

Legal age to drink: should it be changed?

[Health & Medicine](#), [Alcoholism](#)



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Legal Age to Drink: Should it be Changed? In this day and age with more sophisticated teens and young people abusing alcohol, the issue concerning whether or not teenagers should be able to drink at a younger age is an important topic. In the article "Perils of Prohibition" Elizabeth M. Whelan argues that alcohol should be legalized at the age of eighteen instead of twenty-one. She hopes to persuade readers, parents, and educators to support her proposal for the change by successful alcohol education.

Although Whelan provides valuable examples to prove that proper alcohol education is an effective solution in reducing the problems faced with alcohol abuse among American teenagers, she does not provide enough substantial evidence to justify changing the legal drinking age to eighteen years old. In the beginning paragraphs, Whelan compares alcohol consumption with American teens and their European peers. She says, "American teens, unlike their European peers, don't learn how to drink gradually, cautiously, and in moderation" (2). This is a great example because it makes the readers think about the different cultural views of alcohol consumption among youthful drinkers globally. Though the consumption of alcohol in France, Spain, and Portugal is higher than the United States per person, the rate of alcoholism and alcohol abuse is lower (4). Whelan hopes to prove that if moderate alcohol consumption and proper awareness of the use of it is instilled in children eighteen years old and up then drinking alcohol should be okay. She compares three countries to the United States in her example. We live in a pretty big world, is it the same in other "drinking" countries? The example is fairly effective but comparing drinking habits in only three countries to the United States is not enough to persuade readers. In order to

gain support for successful alcohol education being a key factor in helping the problems faced with alcohol abuse, Whelan mentions an example involving her daughter. She explained to her daughter the differences in alcohol contents and the importance of not drinking on an empty stomach (8). The strength of this example is effective because it is coming from personal experience. It's detailed and provided by a woman whose education and occupation qualifies her to make this kind of study. This type of person often makes you want to believe him or her. However, this piece of evidence uses the hasty generalization fallacy. A single personal experience or even many is not enough to convince readers. People's personal experiences differ greatly. And how do the readers even know if alcohol education was successful with her daughter? Her daughter may not have gotten herself into trouble recently but she's still under the legal age of drinking and who knows what would happen once she goes off to college? Because of her daughter's age and the fallacy used, creates a weak example for supporting alcohol education. Whelan continues with examples to prove that proper education is the key instead of prohibiting teenagers the right to drink until the age of twenty-one. She mentions tragic accidents that occurred at the Ivy League school her daughter Christine will be attending in the fall. A student who was nearly electrocuted when, in a drunken state, climbed on a moving train. The student survived but lost three of his limbs (10). A second incident where an intoxicated student ended up in a chimney and was found three days later dead (10). She hopes to convince readers that students do not make good choices when they drink, if they're not educated properly. The tragedies with the sick, injured students are fair because they're emotionally appealing to

the reader but weak because she fails to provide statistical evidence as to how often injuries of this kind occur. The examples are extreme and rare ones that are unlikely to happen on a regular basis. Whelan continues supporting her claim by mentioning a study that was done at the Harvard School of Public Health by her colleagues. What they found in their survey of college students was that they drink "early and . . . often," frequently to the point of getting ill (1). She defends her claim by appealing to authority as evidence. And readers would not be happy knowing that students are becoming sick from irresponsible drinking — the human factor. This study is included to let people know that college students are drinking irresponsibly and becoming sick from it as a result. Not surprisingly, she failed to provide statistical evidence again. That is, evidence of how many students is involved in the survey and the diversity of people in the study. These are important factors needed to be included in the survey to make it believable and convincing to the readers. Finally, two analogies are given by Whelan in hopes of her readers to accept her case. This author creates a weak analogy when comparing sex education to alcohol education. In an attempt to change the legal age of drinking to twenty-one, she says "we choose to teach our children about safe sex, including the benefits of teen abstinence, why not about safe drinking"? (13) The only similarity is that drinking and sex can cause unsafe or unwanted events, therefore it makes sense to be educated on both subjects. However, the similarity is not relevant enough to be considered a good analogy. Safe sex education has been taught for many years to children but it has not stopped them from having sex or preventing unwanted pregnancies. If this is the case, how would safe drinking education

be convincing to the readers to change the legal age to eighteen? The second analogy which is fairly significant in dealing with the unfairness of the legal age to drink, is comparing the ability for teens to be able to drive cars, fly planes, marry, vote, pay taxes, take out loans, and risks their lives in the U. S armed forces to drinking. She says, " At eighteen they're considered adults but when they want to enjoy a drink like other adults, they are " disenfranchised"" (5). Whelan hopes this evidence will convince readers that if eighteen year olds are given " adult" responsibilities then they shall be treated as adults in all aspects of life, including drinking alcohol in moderation. She makes a great point with the comparison but when comparing voting, paying taxes, taking out a loan, and marrying to drinking, the responsibilities don't impair your brain in a way that drinking alcohol would. Whelan presents herself as a kind-hearted woman who is a bit upset and frustrated with the current laws regarding the legal age to drink. The example she uses explaining how she educated her daughter with regards to alcohol content shows her taking a subtle approach with allowing her daughter to drink rather than making it appear to be a bad thing if you are under the legal age. (8) She shows compassion and concern. Whelan's tone throughout the essay is fairly tolerable, but she does show some depreciation towards the government when she compares teenagers being able to " drive cars, fly planes, marry, vote, pay taxes, take out loans, and risk their lives as members of the U. S. armed forces but laws in all fifty say that no alcoholic beverages may be sold to anyone until that magic twenty-first birthday. " (3) When she mentions " we should make access to alcohol legal at eighteen and at the same time, we should come down much harder

on alcohol abusers and drunk drivers of all ages" (12) she is genuinely concerned of the welfare of all people with regards to alcohol and safety. She eagerly wants to make a difference. And as public-health scientist with a daughter heading to college, she has professional and personal concerns in regards to the dangers of alcohol. While it is obvious that Whelan's heart is in the right place and that alcohol abuse among teenagers is a problem, her argument suffers from lack of evidence to support changing the legal age of drinking to eighteen years old. Proper alcohol education can be helpful in terms of improving the problem but that's it. Whelan's article indicates a need for further study on the abuse of teenage drinking. It would be helpful to see statistical results in studies done among colleges across the nation and in all areas from rich to poor. The more valid studies the better chance finding the proper solutions to the problem.