

Community-Related Consequences of High-Risk Drinking: Chapel Hill, NC

Introduction and Background

The Campus and Community Coalition to Reduce the Negative Impacts of High-Risk Drinking (The Coalition), a collaborative effort with representation and funding from the Town of Chapel Hill, UNC-Chapel Hill, the Orange County Health Department, and the Orange County ABC Board, is tasked with addressing the complex public health problem of high-risk drinking by implementing a series of strategies that apply to downtown Chapel Hill, UNC-Chapel Hill, and the near-campus neighborhoods.



The Coalition defines high-risk drinking as alcohol consumption that results in ill effects on a person's health and safety, and also often results in a wide variety of community-related harms. Previous efforts by The Coalition have aimed to reduce the individual-level impacts of high-risk drinking, but, to date, few of the Coalition's efforts have aimed to reduce the impacts of high-risk drinking at the community level. The Coalition's 2019 Evaluation Recommendations Report recommended a literature search to determine what other community level consequences were attributable to the negative effects of high-risk drinking in an effort to fill this gap in knowledge. To supplement this literature search, the Coalition also set out to hear directly from near-campus residents about the negative effects of high-risk student drinking in their neighborhoods. This brief details the findings of that work.

The Secondhand Effects of High-Risk Drinking: Harms to Others

Drinking can cause alcohol-related harm to others (AHTO), particularly in college environments. Some common forms of AHTO that college students often face include having to "babysit" or take care of another student who was drunk, experiencing interruptions in their sleep or studying, being insulted or humiliated, getting into serious arguments or quarrels, and experiencing unwanted sexual contact or sexual assault.ⁱ Because AHTO is often underreported, experts estimate that the true cost of high risk drinking in college populations may be vastly underestimated.ⁱⁱ

An AHTO study conducted at a university in Maryland revealed that half of students reported experiencing at least one harm from other students' drinking behavior in the last academic year. Students who were drinking at the highest risk level experienced an average of four harm-to-others consequences, and students who were drinking at the lowest risk level experienced an average of two harm-to-others consequences.

HALF OF COLLEGE STUDENTS REPORT EXPERIENCING HARM AS A RESULT OF OTHER STUDENTS' DRINKING BEHAVIOR

Economic Cost of High-Risk Drinking

High-risk drinking cost the U.S. \$249 billion in 2010, or about \$2.05 per drink. Much of this cost resulted from losses in workplace productivity, healthcare expenses, law enforcement and other criminal justice expenses, and losses from

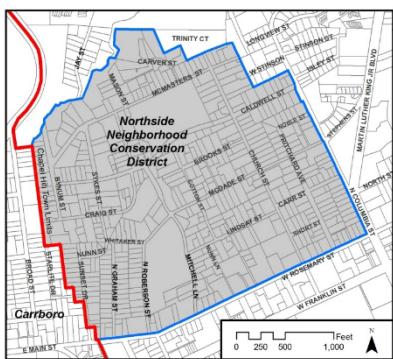
motor vehicle crashes related to excessive alcohol use. The cost of high-risk drinking in North Carolina in the same year was about \$7.1 billion.ⁱⁱⁱ

Community-level Consequences

Many college towns experience community-level consequences of students' high-risk drinking behavior in their residential neighborhoods. Some examples of the damage of drinking on residents include **property damage and vandalism, fights and interpersonal violence, sexual violence, hate-related incidents and harassment, and noise disruptions.**^{iv} Neighbors living near college campuses report lower quality of life due to secondhand effects of heavy alcohol use, including **noise disturbances, vandalism, public drunkenness, and vomiting and urination in their neighborhoods.**

Community-level Consequences of High Risk Drinking in Chapel Hill

In Chapel Hill, two historic neighborhoods are located within walking distance to the University: Northside Historic District and Cameron-McCauley Historic District. The Coalition collected data from residents in both of these neighborhoods about the impacts that student drinking has had on their neighborhoods and lives through semi-structured qualitative interviews. Residents from both neighborhoods reported several consequences that were consistent with the literature, including **vandalism and property damage, noise disturbances, public drunkenness, and vomiting and urination.** One resident reported having a paver stone thrown through the back windshield of their car, and another reported having porch furniture stolen. Residents with children reported having concerns about their children being able to witness high-risk drinking in their neighborhoods and were concerned about the effects that might have on their children.

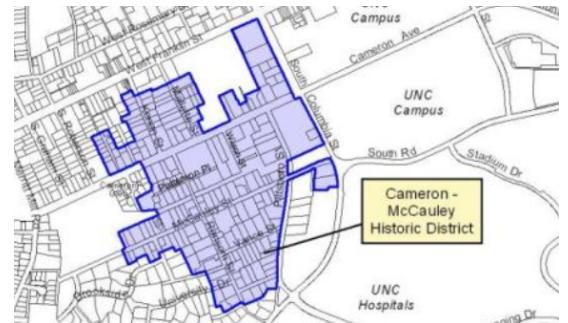


Residents from both neighborhoods also described experiencing problems with parking on weekend evenings as a result of students throwing large parties in their neighborhoods.

Experiences of Student Drinking by Neighborhood

The Northside neighborhood is historically the largest African American community in Chapel Hill and has been experiencing a loss of homeownership for several decades and an increasing demand for student rentals.^v With this increase in student rentals in recent years, the neighborhood residents have experienced an increase in alcohol-related consequences in their community. A theme that emerged across the interviews was that although residents from both neighborhoods reported dealing with similar consequences of student high-risk drinking in their respective neighborhoods, **the lived experience of those consequences for residents was different for the two neighborhoods.** Cameron-McCauley residents generally described their feelings about students living in their neighborhood as overall positive, and they also expressed knowing that they were moving into a student neighborhood when they decided to live there. In contrast, Northside residents expressed feeling as though student renters in their neighborhood disrespected the community by leaving beer cans and plastic

cups in their neighbors' front yards and in the front lawn of the neighborhood church. One Northside resident expressed frustration with mainly White students perpetrating much of the alcohol-related harms in their neighborhood and asked, "If it were Black students doing this in a White neighborhood, what do you think would happen to those students?" suggesting that White students' drinking behavior isn't regulated as harshly as Black students'.



"When we call the cops for noise disturbances...we always call anonymously, because we fear retribution from the students."

Northside Resident

Cameron-McCauley residents expressed a desire to deal with alcohol-related consequences directly with their student

neighbors. As one resident noted, **"Nobody wants to get anyone in trouble. If I know what house is causing trouble, it's**

“always easier when I can just text them directly and ask them to turn the music down or whatever.” Northside neighbors also expressed wanting to be able to deal with any issues directly with their student neighbors, but expressed hesitancy in doing so. For example, one Northside resident told a story about a student becoming verbally aggressive and using a racial slur to a neighbor when they went to a student renter’s yard to ask them to turn their music down when they were having a party with alcohol in their front yard.

Because of these experiences, some Northside residents expressed not feeling comfortable dealing directly with students when these problems occurred, and one resident reported calling the police anonymously because they didn’t want the students to retaliate against them for calling the police about party noise. Despite these issues, Northside residents still expressed a desire to want to be neighborly with their student neighbors and to be able to deal with the alcohol-related issues in their neighborhood internally.

Conclusion

Alcohol-related harms and consequences are experienced by residents in near-campus neighborhoods in Chapel Hill and by students themselves. Due to demographic and historic differences, Northside and Cameron-McCauley residents experience the consequences of high-risk drinking in their neighborhoods differently – the Coalition should be aware of these disparities as they make policy decisions on these issues. The town faces financial consequences because of high-risk drinking through additional police and criminal justice costs, emergency services costs, and in lost productivity. Decreasing the density of alcohol outlets and the availability of alcohol are evidence-based and effective ways to decrease the community-level consequences of high-risk drinking behavior.^{vi} The Coalition should consider decreasing the number of alcohol outlets and the availability of alcohol near UNC-Chapel Hill’s campus in order to reduce the alcohol-related consequences experienced by residents, students, neighborhoods, and the town’s economy.

METHODS

1. A literature review on community-related consequences of high-risk drinking was conducted using PubMed. Search yielded between 20 and 30 results. 11 were included in the full review.
2. Six semi-structured interviews were conducted with community stakeholders. The purpose of the interviews was to gather detailed information from residents about the impact that high-risk student drinking in their neighborhoods has had on them. 1 interview was conducted with a UNC-Chapel Hill University official, 3 interviews were conducted with Cameron-McCauley residents, and 2 interviews were conducted with Northside residents. Interviews were analyzed for common themes and findings were collated.

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ⁱ Maryland Collaborative to Reduce College Drinking and Related Problems. (2014). High-risk Drinking among College Students in Maryland: Identifying Targets for Intervention. Center on Young Adult Health and Development, University of Maryland School of Public Health, College Park, MD; and the Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth, Johns Hopkins University Bloomberg School of Public Health, Baltimore, MD.

ⁱⁱ Pamela Trangenstein, Payton Wall & David Jernigan (2019). Collateral damage from college drinking: A conceptual framework for alcohol’s harms to others among US college students, *Substance Use & Misuse*, 54:8, 1297-1308.

ⁱⁱⁱ Jeffrey J. Sacks, Katherine R. Gonzales, Ellen E. Bouchery, Laura E. Tomedi, Robert D. Brewer. (2010). National and State Costs of Excessive Alcohol Consumption. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, Volume 49, Issue 5, November 2015, Pages e73-e79..

^{iv} Perkins, H.W. (2002). Surveying the damage: a review of research on consequences of alcohol misuse in college populations. *Journal of Studies on Alcohol, Supplement*, s14, 91-100

^v <https://www.townofchapelhill.org/town-hall/departments-services/housing-and-community/northside-neighborhood>

^{vi} Henry Wechslera, Jae Eun Leeb, John Hallb, Alexander C. Wagenaarc, Hang Leed. Secondhand effects of student alcohol use reported by neighbors of colleges: the role of alcohol outlets. *Social Science & Medicine* 55 (2002) 425–435.