

On-premise alcohol outlets have stronger links to crime than off-premise alcohol outlets

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Prior research has shown that neighborhoods with higher densities of alcohol outlets are more likely to have higher rates of violent crimes. This study examined the effects of different types of alcohol outlets – on-premise such as bars and restaurants, and off-premise such as liquor and convenience stores – on four different categories of crime in urban neighborhoods. Results show a stronger relationship between density of outlets and crime for on- than off-premise outlets.

Results will be published in the August 2012 issue of *Alcoholism: Clinical & Experimental Research* and are currently available at Early View.

"On-premise establishments like bars and restaurants sell alcohol to be consumed on site," explained Traci L. Toomey, a professor in the school of public health at the University of Minnesota and corresponding author for the study. "Off-premise establishments like liquor stores and convenience stores sell alcohol to be consumed at a different location. As a result, these types of establishments could pose different problems for neighborhoods. On-premise establishments are more likely to attract larger crowds, and customers at these establishments may drink too much and get involved in problems like fights and vandalism. Off-premise establishment customers typically do not hang out at the establishment and are more likely to get intoxicated and have problems at different locations, potentially outside of the neighborhoods where

they purchased the alcohol."

Although other studies had assessed the relationship between alcohol-outlet density and crime, she added, most of them had only focused on one type of crime. "We were interested in seeing whether alcohol establishment density would have a different effect on assaults versus robberies versus other types of [violent crime](#)."

"Aside from alcohol beverage taxes, regulations on outlet density and number are one of the best ways to reduce alcohol problems in community areas," said Paul J. Gruenewald, senior research scientist at the Prevention Research Center. "Unlike alcohol taxes, these regulations can be used to regulate density and number across community neighborhoods. Because of this it is essential that research be directed at specific regulatory mechanisms that can make a difference."

Toomey and her colleagues examined data from 83 neighborhoods in Minneapolis for 2009, including alcohol-outlet densities, neighborhood demographics, and four categories of crime: assault, rape, robbery, and total violent crime.

"We found that neighborhoods with a higher density of alcohol establishments had more violent crime than neighborhoods with a lower density of alcohol establishments," said Toomey. "We observed a stronger relationship between density of establishments and crime for on-premise establishments than off-premise establishments."

When asked to explain why on-premise outlets seem more problematic than off-premise outlets, Toomey explained it as a chain of events. "One idea is that as we add more alcohol establishments in a neighborhood or other geographic area, we may see more competition for customers among the establishments. This may result in more specialized establishments that attract similar types of customers. This may mean

that some establishments start to attract only heavy drinkers versus a more balanced customer base. This may mean that there is more heavy alcohol use in these areas and thus, more problems related to alcohol use. This type of specialization is more likely to occur among on-premise establishments than off-premise establishments. If this idea is correct, then we would expect a stronger relationship between density of on-premise establishments and violent crime than between density of off-premise establishments and violent crime. Our results lend support to this idea."

Gruenewald agreed. "The mechanisms relating on-premise outlets to crime may be different from those relating off-premise outlets to crime," he said. "Crime related to off-premise outlets may only be related to sales and use while crime related to on-premise outlets may involve additional social mechanisms. These observations are of more than academic interest; drinking at on-premise outlets, especially bars, poses different risks to community members. Furthermore, a number of problems appear to be specifically related to off-premise availability that are not necessarily related to on-premise availability; these include violence between intimate partners and child physical abuse and neglect. The breadth of problems related to outlets is actually much broader than reflected in crime statistics."

"When policy makers decide whether to increase the number of alcohol establishments in their community or in a specific neighborhood, they typically consider a wide range of information, including economic benefits, community support, and potential for crime," said Toomey. "These findings add to the chorus that more alcohol establishments in a neighborhood may increase violent crime. So although elected officials may want to increase the number of alcohol establishments as a way to raise revenue during these tough economic times, they need to weigh economic benefits against a strong potential for increases in violent crime. An increase in violent crime will increase community costs in

terms of law enforcement, court costs, healthcare costs, and contribute to a poorer quality of life for neighborhood residents."

"Another very important finding is that these observations were made using naturally defined neighborhood areas, those defined by the city, and reflect similar findings from Census studies," said Gruenewald.

"This study shows not only the need to regulate alcohol outlet densities in community areas, but to do so using naturally defined areas which are often subject to regulation by city planning and zoning agencies."

Both Toomey and Gruenewald noted that the average person can have an impact on this issue.

"Individuals searching for a neighborhood to live in should assess how many alcohol establishments are located in the neighborhoods they are considering, as well as the crime rates within these neighborhoods," said Toomey.

"Community areas with high numbers of on-premise outlets may be [crime](#) attractors, leading to neighborhood conditions which depress housing values and rents," added Gruenewald. "Since these conditions can be regulated by planning and zoning departments, readers can help improve community health through involvement."

Provided by University of Minnesota

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