

Drinking Linked to Neighborhood Factors

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newwave@tulane.edu

At-risk drinking among African Americans, particularly women, is linked to the concentration of liquor stores in a neighborhood, says Tulane community health researcher Katherine Theall.



Community health researcher Katherine Theall says doctors should be aware of the effect of environmental factors ? such as the density of liquor stores in a neighborhood ? that may lead to riskier drinking among patients. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

Her research also shows that concentrations of liquor stores have been associated with numerous alcohol-related risks including injurious and fatal traffic crashes, drunk-driving offenses, assaultive violence, liquor law violations, death from cirrhosis and sexually transmitted diseases.

[Theall](#), associate professor of community health sciences, investigated the impact of liquor stores, convenience stores and supermarket densities on at-risk drinking behaviors among African Americans. Her motivation for conducting the study was a lack of research concerning drinking patterns among minority populations, despite

an overconcentration of liquor stores in many minority communities in the United States.

“There has been quite a bit of literature on the impact of the alcohol environment on drinking rates,” says Theall. “But very few have examined the impact among specific minority groups or by gender.”

Theall and her colleagues recruited 321 African Americans from April 2002 through May 2003 from New Orleans healthcare clinics. The study participants answered quantitative questionnaires and were classified as at-risk drinkers according to the Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test.

The research team determined that among African Americans who drank, those who lived in neighborhoods with a greater density of liquor stores were more likely to be at-risk drinkers.

In addition, Theall observed that the influence of liquor store concentration on at-risk drinking was much greater for women than men, possibly due to increased stress. Theall's study suggests that women and men differ in their response to stress and may have different psychological coping mechanisms.

She said, “If drinking is a coping mechanism, then greater availability of alcohol may lead to riskier consumption patterns.”

These findings should encourage physicians to consider environmental factors that may lead to riskier drinking among patients, Theall said.

Michael Celone is a sophomore student at Tulane majoring in public health.