

Alcoholism among the youth

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



The debate over whether the legal drinking age should be lowered or remain the same is an ongoing battle. At the age of twenty-one, it is studied that the mind is finished with its natural process of development. It is less likely that alcohol can damage the development of the brain as compared to the brain of an eighteen year old who has yet to finish maturing. The legal drinking age should not be lowered due to the fact at a younger age; people are less tolerant and less capable of controlling their reactions to the alcohol, potentially putting their lives and the lives of others in danger. Almost every state has set a legal drinking age of twenty-one, the legal voting age at the time, after prohibition was repealed.

Between 1970 and 1975, twenty-nine states lowered the voting age from twenty-one to eighteen, twenty-nine states also lowered their drinking age to eighteen or nineteen. During the late seventies, studies showed that traffic crashes had drastically increased after lowering the drinking age. Once this was announced publicly, many groups created a movement to increase the minimal drinking age, and sixteen states responded. The Uniform Drinking Act was passed in 1984. This strongly encouraged the remaining thirteen states to raise their drinking age. If the states would not agree to do so by 1987, the government said that it would cut highway funding (Encyclopedia of Alcohol and Drugs). Many would argue that when the drinking age were set at twenty-one, there is an unavoidably huge increase in alcohol use when youths, turning twenty-one, “ make up for lost time.

” However, a study done by Alexander Wagenaar and PM O’Malley found that when the minimum drinking age was twenty-one, there was a lower use of alcohol after one turned twenty-one. One of the largest arguments in favor of

lowering the drinking age is the use of Europe as a comparison. Where as in Europe, where there isn't a prescribed legal age for drinking, the age for drinking in the United States is 21. One could also argue that within the United States, one is considered a young adult at the age of 18. At this age, one can get married, smoke, obtain a license, and can even be drafted into the army to protect this country with a potential of losing one's life. This lower age for driving in combination with the lowered drinking age incurs a rise in traffic accidents and even eath. Drinking before twenty-one causes more deaths than illnesses.

On the other hand, those countries have their share of alcohol problems. The rate of alcohol-related diseases such as cirrhosis to the liver is the same, if not higher, as in the United States. Alsodrunk drivingamong youth in Europe is lower, but only because the legal driving age in most European countries is higher. Furthermore the use of public transportation is greater in Europe, where as in the United States fewer people take advantage of public transportation. Public transportation is either frowned upon or not available. It is also argued that even though the legal drinking age is at twenty-one, many youths still can easily obtain and drink alcohol, so the current drinking age doesn't work. It stands to reason to conclude that if the drinking age were lowered to eighteen, even younger children would be using alcohol.

This therefore, would have adverse affects on our society, not a positive affect. Because it's illegal for people under twenty-one, many of those people don't drink. Lowering the drinking age would increase alcohol problems among teens, even at an earlier age. My opinion is further

supported by the Correlation between underage drinking and alcohol abuse. Scientists of the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism have said that teens that begin drinking before the age of fifteen are four times more likely to become alcoholics. The same institute also found that alcohol abuse doubles, in those who start drinking before the age of fifteen compared to those who first begin drinking at age twenty-one. Continuing, they found that twenty-five percent of those who began drinking before the age of seventeen went on to become alcoholics.

Substances are widely used by the youth as a means of excitement, consolation, belonging to a group, rebellion, a symbol of social and sexual maturity and independence. As expressed in the CHILD PSYCHIATRY & HUMAN DEVELOPMENT, “ The destabilization of the family, ethical confusion, peer pressure and the decline of self-discipline among the young are the essential causes of adolescent substance use and abuse. ” Excess drinking is usually associated with unwanted outcomes on part of the adolescent drinker. Jonathan Gruber, author of Risky Behavior among Youths: an Economic Analysis, expresses that “ Drinking can lead to an increased chance of motor-vehicle accident or other type of injury, unwanted sex, criminal victimization, and other problems stemming from clumsiness, distorted perception, and cognitive deficit. ” This lists only but a few of the many consequences that result from underage drinking. One solution offered to prevent the consequences faced with reckless drinking is changing the physical and social environments in which adolescents interact. Reducing the number of alcohol-related problems in America is a huge challenge to face.

In part, this is because of the “ prominent and deep-rooted role of drinking in American society. ” Prohibition demonstrated that it is impossible to eliminate drinking in the United States. But one of the major themes running through this book has been that these problems are not indisputable. Their extent can be made smaller or larger by taking or failing to take appropriate actions. Furthermore, most studies show an increase in traffic accidents, and even deaths, among youths when the drinking age was lower. The Encyclopedia of Alcohol and Drugs also states that the result of lowering the drinking age caused a five to twenty percent increase in the number of fatal injury-causing crashes “ likely to involve alcohol, such as single-vehicle accidents occurring late at night. ” Alcohol use is typically reported in one-fifth to two-thirds of these problems; youth drowning, vandalism, assaults, suicides, and teenage pregnancies (Toomey, Rosenfeld, and Wagenaar 3).

Besides accidents, there is also an association between alcohol abuse and suicide. Between one-third and two-thirds of adolescent suicide victims have a measurable blood alcohol level. A study of suicides from 1970 to 1990, done by Johanna Birckmeyer and David Hemenway, found that the suicide rates of eighteen to twenty year olds living in states with a drinking age of eighteen was eight percent higher than in states with a drinking age of twenty-one. The last point to consider is that when the drinking age was lowered to eighteen or nineteen an increase in traffic accidents occurred. Drinking before twenty-one causes more death than illnesses. It seems to me that there is little valid argument against leaving the legal drinking age at twenty-one. Auto accidents, suicides, illnesses, and alcoholism are all reasons in favor of maintaining a legal drinking age of twenty-one.

The world is not yet mature enough for such a drastic change as lowering the legal drinking age, the damage would be too great. Works Cited Birckmayer, Johanna; Hememway, David. " Minimum-age drinking laws and youth suicide, 1970-1990. " American Journal of PublicHealth, 1999. Print. Bower, B.

Alcoholism shows its youthful side.

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