

Local bars, not liquor stores, associated with heavy drinking

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Bars and nightclubs, but not liquor stores, are linked with excessive alcohol consumption and heavy episodic drinking in adults who live nearby, according to a new study from the Pardee RAND Graduate School in Santa Monica, California.

“Usually people think that liquor stores define a neighborhood’s alcohol consumption, but we didn’t find any relationship between them and problem drinking among the adult population in California,” says author Khoa Truong, PhD.

Instead, the investigators say that overall, their findings point to so-called “minor-restricted establishments” -- adults-only bars and nightclubs -- as having the most consistent and sizeable effects on adult problem drinking, even though they accounted for only about six percent of the total number of alcohol retail licenses in the area studied.

After accounting for one’s education level, income, race, and neighborhood sociodemographic characteristics, we found that a higher number of minor-restricted establishments located within one mile from someone’s home is associated with that person’s higher likelihood of binge drinking and consuming excess alcohol, the authors write.

“If the number of minor-restricted establishments increases, on average, from zero to two in a neighborhood, the prevalence of heavy episodic drinking in the past 30 days would increase from 11.1 percent to 14.3 percent among women and from 19.6 percent to 22.0 percent among

men; and prevalence of riding with a driver who perhaps had too much to drink would increase from 2.9 percent to 4.1 percent among women and 4.0 percent to 5.5 percent among men,” says Truong.

The investigators were not surprised with the results, they write, because bars, taverns, and night clubs, especially those that do not allow minors, are where social and cultural norms are more likely to accept, if not encourage, excess drinking

This research raises questions about the effectiveness of policies that target alcohol sales in general, such as a regulation in counties in California that limits the sale of alcohol licenses based on population numbers. For example, California imposes a moratorium on the issuance of alcohol retail licenses when the ratio exceeds one on-sale general license for each 2000 persons and one off-sale general license for each 2500 persons. Truong’s study indicates that limiting the total number of alcohol licenses is not as effective as targeting certain types of licenses, namely those for minor-restricted drinking establishments.

“What’s usually happening is that alcohol outlets are regulated at broader environments. It turns out that the action happens within a micro environment,” says Truong.

Source: Substance Abuse Policy Research Program

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