



Alcohol and Violence in Nunavut: A Comparison of Wet and Dry Communities



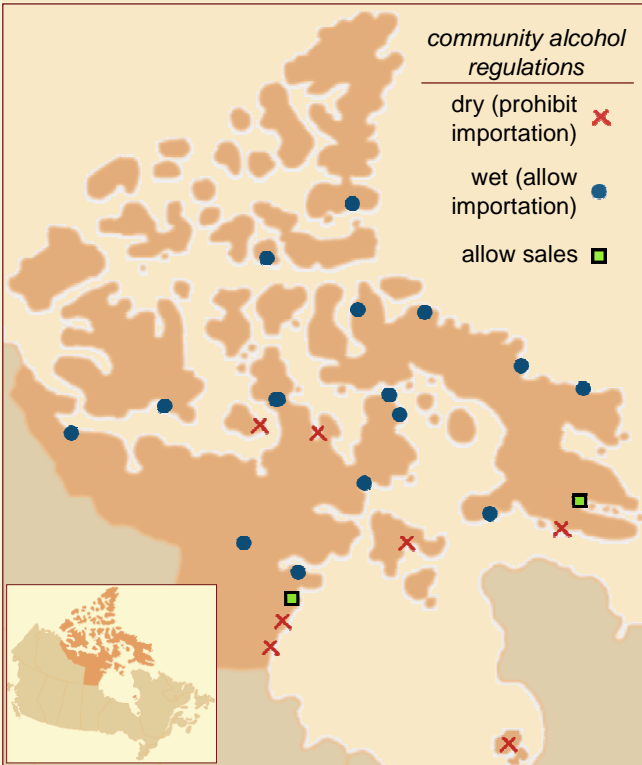
Darryl S. Wood, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor, Washington State University Vancouver

Abstract

Alcohol consumption is thought to be a prime contributor to violence in North American indigenous communities. Many have responded to the problem by choosing to prohibit alcohol. This research examines the effect of local alcohol prohibition on violent crime in 23 Inuit communities in Nunavut (see Figure 1) between 1986 and 2006. Examinations of rates of reported homicide, assault, and sexual assault between 'dry' communities (that prohibit alcohol importation) and 'wet' communities (that allow alcohol importation) indicate that overall, dry communities do have less violence compared to wet communities.

Figure 1: Nunavut Communities That Are Dry (n = 8), Wet (n = 15), and Allow Alcohol Sales (n = 2)



Hypothesis

Studies of local alcohol prohibition in American indigenous communities indicate that geographic isolation is an important mediator of its effectiveness in preventing interpersonal violence. Villages in Alaska that are located off the road system are safer when they prohibit alcohol^{1,2} while reservations in the lower-48 experience higher rates of violence under prohibition.^{3,4} Based on that research, it was expected that Inuit communities in Nunavut – all accessible only by air or sea – would be less violent when alcohol is prohibited than when its importation is allowed.

Data and Method

Violence was measured using community-level crime statistics from offenses reported to the RCMP in 23 communities in Nunavut for the years 1986 to 2006. Communities were classified as being 'dry' if they prohibit alcohol importation or 'wet' if they allow alcohol importation. The 'crude rates comparison function' of StatsDirect was used to calculate rates to compare relative levels of violence in wet and dry communities. This comparison is made in the form of a ratio of the rate of wet communities to the rate of dry communities and confidence intervals for rate ratios were calculated based upon a Poisson distribution.

Results

The analysis confirms the hypothesis that dry isolated communities have less violent crime than wet isolated communities. A comparison of three-year running means over the period 1987 to 2005 shows that wet communities in Nunavut consistently have higher violent crime rates compared to dry communities (see Figure 2). Over the entire 21 years, the homicide rate was 3.16 times higher (95% c.i. = 1.33 to 9.15) in wet communities than in dry communities, the assault rate was 1.71 times higher (95% c.i. = 1.65 to 1.78) in wet communities than in dry communities, and the sexual assault rate was 1.34 times higher (95% c.i. = 1.24 to 1.45) in wet communities than in dry communities (see Table 1).

Conclusion

As elsewhere in the Arctic, isolated Inuit communities in Nunavut experience less violence when they prohibit the importation of alcoholic beverages.

Figure 2: Three-Year Mean Violent Crime Rates, Wet vs. Dry Nunavut Communities, 1987 - 2005

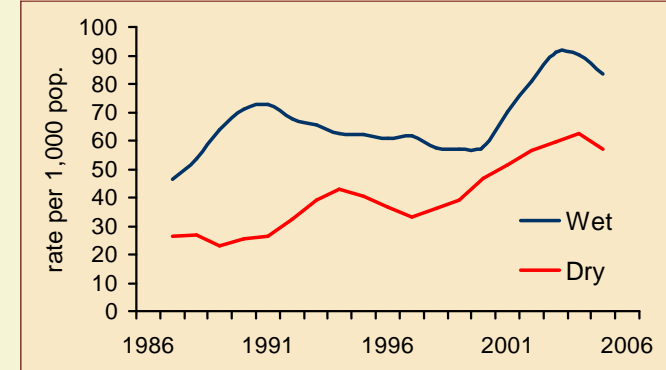


Table 1: Violent Crime Rates, Wet and Dry Nunavut Communities, 1986 – 2006

offence by community type	number	rate per 1,000	rate ratio	95% c.i.
Homicide				
Wet Communities	39	0.18	3.16	1.33 to 9.15
Dry Communities	6	0.06		
Assault				
Wet Communities	11,414	52.7	1.71	1.65 to 1.78
Dry Communities	3,242	30.8		
Sexual Assault				
Wet Communities	2,436	11.2	1.34	1.24 to 1.45
Dry Communities	883	8.4		

Notes

¹Landen, M. G., Beller, M., Funk, E., Propst, M., Middaugh, J., & Moolenaar, R. L. 1997. Alcohol related injury death and alcohol availability in remote Alaska. *JAMA*, 278, 1755-1758.
²Wood, D. S. & Gruenewald, P. J. 2006. Alcohol availability, police presence, and serious injury in isolated Alaskan villages. *Addiction*, 101, 393-403.
³Landen, M. G. 1997. Alcohol related mortality and tribal alcohol legislation. *Journal of Rural Health*, 13, 38-44.
⁴May, P. A. 1976. *Alcohol Legalization and Native Americans: A Sociological Inquiry*. Ph. D. Dissertation, University of Montana.

Acknowledgement

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