |
|---|---|
| <i>How wrong do your parents feel it would be for YOU to:</i> | |
| - steal anything worth more than \$5? | - drink beer, wine, or hard liquor regularly? |
| - pick a fight with someone? | - smoke cigarettes? |
| - draw graffiti, or write things, or draw pictures on buildings or other property (without the owner's permission)? | - smoke marijuana? |

Figure 3 illustrates how the parental favorable attitudes toward DU and ASB risk factors predict substance use and antisocial behavior measures. As seen in Figure 3, youth categorized as higher risk on the favorable attitudes toward DU scale were much more likely to report 30-day use of alcohol, marijuana, and vaping than those who were categorized as low risk (14.9% of higher risk youth indicated alcohol use vs. 1.9% of lower risk youth; 15.6% vs. 2.8% for marijuana use, etc.). According to the data, higher risk youth were nearly 8 times more likely to report past 30-day alcohol use, 5.5 times more likely to report marijuana use, and 5 times more likely to report vaping than their low risk counterparts. In regard to antisocial behaviors, youth categorized as higher risk on the favorable attitudes toward ASB scale were much more likely to have been suspended from school, attacked someone to harm, and have been drunk or high at school during the past year (7.8% of higher risk youth reported attacking someone to harm vs. 2.4% of low risk youth; 7.3% vs. 4.0% had been suspended, etc.).

Figure 3. Substance use and antisocial behaviors in relation to favorable parental attitudes toward drug use and antisocial behavior risk factor scales categorization-Utah 2023 (SHARP)



[1]Hawkins, J. D., Catalano, R. F., & Miller, J. Y. (1992). Risk and protective factors for alcohol and other drug problems in adolescence and early adulthood: Implications for substance abuse prevention. *Psychological Bulletin*, 112(1), 64–105. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.112.1.64>

[2]The SHARP survey measures the health of Utah youth and the risk and protective factors that predict these health and problem behaviors in adolescents. The survey is administered across the state every other year to Utah students in grades 6 through 12.

This data brief was prepared for the Utah State Epidemiological Outcomes Workgroup by Bach Harrison, LLC. Visit <https://utahprevention.org/> to learn more about prevention efforts to reduce substance abuse and misuse.