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Unintended Consequences of Local Alcohol Restrictions in Rural Alaska

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Abstract

Since 1981, Alaskans have had the ability to enact by referendum local restrictions in alcohol sales, importation, and possession, known as “local options.” Intended to empower rural communities to reduce alcohol abuse and associated violence and trauma, the “local option” laws have led to unintended consequences as individuals in alcohol-restricted communities seek intoxication from both legal and illegal sources of alcohol. Based on 68 interviews with 72 community members in eight rural sites in Alaska, this paper examines these unintended consequences of local options restrictions and provides context to the challenges rural communities face in implementing alcohol policies.

Keywords

alcohol; Alaska; restrictions; policy; law; indigenous

INTRODUCTION

“They must be real desperate,” the woman said to me as she shook her head. She was talking about substance misuse in her community in Alaska and how people sometimes ingest Lysol disinfectant spray to get drunk. The thought of ingesting disinfectant spray was repugnant and almost unbelievable to her, but she wanted to communicate that she understood the desperation of addiction. She was one of the first community members to share perspectives on inhalant use in rural Alaska as part of a federally-funded study to test community approaches to prevent misuse among youth. But, local residents also wanted to testify about the local misuse primarily by adults of denatured alcohol when food-grade alcohol is difficult to obtain in communities that have passed local option restrictions. Denatured alcohol by definition has been made unsuitable for human consumption with the addition of chemicals. Due to community input, products containing denatured alcohol became an additional focus of the study beyond inhalants. Despite the fact that the study’s concentration on youth precluded a deeper inquiry into the misuse of surrogate alcohol among adults in communities with local option restrictions in Alaska, 68 initial project interviews with 72 key leaders in eight communities in the northwest of the state where most communities have enacted alcohol restrictions did illuminate patterns of legal, illegal, and legally ambiguous alcohol use in the region.

This paper explores these unintended consequences of the local alcohol restrictions, which are enacted to reduce alcohol misuse and its negative effects, as well as the community reaction that seeks to mitigate them. The analysis demonstrates contested standpoints on alcohol use in rural Alaska and the rational actions taken both by consumers of alcohol in negotiating and crossing the borders of legality and by those who would prohibit it in a setting marked by a complex relationship with alcohol and governance.

Since 1981, a majority of the small, rural communities in Alaska have held public referenda for local options (Berman & Hull, 2001). Alaska 'local option' referenda occur exclusively in rural, Native communities, not because other communities are prohibited from doing so, but presumably because the members of these non-native communities generally want alcohol to be legal. There is a strong contingent of Native leadership in Alaska, including many involved in the initial grassroots efforts to pass the state's local options legislation that believes alcohol has no place in their communities because of the problems with which it has been associated.

INTERVIEWS

From 2004 to 2015, I was part of a collaborative study funded by the National Institute on Drug Abuse to examine community approaches to prevent the misuse of inhalants and other legal products in rural Alaska. This paper reports on interview material from the eight communities located in the Northwest region of the state out of eighteen diverse communities involved in this effectiveness trial (Ogilvie, 2008), which intended to develop and assess the community-level intervention. An open-ended ethnographic interview that initiated research anchored questions in the following categories: 1) incidents of the use of non-illicit substances to get high in the community; 2) identified local community concerns ; and 3) community readiness to address issues concerning the misuse of non-illicit substances among youth. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed for themes.

Sixty-eight (68) on-site interviews were conducted with 72 community members in the eight communities. Some interviews involved more than one participant. The community members in the interviews reported on in this paper come from two hub communities (Hub 1 and Hub 2) and from six Iñupiat and Yup'ik villages (V1, V2, V3, V4, V5, and V6) that are all satellite communities of Hub 1. Interviewers sought community members who were part of the youth-focused prevention network of each community. We pursued representation from varied institutional and social sub-systems, among them: (1) behavioral health, (2) the court system, (3) elders, (4) faith organizations, (5) families, (6) health care, (7) law enforcement, (8) media, (9) policy makers, (10) retailers, (11) schools, (12) social services, and (13) tribal leaders. Many interviewees represented more than one subsystem, especially given the small community size of our sites. Demographically, 55% of all those who participated in the interviews identified as Alaska Native (68% of those in the villages) and 55% were women (72% in the villages only). Average age of the participants was 45.4 years (46.2 in the villages), and the average reported tenure in the community was 24.5 years for all communities and 29.8 years in the villages specifically.

Given the sensitivity and stigma of alcohol in these communities, I do not identify the village names and have generalized demographic characteristics to provide community confidentiality. Elders and other community members have asked that their villages and communities not be singled out by name. Although, people familiar with Alaska will likely know by descriptions the communities included in this study, but by omitting their names, we honor our commitment to the communities. Tribal organizations in the region and specific communities were consulted for this study, and every individual participant signed a consent form to participate in the confidential interview. Table 1 shows approximate community size and percentage all or part Alaska Native as well as 'local option' status and the number of interviews conducted for each community.

'Local option' status varied at the time of the study across the eight Northwest communities for which we have interviews. The hub community (Hub 1) that serves the six villages has been 'wet' since before the 1981 law was enacted. Numerous bars, restaurants, and stores sell alcohol in this community. Hub 1 has a smaller Alaska Native population than the villages, in part, because of the important employment role of service agencies that recruit from outside of the region but also due to a long heritage as a bicultural (and mining) town. All but one of the six villages in our sample served by this hub are 'dry.' V6, which is 'damp,' is a secondary hub in the region that has direct air service from Anchorage and is greater than 80% Alaska Native compared to the other villages that are 90% or more. The other hub community (Hub 2) is a traditional Iñupiat village that due to its location has served as a confluence of commerce since before European contact and developed as a modern hub. Residents of Hub 2 recently voted to create a municipal liquor store that also serves as a distribution center for the importation of all alcohol into the community. This packaging store/distribution center restricts the quantity of alcohol that can be imported or purchased by any individual with daily and monthly limits. Each day an individual resident can purchase 30 cans of beer, 750ml (a fifth) of liquor, and three liters (or four bottles) of wine. Individuals (including visitors) buy a permit to be able to purchase alcohol through which the amount purchased is tracked.

The Northwest region is the traditional homeland of the Iñupiat and Yup'ik peoples. All the communities in this region are located off the road system, relying on air service from Anchorage to regional hubs for the importation of most goods largely through federally-subsidized bypass mail contracts with airlines. Goods are further distributed from the regional hubs to smaller villages via fixed-wing aircraft under the same program. Residents too increasingly rely on personal mail order (e.g., Amazon) to avoid the often poor quality and high-priced items found in the local stores. Regional hubs typically have populations in the thousands whereas villages have populations around or less than 1,000. Some communities have state or locally maintained roads that connect to other villages, but these cases are the exceptions. Some terrestrial travel between communities also occurs on four wheelers (i.e., all-terrain-vehicles) as well as snow machines and dog sleds in the winter. More importantly is a prominent pattern of transience between villages and regional hubs in which families or parts of families from villages periodically live in regional hubs (or even in Anchorage) for sometimes lengthy amounts of time. Regional hubs provide critical services to the residents of the region through regional hospitals, government offices, banks,

and other necessary facilities that villages do not have. The hubs are also gateways to Anchorage (and sometimes Fairbanks) and by pass-through to the lower 48.

Like all Alaskan communities, both the hubs and villages have the ability through referendum to enact the local option restrictions on alcohol. Although in the past some hub communities voted for the most restrictive ‘dry’ laws, currently there are no hubs in Alaska with such restrictions. Regardless of local option status, community members overwhelmingly discussed alcohol as a major concern in their communities and region, and our focus on non-illicit substances elicited discussion of the use of surrogate alcohol.

Local Perspectives on Alcohol Restrictions

Despite various restrictions on the sale, importation, and possession of alcohol through ‘local option’ ordinances in their region, alcohol is still an active substance of misuse in all the communities. That is to say that alcohol misuse persists at levels recognized as problematic in this region of rural Alaska despite regulation, a finding that is consistent with other research in Alaska and in other Native communities in the lower 48 (Back, 1981; Landen, 1997; Lee, 1997; May, 1992). Alcohol users as agents negotiating this restrictive milieu make rational decisions that put them at odds with community members who seek healthy, safe communities through alcohol restrictions and with law enforcement. The strategies employed by alcohol users include: 1) traveling to hubs and other communities where alcohol is legal; 2) utilizing illegal sources of alcohol, including illegal importation and manufacture; and 3) consuming products that contain denatured alcohol. Each of these strategies is evident in the interviewees’ narratives of use as well as in their narratives of local strategies to curtail these practices.

Overindulgence in Hub Towns and Cities: Legal Distribution

Hub communities without restrictions on alcohol are notorious locations of alcohol consumption in Alaska, not just for Native peoples but for all. Many of these communities are historic sites of interaction where traders, whalers, miners, and others would conspicuously spend their earnings (Conn & Moras, 1986). Regional hubs represent the closest locations to ‘dry’ villages in which drinking is legal. For alcohol users, then, these communities become locations of drinking, creating alcohol economies in these sites:

I mean [Hub 1] is a town that gets a lot -- I’m trying to look for good words to say, more so than I could. People that just passing through, coming through, you know just a lot of you know, transit I mean just you know the bars are open to two, three in the morning.

There are a dozen bars in Hub 1 for a population of less than 4000 people, and the local joke is that there are as many bars as churches for such a small population. Most people who come in from the villages for services or who are passing through the hubs do not go to the bars or overindulge in drink. As with other Native peoples in North America, abstinence rates among Alaska Native people are higher than the national average (Young & Joe, 2009). However, for those who do drink, problem drinking is more likely. The criminalization of alcohol in villages may promote patterns of risky drinking or, at least, concentrate it in the hub communities.

As more regional hubs legalize alcohol, these sites become the centers of alcohol use and supply in rural Alaska. Hub 2 had been ‘damp’ since the 1987 when a referendum closed all the bars and sole liquor store. In 2009, Hub 2 voted to go wet again with the establishment of the municipal liquor store and distribution center, which opened in 2010. Hub 2 residents who do not have alcohol offenses on the record are eligible to buy permits for \$50 initially and \$25 each year thereafter. Visitors buy permits based on their length of stay. Alcohol is expensive at the municipal store as are all goods in rural Alaska (for instance, a gallon of milk costs \$8). A six-pack of beer costs about \$16 as does a fifth of inexpensive whiskey. The municipal control of the alcohol economy has meant improved financial condition for the city government, a significant impetus for passing the ordinance establishing the distribution center. The city has invested in new equipment and vehicles for the local police, but residents in the interviews skeptically declared that these financial benefits are not being shared equally. There was the sense that not enough of the money (which is substantial) was going back into the community. And, they echoed concerns about the increased availability of alcohol to youth and to problem drinkers because of the establishment of the store.

The opening of the store and distribution center did not significantly alter the legality of alcohol for residents or the community’s relationship with alcohol as the residents could already import alcohol from Anchorage or Fairbanks, which is still a significant function of the distribution center. Respondents reported decidedly unsocial patterns of alcohol use persisting after the store opened. That is, alcohol consumers can only legally drink in their homes, and they must pay exorbitant prices for the alcohol. As one local blogger from the community wrote (<http://finnskimo.blogspot.com/2010/08/damp-or-wet.html>):

An entire generation of “drinkers” was born and raised in this atmosphere where there seems to be no “social drinking skills.” People covet their precious bottle of whiskey that they paid four times the amount for and drink to get drunk, rather than to enjoy the smoothness of a rum and coke while watching Monday night football. People here just don’t know HOW to drink. And I don’t blame them. They were taught this by everyone else in town who hoards their alcohol and would rather drink a fifth of whiskey to themselves in one night instead of share with their cohort. There are no social drinking establishments here.

Although this pattern persists for residents, what the store/distribution center has done is make alcohol legal to purchase for non-residents. So, non-residents who come in from satellite villages can now access alcohol legally, although consumption is still limited to residences as the hotel and other lodging establishments still forbid alcohol on premises. The other significant change with the distribution center according to interviewees is that the quantity of alcohol in the community has significantly increased. Previously, many residents did not bother with importing alcohol. Now that it is available locally, more people buy it, and many people buy it and do not drink it, storing it up or, selling it illegally to others who either do not have permits (are too young, have alcohol offenses on their record, or are non-residents) or who have exceeded their limits.

Community Response

Many community members from the hubs perceive grave risk from having alcohol legally available for purchase in their communities. Much of the concern centers on the transience of problem drinkers to the communities. City officials in Hub 2 assert that the tight controls that have been put in place for the distribution center to mitigate the risk of problem alcohol use in the community as a hub. They point out that only residents have permanent licenses to purchase alcohol and that in a community where mail is only delivered to post office boxes, the standard to prove residency is a bill with the name of the resident and the physical address. Thus, resident permits are largely limited to people who receive city water and sewer services. However, interviewees believe that the distribution center was solely put in place to increase the financial solvency of the city, and that little concern has been given to the problems of being a ‘wet’ hub. Given its relative newness, the impact of the distribution center on the community is yet to be determined fully and is a subject of intense interest.

Hub 1 has a much longer history of being ‘wet’ and has the additional influence of public sites for drinking in the way of bars and restaurants. There is a continuing racialized discourse of the problem of drinking in the community that stigmatizes Alaska Natives with blame for many community ills centered largely on the transience of drinkers to the community from within the region. The Alaska Native leadership of the region counters stereotypes and stigmatization with proactive efforts to establish their own answers to the alcohol-related issues. In response to behavioral and general health concerns, the Iñupiat and Yup’ik leadership has been organizing toward “wellness” not only for the Hub 1 community but at a regional level to include the satellite villages. A regional wellness coalition has formed to promote health in the region, and one focus is risk reduction for people who come to the hub especially during “high volume times,” which includes times when residents receive influxes of income like Alaska’s permanent fund dividend distribution that every October dispenses a share of the oil revenue to state residents as well as other regional shareholder dividends that residents receive as part of their stake in the regional for-profit Native corporation. The coalition has put together a “safety patrol, which during these high volume times ... makes sure that people aren’t passing out in unsafe places and that type of thing.” This safety patrol originated from concerns by some in the community that racism has generated apathy with regard to the wellbeing of Native people, if not outright hostility:

I mean we’ve been talking about...[Hub 1] being a place where people get intoxicated, and die. And that’s been talked about for decades, and every once in a while when somebody dies, and people are so upset about it, there are meetings, but it the falls through and the continuous addressing of issues doesn’t happen here. And -- I, think part of it is that -- the deaths that have happened, the deaths that have happened related to alcohol, they are Native people, most of the people in the jail, are Native people. And -- it’s acceptable in this town.

Dozens of “disappearances” of Native people (mostly men) over the last few decades in the town have brought on an FBI investigation, and a recent police chief made it a priority to try to work with the Native community about the problem. Regardless, there remains the perception that the “drinking” problem of people from the villages is the source of the problem.

Homebrew and the Bootleg Industry

Traveling to the hub communities is not the only way in which people who live in the ‘dry’ villages acquire alcohol as it is illegally brought to these communities in various ways. There is a thriving bootleg industry in the ‘dry’ communities in which alcohol is both illegally imported and manufactured. Illegal alcohol economies are common in situations of prohibition. Most notoriously in the U.S. is the illicit alcohol trade that developed under U.S. national prohibition in the 1920s. Alcohol was imported from Mexico and Canada during this time period, and significant illegal production operations in the U.S. proliferated. Even scholars that have not condemned the national prohibition of the 1920s as a failure, acknowledge that drinking persisted among problem drinkers and that illegal alcohol economies enabled this (Blocker, 2006; Hall, 2010).

Lee (1997) discusses the illegal alcohol trade in Southwest Alaska, and today, there is an ongoing debate about ending alcohol prohibition on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota as a means to address the exploitative practices of stores that sell beer along the border of the reservation (Williams, 2012). In 2013, the Oglala Sioux Tribe held an election in which the tribe legalized alcohol on their lands, but the intent of the law was questioned. Many who voted for its passage indicated to the Oglala Sioux leadership that they were voting with the intent that the law would disrupt the four beer-only package stores immediately off the reservation in the unincorporated town of Whiteclay. The town is a notorious “Skid Row of the Plains” to tribal members and legalizing alcohol might have reduced the exploitation of the businesses that ran the beer outlets (Hammel, 2016). As the Oglala Sioux Tribe were about to vote again in May 2016, the Tribal Council abruptly called off the vote under protest ostensibly keeping alcohol illegal on the reservation. Thus, alcohol obtained and often consumed in Whiteclay kept alcohol available even with the ban on the reservation. The boundaries of legality are pushed in the case of alcohol prohibition adjacent to legal sites of sale. The Oglala Sioux continued to challenge Whiteclay’s role in alcohol problems in the community, and in April 2017, a state liquor board voted unanimously to deny continued liquor licenses to the businesses in Whiteclay (Hammel, 2017). Regardless, alcohol is still present on Pine Ridge with a thriving bootleg industry just as in Alaskan communities with alcohol bans.

Fueling the illegal alcohol economy in Alaska is a shortage of economic opportunity. Bootleg alcohol represents a lucrative business in areas short of wage-paying jobs. In Hub 2, alcohol is purchased at the distribution center and redistributed, albeit illegally to other people, who do not hold permits for various reasons or who have exceeded their limits:

When we didn’t have our liquor store here, you know, you could only order booze from Anchorage and people would order, bring it here and they would bootleg it, that’s how a lot of people made their money was bootlegging. And a bootleg jug would run like \$80, \$70, \$80, even today a lot of people go to the distribution center, they buy beer and they buy their one jug a day, and then they buy wine, and they don’t drink, you know, they don’t drink at all, they just bring it home, wait for someone to come by and say, you know, whose got? And then they sell it, they sell it to them.

This distributes alcohol to both local hub residents and village residents who often bring alcohol back to their dry villages. Redistribution in villages at increased prices provides income to local residents. A bottle of alcohol worth \$20 to \$40 in the liquor store is worth \$70 or \$80 to those without the legal ability to buy in the hub and is worth \$200 or more in the village.

Homebrew, too, is a significant source of alcohol in 'dry' communities throughout Alaska. Mixing three ingredients together (yeast, sugar, and water) and leaving it to ferment, people can create an intoxicating mixture in a day or two. Sometimes brewers get "fancy" and add raisins to determine when the brew is done (the fruit will float more readily in alcohol) or fruit juice or flavored beverage powder for flavor. Homebrew is exceedingly common and prolific:

Even though this is technically a dry village, there's a lot of, they estimate there's 13 homebrew stations here in this village. There's a lot of home brewing going on.

One trooper reported that simple homebrew mixtures had been tested at 6% alcohol content after only about 24 hours of fermenting. The process is simple, and even kids are reported to have engaged in making and selling it:

...the home brew that's, that's the major substance abuse 'cause they can make alcohol rapidly, and they can distribute it and they can make a lot of money off of it...I have 12-year-old kids that have confessed to me saying that they make it, and they have been selling it here.

Although homebrew is not as worth as much per quart as bootlegged alcohol, larger quantities can be made than can be imported. And, homebrew can be sold for \$50 to \$100 a quart.

Community members generally report being aware of who in the community manufactures alcohol, but community dynamics often challenge addressing the issue through the criminal justice system. Criminalizing alcohol in the village means criminalizing friends and family in the community:

We put up with a lot of that behind our house... 'cause this guy has been there making the homebrew there for several years. And we can call the VPO [Village Police Officer] 'til we're blue in the face and it really does no good. I mean, you know, unfortunately in the village it's a situation where you know, everybody's related to everybody and nobody wants to turn anybody in unless it's a, an extreme dire emergency where somebody's trying to kill somebody, nothing ever really gets done...

Close ties in the village promote ignoring problems unless they are critical. The perception that too many locals (insiders) get in trouble with the troopers (outsiders) is prominent. Troopers are intentionally recruited from outside of the region and are true outsiders who enter the villages for the purpose of the enforcement of Alaska laws. Most villages have only itinerate trooper posts. Some villages, however, given perceived significant problems, have been assigned permanent troopers, but even then, two troopers are posted in alternating two weeks on and two week off. One public health nurse retold a story in which she was talking

to someone from a village with permanent troopers and how the trooper was seen as a hindrance to community enjoyment of a celebration:

I was just on the plane from Anchorage and talking to a woman from one of the villages, and I said, oh you have your own troopers now...there's two troopers and they take turns, they're there every day and I'm like, well, that's a good thing, right? I'm thinking it's a good thing, I don't know if she thought it was a good thing. I said, so there's lots of bootlegging and home brew there. Oh, she says, yeah, but then she said, Fourth of July and there was always a race, so the trooper participated in his age group race. Well, he fell and he hurt himself. She said they had to bring an air evacuation. She now thought this was a bad thing, you know, so then the plane came and took him away, and then she said, everyone kind of relaxed, and they had real Fourth of July, then she said, yeah, a real Fourth of July.

The message was that the village residents felt unable to enjoy the celebration with troopers participating. Implicit in her story was that alcohol was a part of the celebration once the trooper was medevac-ed out. Alcohol violations often mean removal of friends and family from the community, incarceration far from home, and obstacles to gaining future employment and other rights (like alcohol permits in the hub). Minimally, informing on friends and family has the social burden of having turned someone in to outsiders of the community.

Community Response

Given these social difficulties in addressing home brewing and bootlegging in dry villages, communities have devised other efforts to address the problem. Bootlegging is difficult to address as flights to the villages are not often scrutinized by law enforcement and there is no official screening of luggage. Local airlines will report to authorities if they are suspicious, but most bootleggers import only small amounts of alcohol to remain undetected. Terrestrial transportation is even harder to detect.

More easily addressed is homebrew in the communities, which requires specific ingredients, and the primary strategy to reduce home manufacture of alcohol is to restrict the purchase of yeast in the local store of each community. Most stores do not sell yeast or restrict the amount sold, and stores that ship to villages (from hubs or from cities like Anchorage or Fairbanks) will not ship large amounts. However, community members are still able to bring these ingredients in on their person when they travel outside of the community or to have acquaintances mail the ingredients to them. These factors are likely why community members report that homebrew is the greatest concern among community prevention advocates; it is ubiquitous and preventable.

Use of Denatured Alcohol

The misuse of products containing denatured alcohol is not uncommon in settings that place social and physical restrictions on alcohol (Burd, Shea, & Knull, 1987; Egbert, Liese, Powell, Reed, & Liskow, 1986; Egbert, Reed, Powell, Liskow, & Liese, 1985; Lachenmeier, Rehm, & Gmel, 2007). Rural Alaska is no exception with many narratives and examples of the drinking of mouthwash, Lysol, and other products that contain denatured alcohol. The

misuse of alcohol-based are reported throughout the state. This phenomenon of ingesting everyday domestic products high in alcohol confounds local options restrictions because the products are legal. Yet, the individuals using this means for intoxication are those whom the law targets, individuals with severe problems, including addiction, that spread beyond themselves challenging local order and wellness in small communities. These products are not perceived as the most critical substances of misuse. In fact, many participants in the interviews questioned our study's focus on inhalants and legal products given the problems that communities face with alcohol. However, many also recognized a clear relationship between alcohol misuse and the misuse of legal products as surrogates for alcohol and other drugs:

Once they get started on it, then they start looking for another. I mean, if they can't get a hold of home brew, then they go looking for the gas to huff. And then they go looking, you know, for stealing medications and things like that.

Community members believe that intoxication-seeking individuals will find products to use for this purpose. These narratives represent a clear progression of the rational decisions of local residents seeking intoxication, an order of what is preferred to what is "desperate:"

And if they can't get a hold of the yeast because there's none, ok, if the whiskey's not in town and they can't afford to buy it for instance, either one or the other, they'll go have the Lysol, which you know, Lysol. I've even heard stories about Pine Sol as well.

No one talks about the pleasures of ingesting Lysol, but they talk about the environment of desperation that leads intoxicating-seeking individuals to use these products.

Community Response

Descriptions in rural Alaska proliferate about the efforts of stores to keep denatured alcohol out of the hands of those who would use it to get intoxicated. Many retail stores in the hub communities monitor products that can be misused, and many products have been locked up, put behind the counter, or removed from store inventories altogether because of the potential for misuse. Like yeast, which is a great concern for homebrew, products containing denatured alcohol are reportedly highly monitored. In addition to the general removal or physical restriction of these products, interviewees also reported that individuals with known alcohol problems were denied sales of these types of products. In some cases, youth too were denied purchases, suggesting acknowledgement that youth who often lack social accessibility to alcohol turn to these other products for intoxication.

The significance of products containing denatured alcohol shifts with the legality of alcohol. In Hub 2, community members recognize that since the distribution center has opened, products that contain denatured alcohol no longer have to be stored behind the counter, suggesting that the legality of alcohol in the hub have reduced the demand for products with denatured alcohol.

CONCLUSION

The unintended consequences of local restrictions on alcohol in rural Alaska include intentional strategies of some to thwart the restrictions and the counter efforts by others to reinforce the restrictions and find other ways to promote wellness. Physical and social restrictions to alcohol result in the seeking of intoxication through other means, many of which are more harmful than the effects of unrestricted access. And, yet, the local options laws remain a symbol of local control in which Alaskan communities and Alaska Native people determine their own paths. Despite the recognition that local option restrictions do not end alcohol misuse, there remains the belief that these restrictions are effective in reducing alcohol-related problems even if great evidence does not support the claim. For example, Seale and colleagues (2006) documented in focus groups that the Iñupiat participants from one hub community cited these ordinances as one factor that have reduced alcohol-related problems in their communities.

However, Alaska Native people seek not only to improve their wellbeing related to alcohol but also related to stigmatization and its effects on community wellness. Racism and stereotypes about alcohol certainly play a part in local perceptions of villages and Native people. Criminalization of alcohol in the villages, which concentrates alcohol usage often conspicuously in hub communities, is mistakenly translated as cultural flaws in the Iñupiat and Yup'ik people. This narrative is not unique to Alaska, or the United States. In Australia, alcohol prohibition in the past and redirected spatial prohibitions directed at aboriginal peoples (e.g., bans on public drunkenness) reinforce systemic discrimination more than they address problematic drinking (D'Abbs, 2012). Moreover, D'Abbs emphasizes that alcohol policy directed at aboriginal people serves only to reinforce the long-lasting disadvantage and inequity that cause problematic drinking patterns.

The local policies that seek to reduce harm inadvertently contribute to the disproportionately high negative outcomes for Alaska Native peoples associated with problem alcohol use (Segal, 1998; Young & Joe, 2009). Generally, American Indian and Alaska Native populations have overall lower rates of alcohol use (i.e., the percentages of the population that uses alcohol) but much higher rates of problem drinking like binge drinking (Young & Joe, 2009). The 2008 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (SAMHSA, 2010), for instance, recorded the national average for 30-day alcohol use at 55.2% whereas only 43.9% of the American Indian/Alaska Native sample had used alcohol. However, the national average for binge drinking was 24.5% versus 30.6% for the American Indian/Alaska Native sample. These patterns are reinforced through alcohol restrictions as patterns of social and shared drinking are restricted in favor of bingeing and "hoarding" as was a theme in our interview findings.

Local restrictions on alcohol are not sufficient alone to curb alcohol problems in Alaskan communities. Although the enactment (and enforcement) of local options restrictions on alcohol certainly do reduce some negative consequences of alcohol use (most notably violence and violent death), these policies do not address the fundamentally important factors behind substance abuse and addiction in Alaska Native communities as evidenced by the unintended consequences of such restrictions described in this article. Engaging in

patterns of risky drinking whether it is binge drinking in a community that has no restrictions, illegal consumption in communities with restrictions, or consumption of denatured alcohol products that have deleterious consequences is imbedded in larger historical and current context that can only be addressed through community-wide efforts to cultivate wellness. Comprehensive efforts to develop community wellbeing are growing with models that promote community-driven solutions (e.g., Allen & Mohatt, 2014; Allen, Mohatt, Beehler, & Rowe, 2014; Allen, Mohatt, Fok, Henry, & Burkett, 2014) and thoughtful reflection on historical context (e.g., Wexler, 2006; Wexler, 2009). Community-level, ecological, policy approaches to reducing alcohol problems are effective and just now being expanded to and developed with Native communities (Etz, Arroyo, Crump, Rosa, & Scott, 2012). Critically, in this expansion, efforts must not rely solely on restriction but instead be holistic and engage contextually with the community setting and its history.

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Table 1

Community Characteristics

COMMUNITY	APPROXIMATE POPULATION	APPROXIMATE % ALL OR PART ALASKA NATIVE*	“LOCAL OPTION” STATUS	# OF INTERVIEWS
HUB 1	>3000	<70%	Wet	9
V1	<1000	>90%	Dry	8
V2	<1000	>90%	Dry	10
V3	<1000	>90%	Dry	8
V4	<1000	>90%	Dry	8
V5	<1000	>90%	Dry	8
V6	<1000	>80%	Damp	8
HUB 2	>3000	>80%	Wet	9

* SOURCE: 2010 U.S. CENSUS ([HTTP://FACTFINDER.CENSUS.GOV/](http://factfinder.census.gov/))