Alcohol in the Environment:
East Harlem Community Report

Healthy CUNY Initiative
CUNY School of Public Health
at Hunter College
and
1775 Houses Tenant Association
E. Harlem, NYC
Background

- Alcohol is the 3rd leading cause of death in the United States.

- Excessive alcohol use worsens:
  - violence
  - chronic disease
  - accidental injuries
  - sexual assault
  - mental health problems (CDC, 2014).
Background

• Less advantaged neighborhoods experience more negative consequences of drinking, compared to more affluent neighborhoods (Jones-Webb & Karriker-Jaffe, 2013).

• Alcohol is one of the most readily available consumer products. Many communities, especially in low-income areas, are saturated with alcohol outlets (Community Guide, 2013).
Just over half of NYC adults drink

When asked, 57% of adults report drinking in the last 30 days

- Of those who drink, almost half (43%) binge drink

Source: National Survey on Drug Use and Health, 2009-10; Community Health Survey 2010
One in three NYC high school youth drink

When asked, 31% report having 1+ drink in the last 30 days

Of those who drink, almost half (44%) report binge drinking

Source: Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2011, Survey of NYC public high school students, grades 9-12
Background

- East Harlem has a lower overall rate of drinking (49% / 56%)
- but twice the number of alcohol related hospitalizations as the rest of NYC.

Source: NYC Community Health Survey 2012
Binge drinking varies by neighborhood

Key:

- Light yellow: 6.7–12.4%
- Light orange: 12.6–16.2%
- Orange: 17.2–32.1%

Source: Community Health Survey, 2010
Introduction

Who?
• CUNY School of Public Health at Hunter College
  + 1775 Houses Tenant Association, E. Harlem, NYC
• Funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

What?
• Collaborative research project about alcohol in the East Harlem environment
• Not a comprehensive report, but a snapshot based on the viewpoint of a group of concerned community members

How?
• PhotoVoice - a research method where photographs are used to help facilitate discussions about community issues.
Introduction

How does PhotoVoice work?

• East Harlem community members took photos showing some of the harms associated with excessive drinking in their community

• Focus on environmental harms – how alcohol affects their community - rather than individual consequences

• Group members meet before and after to discuss issues, photos, themes and solutions

• Not a comprehensive report: A snapshot
Findings

Following are themes that the authors have identified through group discussions about the photographs and the issue of environmental alcohol harms. Quotes are included to illustrate community members’ points of view.
Community Strengths

• Strong community ties, social unity:

  “We’re all like family. All of us have raised our children here. He knows my kids. I know his kids. I know her kids. All our kids grew up together. I know her aunt, his sister.”

• Community activists motivated to create change:

  “People like him . . . come out and share the knowledge and let the young people know, even me -- I have grandchildren that I send the message to that what your friends do in the neighborhood is not cool.”

• Strong presence of CUNY School of Public Health, restaurants and other establishments:

  “We have all these stores (inaudible). We have Hunter College. We have -- Harlem is full of restaurants. You can eat anything you want. They have all those café restaurants. We have a movie theatre.”
Photographs

*Theme 1:*
Alcohol outlets are densely clustered and prominent in this community.
“They’ll have three grocery stores in one block selling liquor. Because they can, and they’re allowed to do that above 96th Street.”
“You go half a block more and there's another store. It makes it so easy and convenient for them if they want to buy liquor.”
“The liquor store is right across the street from an outpatient substance abuse program.”
“There really is no respect in this community that you would put a liquor store next to a church. If I decided to become a church member I would think twice.”
Theme 2:

Children are constantly exposed to excessive drinking and alcohol advertising.
“We were able to see that liquor sign from three blocks away. There's a toy store next door. You see kids looking out the [apartment] windows.”
“This was across from the liquor aisle. They make it so convenient.”
“I shouldn’t have to walk past 99 liquor stores watching people misbehaving and explain it to any child -- ‘Grandma, why is he doing this? Why is he doing that?’”
Theme 3:

There is a large concentration of people from outside the neighborhood who drink excessively.
“These are the folks who are coming in on the bus. They are not from our neighborhood.”

“I don’t think I should have to step over people sleeping.”
Theme 4:
Excessive drinking negatively affects sanitation in the neighborhood.
“They cash them in to buy alcohol. It's an eyesore, [and it’s] going to cause bugs and mice and rats.”

“They fight each other about the machines because one takes glass and one takes plastic.”

“On the other hand it’s a good thing because they are cleaning our streets.”
“We shouldn't have to live like this. They cause rats, and then we get the bugs, and then we get the people who are searching for cans and bottles and then it gets spread all over the sidewalk.”

“It’s been there a couple of days... Nobody’s going to pick that up. It’s probably full of bugs. Why is this still here?”

PhotoVoice participants relate alcohol to a lack of respect and caring for the environment, leading to poor sanitation.
Proposed Solutions from 1775 Houses Tenant Association

• Involve local businesses in keeping the streets clean and safe.

• Link alcohol issue to already existing advocacy issues, e.g. bus stops, methadone clinics, shelters, benches.

• Bring awareness to neighborhood residents about the role of alcohol in neighborhood issues.

• Disseminate this information to community board & committees
Resources

For more information about this report go to: www.cuny.edu/healthycuny and click on Alcohol Initiatives

For more information on alcohol-related harms:
Visit The Community Guide for information about strategies to prevent excessive alcohol consumption and related harms, including interventions to reduce alcohol-impaired driving.


Look at this infographic about alcohol’s hidden harms, from The Partnership for a Healthier New York City.
If you or someone you know needs help:

Visit Rethinking Drinking, Alcohol & Your Health for tips and tools you can use: rethinkingdrinking.niaaa.nih.gov/

Contact the New York State Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse (OASAS): (800) 522-5353 or www.oasas.state.ny.us

Alcoholics Anonymous: www.aa.org

Call the New York State HOPELine at 1-877-8-HOPENY.
• Available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year for help with alcoholism, drug abuse and problem gambling.
• All calls are toll-free, anonymous and confidential.

Visit findtreatment.samhsa.gov to find an alcohol abuse treatment program.

