

Space and place in alcohol research

October 21 2019



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Every time someone drinks an alcoholic beverage, he or she will drink that beverage at some place and some time. Not surprisingly this means that the physical and social environments in which that drinking takes place will be affected by:

- The physical characteristics of places that may encourage drinking, such as the ready availability of alcohol, and
- The social characteristics of places that accelerate drinking and lead to further problems, such as the presence of other heavy drinkers.

A new article by scientists at the Prevention Research Center of the Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation and colleagues at the University of Pittsburgh, Columbia, and Ohio State universities tackles the problems researchers must address to fully understand the effects of physical and [social environments](#) on drinking patterns and problems.

Although recent literature on place and alcohol use illustrates the importance of [place](#) and context on alcohol-related outcomes, it largely fails to identify the mechanisms by which these associations arise.

Instead, the authors recommend that future research:

- Identify high-risk contexts in which either more drinking or more problems will occur,
- Measure the physical and social characteristics of those places that accelerate drinking and problems,
- Explore the patterning of these interactions in space and time, and
- Construct models of how these contexts and characteristics operate to increase risks for [heavy drinking](#) and problems.

With that knowledge much more effective targeted [preventive interventions](#) can be developed. These will include individually-based interventions, like brief interventions to defuse alcohol-related violence in drinking contexts, and population-based interventions, like alterations in serving practices in drinking environments.

Lead author, Dr. Christina Mair, notes that: "Careful analyses of the 'social ecologies' of drinking will lead to the development of more effective environmental prevention interventions."

More information: Christina Mair et al. Space and Place in Alcohol Research, *Current Epidemiology Reports* (2019). [DOI: 10.1007/s40471-019-00215-3](https://doi.org/10.1007/s40471-019-00215-3)

Provided by Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation

Citation: Space and place in alcohol research (2019, October 21) retrieved 11 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2019-10-space-alcohol.html>

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