



Tools for Change: Alcohol Regulation

Ask almost any police officer what they think about adding a new bar or liquor store in a high-crime community, and they will likely have some strong opinions about why that should not occur. The link between alcohol and crime and disorder has been demonstrated by a number of researchers. Alcohol can serve as a stimulus for potential offenders, increase the vulnerability of victims, and contribute to a general sense of disorder in a community.

Root Problems

The Center for Problem-Oriented Policing (POP Center) has developed a number of guidebooks that identify problems associated with the overuse of alcohol. These guides examine some common problems, discuss how you can analyze your situation, and identify potential responses for your community to consider.

- **“The Problem of Chronic Public Inebriation”** examines the issues of individuals who are drunk and loitering in public spaces, including disorderly conduct, threats, public urination and defecation, passing out in public, thefts, and assaults—with chronically inebriated individuals as likely to be victims as perpetrators of crimes.
- **“The Problem of Assaults in and Around Bars”** looks at violent crimes committed by or against individuals who have been drinking, discussing possible factors that can contribute to the problems, from aggressive bouncers to competitive situations to discounted drinks.
- **“The Problem of Underage Drinking”** focuses specifically on the challenge of responding to youth drinking, which has its own set of factors revolving around motivation, access, culture, and impact.

One Response: Regulation

Communities may undertake a variety of responses to deal with a local alcohol problem, including developing policy to regulate the problem. This option helps to: 1) identify that the community has a problem, 2) detail the community response, and 3) assign a specific entity with responsibility for the response.

Some communities have enacted ordinances that limit or completely ban alcohol in specific areas to reduce the opportunity for crime to occur. These regulations can go by a variety of names, including Alcohol Free Zones (AF Zones) or Alcohol Impact Areas (AI Areas). Alcohol Free Zones may include a blanket ban on alcohol use in public places like schools or parks, and Alcohol Impact Areas limit the sales of certain types of alcohol in crime and disorder hot spots. For example, a number of cities in Washington State have designated AI Areas where the sale of certain alcoholic beverages (particularly those with high alcohol content) is restricted in an effort to reduce public drunkenness.

The BCJI Approach

These powerful themes run through all BCJI projects.

DATA-DRIVEN

BCJI targets crime hot spots – often streets, properties or public spaces in communities that have struggled with crime for years. Researchers are engaged in the day-to-day work, helping partners examine problems, assess evidence-based solutions, and monitor progress.



COMMUNITY-ORIENTED:

BCJI champions active roles for residents in identifying problems, selecting strategies and creating safe and healthy environments.



SPURS REVITALIZATION:

BCJI tackles problem properties, unsafe streets and parks, unemployment, transit barriers and service gaps related to crime.



BUILDS PARTNERSHIPS:

BCJI taps the resources of public, nonprofit and community leaders to bring more resources and different approaches to bear on longstanding crime challenges for lasting change.



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Another option is to adopt use permits, where stores that sell liquor are required to purchase a local permit (in addition to their liquor license). The funds are then used to monitor and enforce state and local regulations related to the responsible sale of liquor and successful business operations. Several communities in California have adopted use permits (also known as “deemed approved” ordinances) in response to increases in crime and nuisance problems related to the sale of alcohol and the potential oversaturation of stores selling alcohol.

A deemed approved ordinance is a regulation that establishes operating standards for businesses that sell alcoholic beverages as a way to protect the health and safety of residents in the surrounding community by minimizing nuisance activities associated with alcohol sales such as illegal drug activity, graffiti, prostitution, and loitering.

Research and Case Studies

- **Evaluations of AI Areas in Tacoma and Seattle** have reported a reduction in the number of public intoxication complaints to the police. Additionally, local residents and businesses report fewer incidents of public intoxication in these areas.
- The city of Sydney, Australia, recently completed a **review of AF Zones** following concerns from residents that their use was unnecessary and not effective at reducing crime/disorder in certain areas. Following the review, the city reduced the number of AF Zones from 351 to 303.
- The **Alcohol Epidemiology Program** at the University of Minnesota has compiled a list of more than 30 cities that have ordinances, codes, and/or license conditions to limit the sale and/or consumption of certain alcoholic beverages, focusing largely on malt liquor and fortified wines. The program’s website provides an extensive collection of materials about existing policies and how to go about developing your own policy.
- The **WA State Liquor Board** provides extensive information about the state’s AI areas, including **administrative code**, links to ordinances, meeting materials, lists of banned products, and progress reports. It includes examples of a specific policy—the **Spokane AI Area Ordinance**—and information about how to analyze your problem in the Tacoma AI Area Background Materials: **West End Voluntary Compliance Report** and Appendices A-I available under **Tacoma- West End**.
- **“Reducing Community Alcohol Problems Associated with Alcohol Sales,”** published by Alcohol Policy Consultations in 2009, outlines the development and use of deemed approved ordinances in California. The report also includes a content analysis of existing deemed approved ordinances. For an example of a deemed approved ordinance, see the Rohnert Park **“Use Permits for Alcoholic Beverage Establishments”** ordinance.
- The website for the **City of San Bernardino** provides a wealth of information related to the city’s departments and services. Links to ordinances can also be found on the website. For an example of a specific policy, see the **City of San Bernardino Deemed Approved Ordinance**.

Case Study: San Bernardino Alcohol Regulation

The San Bernardino BCJI project aims to use a local deemed approved ordinance to help reduce crime and disorder problems linked to a few vendors in their target area. In addition to establishing operating standards for businesses that sell alcoholic beverages, San Bernardino’s ordinance also prohibits the sales of certain types of alcohol products such as the sale of an individual container of beer of 40 ounces or less. During an analysis performed for the project, the research team found that “40s” were often mentioned in relation to crimes. When the team looked into the issue further, they found a correlation between stores that dedicated a high proportion of shelf space to single serve alcohol and crime.

The San Bernardino Police Department (SBPD) gained insight on how to routinely enforce the deemed approved ordinance by taking a training trip to Oakland, helping the SBPD devise future plans on how to monitor and track liquor stores, bars, and restaurants. The team also heard about how to restructure enforcement action to take a more proactive approach with establishments found in violation of the deemed approved ordinance. Sergeant Shauna Gates expressed excitement to apply the methods learned from the training and believes the outcome from the cooperation between the department and local alcohol vendors will benefit the city of San Bernardino.

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