

With problem drinking, where you live may matter

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Some people living in disadvantaged neighborhoods may be at increased risk of problem drinking—though much may depend on race and gender, according to a new study in the November issue of the *Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs*. Researchers found that of nearly 14,000 U.S. adults surveyed, those living in low-income neighborhoods were generally more likely to be non-drinkers than were people in affluent neighborhoods.

That was not true, however, of black and [Hispanic men](#). And among people who did drink, African Americans in disadvantaged neighborhoods were more likely than their better-off counterparts to be [heavy drinkers](#). Also, when black men and white women from [poor neighborhoods](#) drank, they were more likely to suffer drinking-related "consequences"—ranging from trouble at work, to physical fights, to run-ins with the police—than their better-off counterparts.

"There are a lot of aspects of your environment that can affect your drinking behavior and what happens when you do choose to drink," says lead researcher Katherine J. Karriker-Jaffe, Ph.D., of the Public Health Institute's Alcohol Research Group in Emeryville, California.

On one hand, disadvantaged neighborhoods may have a lot of bars or other places to get alcohol, Karriker-Jaffe pointed out. On the other hand, there may be factors in those neighborhoods that limit people's drinking—like less [disposable income](#) to afford alcohol, or cultural norms that frown on drinking.

The new findings point to a fairly complex relationship between neighborhood disadvantage and drinking. And it's not clear yet why there are racial and [gender differences](#), according to Karriker-Jaffe.

For low-income black men, she speculates, the higher rate of heavy drinking could be related to the multiple [stressors](#) in their lives. The higher rate of drinking consequences could have a number of explanations, too—like the bigger police presence in low-income African-American neighborhoods.

Whatever the reasons for the findings, Karriker-Jaffe says they point to opportunities to intervene.

"This can help us figure out strategies to reach the most at-risk people," she says.

It might be wise, for example, to target prevention education or alcohol-abuse treatment programs to certain disadvantaged neighborhoods. But since drinking habits fit into the wider context of people's lives, bigger-picture efforts—like improving job opportunities—will likely be important, too, according to Karriker-Jaffe. It's hard to tell from this study whether cutting down on the typically high number of alcohol outlets in [disadvantaged neighborhoods](#) could potentially help. "We're not sure what the role of increased alcohol availability might be, but it's likely to be important as well," Karriker-Jaffe says.

More information: Karriker-Jaffe, K. Zemore, S. E., Mulia, N., Jones-Webb, R., Bond, J., and Greenfield T. K. (November 2012).

Neighborhood disadvantage and adult alcohol outcomes: Differential risk by race and gender. *Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs*, 73(6), 865.

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