

## **UNDERAGE DRINKING RELATED TO ENFORCEMENT, AVAILABILITY AND DRINKING NORMS**

Law enforcement and community drinking norms can affect underage alcohol use, a new study finds. The study, carried out by the Prevention Research Center of the Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation in Berkeley, California, investigated relationships between local alcohol policies, enforcement, alcohol outlet density, adult alcohol use, and underage drinking in 50 California cities. The researchers rated eight local alcohol policies in each city. Policies included restrictions placed on how alcohol is sold, ordinances holding social hosts responsible for providing alcohol to underage youth and harm resulting from alcohol use on their premises, and restrictions on window/billboard advertising, among others. An assessment of the level of local alcohol enforcement was based on grants received from the California Alcoholic Beverage Control agency for enforcement of underage drinking laws. Outlet density was based on the number of on- and off-premise outlets per roadway mile in the community. Level of adult alcohol use was measured by a survey of 8,553 adults. Underage drinking was measured by surveys of 1,312 adolescents in 2009 and 2010.

Communities with a higher density of alcohol outlets and higher levels of drinking among adults also had more underage alcohol use. Communities that had more vigorous enforcement activities had less underage drinking. However, the researchers did not find any relationships between the eight local alcohol-policy ratings and how much young people drink in the community.

Adult alcohol use, outlet density and enforcement appear to affect youth drinking indirectly through adolescents' perceptions and beliefs about the availability of alcohol, enforcement of underage drinking laws, and perceived acceptability of alcohol use. The importance of adolescents' perceptions indicates that alcohol may be more readily available to adolescents (especially from social sources) in communities where alcohol use is more normative and acceptable.

Dr. M.J. Paschall, lead author of the study stated, "These findings suggest that adult drinking norms and consumption patterns at the community level maybe important influences on underage drinking and should be targeted in interventions to reduce drinking and drinking problems among young people. These findings also suggest that media campaigns or social marketing may be an important component of prevention programs. In particular, increasing awareness and visibility of enforcement activities may be essential to obtain a deterrent effect." He went on to say, "We did not see a relationship between city alcohol policy ratings and adolescent drinking. This may be partly the result of the fact that it's easy to cross city limits to obtain alcohol. Young people can go into a neighboring community to buy or drink alcohol. By contrast, we find that when policies apply to larger areas – like a state, they appear to have a greater impact on underage drinking and other consequences like traffic crashes."

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