

**Should the Legal Age for Drinking Be Lowered?**

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## **Should the Legal Age for Drinking Be Lowered?**

The debate about lowering the minimum legal drinking age (MLDA) laws for the U. S. from age 21 to 18 years old has been associated with one of the most heated debates. The supporters also feel that anybody 18 years old and above is an adult and should be allowed to decide whether or not to take alcohol. Luukkonen et al. (2023) have supported the idea that the debate around the MLDA is pivotal to keeping the minimum drinking age at 21. It holds the key to the success of public health and safety and for the good of society (Ayares et al., 2022). Therefore, lowering the legal drinking age is unnecessary since underage drinking contributes to health complications, elevated levels of accidents, fatalities, and increased consumption of alcohol among the underage.

Primarily, reducing the MLDA increases the dangerous health impacts on the youth and young adults. The brain maturation process goes on until the age of 25, and alcohol damages the growing brain more severely, affecting the areas that have poor myelination, including the frontal lobe associated with decision-making and controlling impulses. Luukkonen et al. (2023) have revealed that right from the time that a person takes alcohol, they are likely to develop more chronic problems, including dependence on alcohol, mental illnesses, and poor brain function. Thus, the MLDA should be maintained at 21 to prevent the negative changes it induces.

Additionally, one cannot overlook that the current legal drinking age of 21 helps decrease traffic accidents and deaths. Prior research on this subject has demonstrated that higher legal drinking ages are related to lowered traffic accident rates. For instance, a consequence of the National Minimum Drinking Age Act that was passed in the year 1984 is a reduction in the string of drunk drive-related deaths by one-third (Reams, 2016). According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (2022), the age-21 law decreased alcohol-related deaths

by over 31,000 from 1975 to 2016. The points raised can, therefore, explain why the country would experience more car crashes, injuries, and fatalities on the roads if the legal drinking age were to be reduced.

Moreover, lowering the drinking age would guarantee increased drinking among the youth, who will be excited to explore this new reality. Jager et al. (2023) have discussed that maintaining the legal drinking age at 21 has shown that persons aged 21 years drink less when the drinking age is 21 and continue to drink responsibly even as they grow older. On the other hand, lowering the legal drinking age will mean that high school and college students will make it a norm to drink. Hence, their likelihood of engaging in high-risk drinking and other related behaviors is also likely to be high. It also raises early alcohol consumption, which also brings into the foreground higher rates of illicit drugs and substances where it has been proved in some research that early alcohol users are likely to indulge themselves in other vices.

The critics of the age-21 MLDA law assert that it is useless since many persons 21 years old and above take alcohol, especially in possibly hazardous conditions (White, 2020). They say that it will be easier to control the drinkers and encourage safer drinking if the legal age of drinking is reduced. However, this argument leaves out the fact that the present law poses a severe discouragement to the law. Some youths are still involved in unlawful drinking, but the law has drastically lowered the instances of underage drinking and has fostered a culture that defies early use of the substance (White, 2020). Furthermore, the disadvantages of reducing the drinking age exceed the assumed advantages in regulating the existing problem.

In conclusion, the legal drinking age should remain at 21. It is because of the adverse effects that are caused by the abuse of alcohol in events like traffic accidents or other social disorders among people younger than 21. Even though there is still some non-compliance with

the current legislation, the legislation remains favorable to the general population's health and safety. This way, society would be able to safeguard young adults from the various harms caused by alcohol. This goes beyond just freedom of one's choice; it is necessary for the protection of the people and society. Future studies and policies should be directed to improve the enforcement and education regarding the MLDA regulations.

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