

Problem drinkers with friends who drink and who live in poor neighborhoods are more likely to relapse after treatment

Emeryville, CA: The number of people in your social network who drink increases the risk of relapse following treatment and this risk is even greater if you live in a disadvantaged neighborhood, a new study from the Alcohol Research Group, a project of the Public Health Institute, found.

Study participants were recruited from abstinence-based outpatient programs and participated in follow-up interviews one, three, five, and seven years post recruitment. A disadvantaged neighborhood was defined as at least twenty percent of its residents having incomes below poverty.

The number of heavy drinkers in one's network increases risk of relapse, even after adjusting for demographic and other risk factors associated with problem drinking. Those living in disadvantaged neighborhoods who had greater numbers of problem drinkers in their networks were at even greater risk for continued problem drinking compared to those in non-disadvantaged neighborhoods who had problem drinkers in their networks.

"This is the first study to look at the synergy between neighborhood disadvantage and social networks on relapse risk among people following treatment for alcohol problems," Scientist and lead author Amy Mericle said. "We now need to focus on developing and testing interpersonal and structural interventions to increase recovery capital to offset these risks."

Such interventions include providing those in recovery with strategies to deal with environmental and social triggers, as well as creating supportive environments that reinforce a lifestyle in recovery.

More Information

Mericle, A. A., Kaskutas, L.A., Polcin, D.L., and Karriker-Jaffe, K.J. (2018). Independent and interactive effects of neighborhood disadvantage and social network characteristics on problem drinking after treatment. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 37(1), 1-21.

Support for this paper was provided by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism at the National Institutes of Health under award number R01AA020328.

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