



SOCIAL HOST ORDINANCES

A LITERATURE REVIEW

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Overview

This literature review explores the relationship between instituting a **Social Hosting Ordinance** (SHO) and the effect on underage drinking for small towns and communities in Georgia as a result of the policy. In general, a literature review is a report on the “state of the field” that goes beyond mere information-gathering to analyze relevant research, introduce contemporary findings, synthesize themes, point out gaps in research, and issue recommendations for practice and future research. From this perspective, a literature review on the effects of instituting a social host policy in small towns and cities will review research on these effects in contexts comparable to Georgia (i.e., appropriate for Georgia substance abuse prevention providers). This literature review will offer tools for providers to become knowledgeable in foundational, as well as current, research on the relationship between a social host policy and its effects on underage drinking in Georgia, with the purpose that they will use this knowledge to support the public health goals of Georgia communities.

An Introduction to Underage Drinking

Underage drinking is a widespread problem in the United States, with underage drinkers consuming around 20 percent of all alcoholic beverages, and spending roughly \$23 billion of the \$116 billion that Americans spend on alcohol (Foster et al, 2003). In addition, underage drinkers routinely engage in “binge drinking,” drinking an average of five drinks six days out of every month. In the state of Georgia, 74 percent of high school students have reported drinking alcohol at least once in their life, while almost 40 percent noted that they currently drink alcohol. Of course there are many consequences to underage drinking, including increased likelihood of unintentional injury, being a victim of homicide or suicide, having high-risk sexual activity, engaging in violence, and possible injury to the adolescent brain, which is still developing (Powell, 2009). In addition, since, underage drinkers routinely obtain alcohol from parents or other social sources, this literature review asks the question: How might a social host policy reduce the negative consequences of underage drinking, such as traffic accidents as a result of underage drinking and driving? This review attempts to provide information about how a social host policy might be a tool to reduce the negative consequences of underage drinking for towns and communities in Georgia.

An Introduction to Social Host Ordinances in Georgia

A **Social Host Ordinance** (SHO) or **Social Host Law for Minors** (SHLM) is a law that holds responsible those who provide alcohol to underage drinkers; in addition, a SHO or SHLM can also force property owners, landlords, and even renters to be held accountable for damages or injuries

that occur on their property as a result of underage drinking. Alcohol policy researchers (Hingson & White, 2014) reported that social host ordinances are effective at curbing underage drinking at colleges *when combined with other environmental strategies*, such as party enforcement, DUI checkpoints, and compliance checks.

Georgia was one of the first thirteen states in the United States to institute a statewide SHLM law in 1985 (Dills, 2010). This law “imposed civil liability on social hosts for providing alcohol to minors” (Dills, 2010, p. 242). However, while “civil penalties can include substantial financial liability if injury, death or property damage occur,” current practice within Georgia sets a high bar (Cobb Alcohol Task Force, 2012). According to one community coalition working in alcohol prevention, “severe penalties associated with state law means strong evidence is needed for a conviction” (Cobb Alcohol Task Force, 2012).

Organization of this Literature Review

This review will first present a table that displays all the articles found in this review at a glance. All relevant data is included in this table, including article name and purpose, major findings, and pertinent methodological information. Following the table will be the review itself, which presents fuller descriptions of the articles reviewed in the table. Additionally, there is a section titled *Information for Key Stakeholders* that provides “bite-sized” information that is accessible and engaging for key stakeholders who may prefer information in a most compact form. Finally, references are listed for those who wish to consult the original sources for additional information.

Literature Review

Methods

A review of articles in the top public health journals in the United States revealed that while there are a number of research articles about the effectiveness of social host policy in reducing underage drinking, there is far less research on the *social host policies in the state of Georgia*. Therefore, the major theme of relevant literature was research on the effectiveness of social host laws, nationally. Research from top, peer-reviewed public health journals was included in this review, provided it had been published in the last fifteen years (from 2000-2015). In addition to these selected journals, the “snowball method” was used to gather relevant research from similar journals, databases, or sources. Search terms were limited to “alcohol” and “social host,” and a total of thirty-four articles were found. The most relevant articles are listed in the following table.

Table 1: Relevant Research Articles

Article	Purpose of Article	Findings	Take-Away for Providers
Article 1: A Review of Social Host Policies Focused on Underage Drinking Parties: Suggestions for Future Research	To evaluate the effectiveness of social host laws in reducing the negative consequences of underage drinking.	Since nearly one-third of youth can obtain alcohol from social sources, and that excessive drinking occurs outside the house, SH laws give law enforcement a tool to deter underage drinking.	The perceived threat of being held responsible for potentially serious financial burden is more threatening than civil penalties.
Article 2: Reducing Harmful Alcohol-Related Behaviors: Effective Regulatory Methods	To assess the effectiveness of a wide range of policies designed to reduce the frequency of drinking and driving after “heavy episodic drinking.” Social host policies were one such policy.	People living in states with SH laws, like Georgia, experience fewer “heavy drinking episodes and drinking & driving behavior.”	SH may lead drinkers to be more responsible, by encouraging them to drink less, not to drive, or find a designated driver.
Article 3: Social Host Liability for Minors and Underage Drunk-Driving Accidents	To test whether the adoption of social host laws for minors (SHLM) affects drunk driving by teenagers 18-20 years old.	SHLM reduces the traffic fatalities rate in accidents involving a drunk driver by 9%.	SHLM appear to work not by reducing drinking, but by discouraging underage drinkers <i>from driving</i> . The policy works especially for drunk drivers prone to be repeat offenders.
Article 4: Social Host Policies and Underage Drinking Parties	This study examined the effects of coalition-based underage drinking prevention initiatives. OJJDP analyzed data from 68 communities in 5 states for this study.	Despite findings to the contrary (Stout, 2000; Dill, 2010), this report found that SH laws were not associated with changing entrenched drinking behavior, such as binge drinking.	Social host laws attempt to change long-term behavior. This study found that the initial benefits might be limited to “mediating factors” of underage drinking, like changing the location or size of the group. Eventually, SH laws may reduce binge drinking.

Summaries of Significant Articles

Article 1

A Review of Social Host Policies Focused on Underage Drinking Parties: Suggestions for Future Research

Despite the laws prohibiting people under the age of 21 from consuming alcohol, alcohol is still the most widely used, and abused, drug in the US. Since studies have shown that young people consistently get alcohol from parents, friends, and other adults—one study from the American Medical Association found that “one-third of all teens 13-18 reported being able to obtain alcohol

from consenting parents” – it is necessary to address the social sources that contribute to underage alcohol consumption (Wagoner, Francisco, Sparks, Wyrick, Nichols, & Wolfson, 2012). Another important source of alcohol is at parties, where 56 percent of 9th graders and 60 percent of 12th graders report getting alcohol at a party. Studies have found that youth drank more outside of their house, with less adult supervision, and when they were in “peer only” groups. In addition, research on underage drinking in high school found a strong association between high school underage drinking and excessive drinking in college; drinking games were common in both situations. In order to be effective, social host policies must be consistent & enforceable. The policies target those who provide alcohol to minors and host UAD parties.

According to Wagoner, the primary purpose of SHO laws is to deter parties, which are associated with binge drinking and serious consequences of UAD, including unintentional injuries, sexual assault, violence, and drinking & driving (p. 106). SH laws give law enforcement a tool to “hold individuals accountable for hosting UAD parties,” (p. 108) and hosts can include youth, parents, tenants, and landlords, even those who are not physically present when the party occurs. Penalties for social hosting *can* include: city/county criminal sanctions, civil penalties, and response cost recovery fees. In Georgia, however, penalties include “state SH civil liability” for serving an intoxicated minor. This study mirrors recent reports (Fell, Scherer, Thomas, & Voas, 2014) that found that the mere threat of being held liable for potentially onerous financial damages as a result of a lawsuit is a perceived as more threatening than the possibility of an arrest or citation.

Article 2

Reducing Harmful Alcohol-Related Behaviors: Effective Regulatory Methods

In a meta-analysis of the effectiveness of regulation on drinking behavior, Stout found that states that employed environmental strategies like social host initiatives were likely to be successful in reducing underage drinking. Social host laws operate on the principle that hosts are able to monitor alcohol consumptions of guests, or at least not serve them to excess. According to Stout, people living in states with social host liability laws, such as Georgia, reported “fewer heavy drinking episodes and drinking & driving behavior” (Stout, Sloan, Liang, & Davies, 2000). Drinking and driving fell for heavy drinkers, leading the authors to suggest that social host laws may encourage drinkers to engage in more responsible drinking behavior, such as finding a designated driver, ordering a ride home for an intoxicated guest, or limiting alcohol consumption of guests. Stout reported that social host liability is one of the more effective policies. The authors suggested that while criminal policies such as the ones advocated by MADD & other groups are effective (mandatory minimum first sentences), environmental strategies such as social hosting laws are “just as effective in preventing excess consumption & drunk driving” (p. 412).

Article 3

Social Host Liability for Minors and Underage Drunk-Driving Accidents

This study found that social host laws reduced the drunk driving fatality rate by 9 percent. Social host laws for minors (SHLM) have three effects: raise the price of drinking; may increase drunk driving for underage, as they drink in other places; strengthen incentive for hosts to monitor drinking and encourage guests not to drink and drive. Dills noted that “Social Host Laws for Minors affects drunk driving fatalities in two ways: reducing amount of alcohol consumed or reducing the

probability of driving after consuming alcohol” (p. 247). SHLM reduces drunk driving and is notably effective at reducing the frequency of repeat offenders drunk driving (p. 248). While Dills cautioned that SHLM don’t appear to reduce alcohol consumption, but rather reduce the frequency by which underage youth drive after drinking: “SHLM appear to induce adults supervising alcohol consumption to pressure underage drinkers not to drive” (p. 248).

Article 4

Social Host Policies and Underage Drinking Parties

Communities are using a number of strategies to reduce young people’s social access to alcohol, including: shoulder tap programs, party patrols, and public policy (Wagoner, Sparks, Francisco, Wyrick, Nichols, & Wolfson, 2013). Data for current report of the effectiveness of SH laws was drawn from a study conducted by the Office of Juvenile Justice & Delinquency Prevention, which examined sixty-eight communities in five states. The goal of the OJJDP study was to assess the impact of coalition-based underage drinking prevention initiatives. These communities had a population of between 25,000-200,000 people. Despite findings to the contrary from other researchers (Stout, Dills), the current study found that social host laws “are not associated with changing drinking location or decreasing peer drinking group size, heavy episodic drinking, or nonviolent consequences” (p. 47). Interestingly enough, the study found that “youth who were older, White, and lived in upper median family income communities” were more likely to binge drink (though with “nonviolent consequences”) than youth who were younger, non-White, and from lower-income communities (p. 48). Higher SES has been correlated with increased alcohol use, with this relationship mediated by parental drinking behavior. Though Wagoner and other preventionists hope that social host laws will have a long-term effect on underage drinking, the author suggests that initial benefits might be limited to “mediating factors” of excessive underage drinking, such as drinking location and peer group size, and only later with binge drinking.

Information for Key Stakeholders

<p>Many teenagers report obtaining alcohol from social sources. According to a study by the American Medical Association, one-third of teens aged 13-18 are able to obtain alcohol from their parents. Another study found that almost 60% of high school students reported being able to consume alcohol at parties. The goal of SHO then, is to deter underage drinking at parties.</p> <p>Source: (Wagoner, Francisco, Sparks, Wyrick, Nichols, & Wolfson, 2012)</p>	<p>According to one researcher, states that employ SHO or SHLM were likely to be successful in reducing underage drinking, over time. People living in states with SHO or SHLM reported “fewer heavy drinking episodes and drinking & driving behavior.”</p> <p>Source: (Stout, Sloan, Liang, & Davies, 2000)</p>
<p>Social host laws for minors were found to reduce drunk driving fatalities by 9 percent. These laws appear to work by “inducing adults supervising alcohol consumption to pressure underage drinkers not to drive.”</p> <p>Source: (Dills, 2010)</p>	<p>While social host ordinances and social host laws for minors can be effective at reducing the negative consequences of underage drinking, changing social norms and attitudes around alcohol use and abuse can be envisioned as a series of incremental steps. The initial benefits of SHO & SHLM may be limited to the “mediating factors” of excessive underage drinking (group size or drinking location) and later with binge drinking.</p> <p>Source: (Wagoner, Sparks, Francisco, Wyrick, Nichols, & Wolfson, 2013)</p>

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