

Study: Community organization can reduce, negate impact of alcohol outlets on neighborhood violence

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The density of businesses that sell alcohol in a community has been tied to local levels of violence, but new research has found that the influence depends on the nature of the community. More stable communities can see little to no influence but more disorganized communities are not so fortunate.

Communities with greater levels of disorganization, marked by higher percentages of people living in poverty and in women-headed households with children and more renters, were hit the hardest by the presence of the liquor establishments.

"Common values and stronger [social cohesion](#) found in more organized communities usually results in a greater ability to regulate the behavior of local retailers and those who patronize the local [alcohol outlets](#)," said William Alex Pridemore, professor in the Department of Criminal Justice at Indiana University Bloomington. "These communities are more likely to have greater social capital, effective informal surveillance, and even friends who work at city hall. They're more likely to get the attention of police or authorities who license liquor establishments."

Pridemore will discuss his findings on Monday during the American Sociological Association's annual meeting in Las Vegas.

The study results have policy implications. Changing local and state alcohol policies can be daunting because of its complex political and commercial context but Pridemore said changing [alcohol policy](#), such as restricting the number of outlets that can operate in disorganized neighborhoods, might be easier to achieve than changing neighborhood characteristics like poverty or social disorganization. Citywide policies that establish density thresholds for businesses that sell alcohol might not be necessary, he said, but instead such policies could be targeted to protect the most fragile neighborhoods.

The co-author of the study is Tony Grubestic, associate professor in the College of [Information Science](#) and Technology at Drexel University.

In earlier research, Pridemore and Grubestic found that adding one off-premise alcohol sales site per square mile would create 2.3 more simple assaults and 0.6 more aggravated assaults per square mile. Increases in violence associated with restaurants and bars were smaller but still statistically significant. Their latest findings demonstrate that this relationship between assaults and the number of alcohol outlets weakened as the social organization of a community increased. The association became stronger, with the number of assaults increasing, as the level of disorganization increased.

Pridemore said greater organization, which can include neighborhood associations and neighborhood watches, likely weakens the association for the following reasons: These communities can informally influence the behavior of patrons who visit local liquor establishments; residents are more likely to demand more responsible business practices from the owners and managers of alcohol sales sites; residents also are more likely to tap their social connections or otherwise get the attention of police and other authorities when problems arise.

The researchers created their models using geocoded police data on

assaults and geocoded data on the location of alcohol outlets in 298 block groups in Cincinnati. Pridemore and Grubestic's research is among the first to apply theories and research techniques used by sociologists and geographers to the long-studied relationship between violence and community organization, typically the domain of epidemiologists and public health experts.

Provided by Indiana University

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