

# The fallacy of the local bar: Do individuals opt to travel farther than the neighborhood watering hole?

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Individuals travel beyond their residential neighborhood and area of work to bars, but tend to travel to liquor stores closer to home, according

to a new study at the Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health and the Monash University School of Public Health and Preventive Medicine. The findings are published in the journal [\*Drug and Alcohol Review\*](#).

"Our study aimed to characterize individuals' trips to [alcohol outlets](#) and describe these trip locations in the context of the mixed results we have seen from previous studies on alcohol outlet density and consumption," said Christina A. Mehranbod, in the Department of Epidemiology, and first author.

"Understanding where people [travel](#) to access alcohol outlets, like bars and liquor stores, is essential for understanding the environments to which people are exposed and ultimately influence decisions related to alcohol consumption."

Using 2014-2018 household travel data from the Victoria Integrated Survey of Travel and Activity from Victoria, Australia, the researchers categorized trip origins and destinations by ten place types, by total trip distance and duration, and [geographic location](#) as well as transport mode, and other personal and household level variables including age, and income, among others.

People were willing to travel to a bar farther than the distance and time people were willing to travel to liquor stores. Among 23,512 respondents, 378 or 1.6 percent traveled 18 minutes and approximately 5 miles to visit a bar versus the 79 study participants or 0.3 percent for a liquor store purchase. Bar trips added slightly over 5 miles and 18 minutes to cumulative travel; 41 percent attended bars co-located in participants' home local government area.

"Trips to and from liquor stores were shorter and quicker than trips to and from bars," observed Christopher Morrison, Ph.D., assistant

professor of Epidemiology at Columbia Mailman School, and senior author.

One-one-way trips to liquor stores had a mean distance of 8.7 miles and took 12.2 minutes, but these trips added only 3 miles and 8.9 minutes to the cumulative travel distance over the full day.

"We attribute this variation because trips to liquor stores are commonly part of complex trips involving multiple stops, Morrison noted.

Additionally, trips to liquor stores are part of more complex daily journeys—for example, it can be a stop between someone's workplace and home. Also, people might travel farther for unique bar experiences, but proximity influences liquor [store](#) purchases."

"This finding highlights the fact that alcohol outlet placement potentially affects populations well beyond the neighborhood in which outlets are placed," said Morrison.

In addition to describing where people travel to access bars and liquor stores, the research team also tested the impact of alcohol outlet density on trips to alcohol outlets. In sync with other literature, Morrison and the team found alcohol outlet density to play a role.

"With [alcohol consumption](#) continuing to take a considerable toll on [public health](#), we believe that refining the scientific methods for measuring exposure to alcohol outlets that may influence decisions to consume [alcohol](#) remains a research priority," said Mehranbod.

**More information:** Christina A. Mehranbod et al, Individuals' travel to alcohol outlets: The fallacy of the local bar, *Drug and Alcohol Review* (2024). [DOI: 10.1111/dar.13808](https://doi.org/10.1111/dar.13808)

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