

## **COMPREHENSIVE COMMUNITY APPROACHES TO UNDERAGE DRINKING REDUCE SALES TO MINORS**

Community-based alcohol access reduction and enforcement approaches to underage drinking prevention can be effective in reducing sales to minors, a recent study determined. The research, carried out by the Prevention Research Center of the Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation in partnership with the Oregon Research Institute, used random assignment of 36 Oregon communities to test the effectiveness of a community-based intervention designed to reduce youth access to alcohol. Half of the communities implemented the program and half did not. The intervention components included community mobilization highlighting local underage drinking data and increasing awareness of the risks of underage alcohol consumption, coupled with a reward and reminder programs for retailers – rewarding them for refusing sales to minors and reminding them of the law if they sold to young-looking patrons without ID. In addition, local law enforcement agencies were recruited and trained to enhance their enforcement of underage drinking laws, which included compliance checks to prevent sales of alcohol to minors, surveillance activities designed to prevent adults from purchasing alcohol for minors, and intervening in underage drinking parties. Local media outlets publicized the program.

These activities were found to reduce the likelihood that retail clerks would sell alcohol to underage-looking buyers. The rate of sales to minors was reduced from almost 24% in the intervention communities before the program to less than 10% after the program was implemented. The control communities also experienced a decrease in sales to minors, but not as great as the intervention communities. The researchers hypothesized that the more general decrease could have resulted from media attention to the intervention that may have spread beyond the target communities into nearby communities as well as the possibility of communication among retailers in different communities.

Despite the decrease in sales to minors, no statistically significant differences were observed in underage drinking or the perceived availability of alcohol as reported by high school students surveyed in the communities. Communities with the most vigorous enforcement efforts, however, experienced significantly greater reductions in drinking and binge drinking among high school students than communities in which enforcement activities were less intense. Dr. Robert Flewelling, the lead author on the paper commented, “The findings highlight the difficulty in reducing youth drinking even when the community successfully reduces sales to minors. Underage drinkers can obtain alcohol from many sources other than stores. They get it from older friends and siblings, at parties, and even from their own homes. But the study results are encouraging in that they suggest that intensified efforts to enforce underage drinking laws, combined with efforts to publicize these efforts and garner public support for them, *can* have an impact on consumption.”

The full study appears in *The American Journal of Community Psychology*, DOI 10.1007/s10464-012-9529-3, published on line July, 2012.