The Challenge:
It is widely acknowledged that excess alcohol consumption has a harmful effect on health and leads to violence, but it was not known if a change in the availability of alcohol led to a change in the harm that it caused.

The Research:
This study sought to investigate whether change in the availability of alcohol was associated with alcohol-related harm and whether the levels of harm were higher or lower in areas of social deprivation. Funded by The National Institute for Health Research programme with technical and computing support provided by the Farr Institute at Swansea University, researchers calculated alcohol outlet density by taking the average network walking distance between all households and all licensed alcohol premises within a small geographical area.

Researchers then analysed the link between quarterly change in this new measure of alcohol availability and anonymised data from the Welsh Health Survey, hospital records and the police to look at the rates at which harmful outcomes such as excessive alcohol consumption, hospital admissions and violent crimes occurred.

The Results:
Results suggested that changes in alcohol availability are related to the harmful effects of alcohol, with more instances of alcohol-related harm such as excess consumption, hospital admissions and violent crime taking place in places where alcohol availability increased. This study also found that more deprived local authority areas had higher levels of poorer health caused by alcohol and more violent crime. High alcohol availability was significantly associated with an increased risk of an emergency admission to hospital demonstrating that higher levels of alcohol outlet density were associated with an increased burden on the NHS.

The Impact:
The study findings are now being shared with the NHS, local government and alcohol charities with the aim of influencing policy and practice to improve population health and reduce health inequality.

For more information visit: https://www.journalslibrary.nihr.ac.uk/phr/phr04030#/abstract

Enquiries to Sarah Toomey, Communications Officer, Farr Institute CIPHER s.toomey@swansea.ac.uk