

Context matters: Neighborhood factors associated with heavier drinking

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People in wealthier neighborhoods drink alcohol twice as frequently as people in poorer areas, suggests a new study from the University of Pittsburgh Graduate School of Public Health and the Prevention

Research Center of the Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation.

Studying neighborhoods in the East Bay of California, researchers compared 72 clusters of 200 residents living in areas of high and [low household income](#) and stores selling alcohol for consumption elsewhere (such as liquor stores and other retailers). Residents of each cluster were asked how often and how much they drink and questions to assess [alcohol dependence](#). Data were also gathered by the study team to measure levels of physical decay in each neighborhood.

The study revealed that, in contrast with previous research, living in areas with more off-premise outlets was not linked to heavier drinking or more problem drinking. People in more affluent neighborhoods reported drinking twice as frequently as respondents in low-income areas.

The influence of social context was notable. People with [higher incomes](#) reported more frequent drinking—even when they lived in lower-income areas. But people with lower incomes who lived in affluent neighborhoods drank far more alcohol than people with similar incomes in poorer neighborhoods. Heavy drinking was also more commonly found in neighborhoods with more physical decay.

Says lead author, Dr. Christina Mair: "This study reports on the independent effects of social context and individual resources on drinking patterns. The effects of individual income is moderated by the local economic environment."

More information: Christina Mair et al, Microecological Relationships Between Area Income, Off-Premise Alcohol Outlet Density, Drinking Patterns, and Alcohol Use Disorders: The East Bay Neighborhoods Study, *Alcoholism: Clinical and Experimental Research* (2020). [DOI: 10.1111/acer.14387](https://doi.org/10.1111/acer.14387)

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