

# Liquor store density linked to youth homicides

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Violent crime could be reduced significantly if policymakers at the local level limit the number of neighborhood liquor stores and ban the sale of single-serve containers of alcoholic beverages, according to separate studies led by University of California, Riverside researchers.

In the first of two groundbreaking studies published in the September issue of the journal *Drug and Alcohol Review* – "Alcohol availability and youth homicide in 91 of the largest U.S. cities, 1984-2006" – researchers found a correlation between the density of alcohol outlets and violent crime rates among teens and young adults ages 13 to 24. Study authors were sociology professors Robert N. Parker and Kirk R. Williams, co-directors of the Presley Center for Crime and Justice Studies at UCR; Kevin J. McCaffree, UCR research assistant; sociology professor Emily K. Acensio of the University of Akron, who earned her Ph.D. at UCR; Angela Browne of the Vera Institute of Justice in Washington, D.C.; and Kevin J. Strom and Kelle Barrick of RTI International in Research Triangle Park, N.C.

The second study, "The impact of retail practices on violence: The case of single serve alcohol beverage containers," examined crime rates and cooler space allocated to containers sold individually in San Bernardino, Calif. Researchers generally found higher rates of violent crime in neighborhoods around alcohol outlets that allot more than 10 percent of cooler space for single-serve containers. Study authors were Parker, McCaffree and Daniel Skiles of the Institute for Public Strategies in San Bernardino.

Drug and Alcohol Review is published by the Australasian Professional Society on Alcohol and Other Drugs.

"These results suggest that alcohol control can be an important tool in violence prevention," Parker said. "Policies designed to reduce outlet density can provide relief from violence in and around these neighborhood outlets. And banning or reducing the sales of single-serve, ready-to-consume containers of alcohol can have an additional impact on preventing violence."

Researchers in the first study analyzed federal crime data for offenders ages 13 to 17 and 18 to 24 and census population and economic data to determine crime rates and the density of beer, wine and liquor stores in 91 of the largest American cities in 36 states.

Taking into account other factors known to contribute to youth homicide rates – such as poverty, drugs, availability of guns, and gangs – the researchers found that higher densities of liquor stores, providing easy access to [alcoholic beverages](#), contributed significantly to higher youth homicide rates.

"Our findings suggest that reducing retail alcohol outlet density should significantly reduce the trends of youth homicide," Parker said.

In the study of single-serve alcohol containers, researchers from UCR and the Institute for Public Strategies in San Bernardino collected data on alcohol outlet locations, violent crime reported to the San Bernardino Police Department and census data on a variety of population, family and age indicators. Workers from the San Bernardino County Department of Public Health's Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention Program visited every liquor store in the city, and counted the number of coolers containing alcoholic beverages at each location and the amount of cooler space devoted to single-serve containers.

All of that data was mapped using a Geographic Information Systems software program.

The researchers found that [violent crime](#) rates were significantly higher in neighborhoods that had both higher densities of liquor stores and retail outlets that devoted more cooler space for single-serve containers. The impact of sales of single-serve containers of alcoholic beverages alone was "modest," they said. The higher the percentage

"As far as we are aware, this is the first study of its kind to examine the impact of single-serve sales on violence, and the first study to use the proportion of cooler space as an indicator of sales volume of a type of alcoholic beverage," the researchers wrote. ... "There is no reason that communities concerned about single-serve containers and their impact cannot take regulatory action on the basis of this limited study. Community interests should dictate local policy, and the potential benefits of reduced violence outweigh any potential harm that the banning or limitation of such sales would create."

Parker said one type of regulatory measure that could be justified on the basis of the study's findings would be the adoption of a Deemed Approved Ordinance. Such a law would give cities more authority "to set acceptable standards of practice for existing [alcohol](#) retailers, as well as help to reduce existing outlet density by strengthening the local authority's ability to punish consistent violators of these standards of practice with the permanent loss of the ability to do business."

**\*\*Cities included in the youth homicide study, by state:**

Alabama: Birmingham, Mobile, Montgomery

Alaska: Anchorage

Arizona: Phoenix

Arkansas: Little Rock

California: Anaheim, Fresno, Long Beach, Los Angeles, Oakland, Riverside, Sacramento, San Diego, San Francisco, San Jose, Santa Ana, Stockton

Colorado: Colorado Springs, Denver

Georgia: Atlanta, Columbus

Hawaii: Honolulu

Illinois: Chicago

Indiana: Fort Wayne, Gary, Indianapolis

Iowa: Des Moines

Kentucky: Lexington-Fayette, Louisville

Louisiana: Baton Rouge, New Orleans, Shreveport

Maryland: Baltimore

Massachusetts: Boston, Springfield, Worcester

Michigan: Detroit, Flint, Grand Rapids

Minnesota: Minneapolis, St. Paul

Mississippi: Jackson

Missouri: Kansas City, St. Louis

Nebraska: Lincoln

Nevada: Las Vegas

New Jersey: Jersey City, Newark

New Mexico: Albuquerque

New York: Buffalo, New York City, Rochester, Syracuse

North Carolina: Charlotte, Greensboro, Raleigh

Ohio: Akron, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Columbus, Dayton, Toledo

Oklahoma: Oklahoma City, Tulsa

Oregon: Portland

Pennsylvania: Philadelphia, Pittsburgh

Rhode Island: Providence

Tennessee: Chattanooga, Knoxville, Memphis, Nashville-Davidson

Texas: Amarillo, Austin, Corpus Christi, Dallas, El Paso, Fort Worth, Houston, Lubbock, San Antonio

Utah: Salt Lake City

Virginia: Norfolk, Richmond, Virginia Beach

Washington: Seattle, Spokane, Tacoma

Wisconsin: Madison, Milwaukee

Top 100 cities eliminated from study for incomplete data: District of Columbia, Fort Lauderdale, Jacksonville, Miami, Omaha, St. Petersburg, Tampa, Tucson and Wichita.

Provided by University of California - Riverside

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