

Research on the Legal Liquor Youth in the US

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Abstract: Changing the legal drinking threshold in USA is an issue of contention in general that has been debated for decades but also one of the government's concerns since it relates to the citizens' health and livelihood issues such as traffic problems. The trends in related literature research in recent years keep in a relatively high position, lots of researchers are working on whether to lower the drinking age or not. This paper discusses whether the United States should lower the drinking age or not through the form of a literature review. Based on the analysis, it concludes that dropping the acceptable drinking age is essential. The main reason is about responsibility, potentially negative effects on the youth and others including sexual assault, binge drinking, development of the brain, and future study career. The research in this article can provide some reference for the US government to set the drinking age reasonably.

Keywords: minimum drinking age, alcohol, U.S. polity

1. Introduction

The minimum permissible drinking age in America is aged 21. The law was built in 1984 in response to concerns about drunk driving situations and fatalities among young adults [1].

However, since its implementation, the subject of lowering the limit for alcohol consumption has been brought into discussion. Cutting the legal drinking age, argued advocates, would cut down on drinking in large quantities and make young people have responsible drinking habits, opponents contend that it will end up in a boom in health issues and accidents linked to alcohol. In this paper, we will look at each theory and explore on the potential impacts of reducing the permitted age to drink in the country.

Through this article's research from the value of theoretic, it can more systematically go through the perspectives of scholars and experts. This article will benefit from discovering the main viewpoints of existing literature, but it also helps to identify trends in this research field to provide further research direction. From the practical value, it inspires the government towards the final decision on whether to lower the drinking age or not.

2. Research Tendency

This study collected the research paper from google scholar. We find 387 papers from 2000-2017. As shown in Fig. 1. According to the published documents, eleven articles focused on the drinking age relative problems from 2000; twelve articles from 2001, twenty-one articles from 2002 and 2003, twenty-three articles from 2004, twenty-two articles from 2005, 2006, and 2015, sixteen articles from

2007 and 2018, eighteen articles from 2008, 2011, and 2016, twenty-nine articles from 2009, twenty-five articles from 2010, seventeen articles from 2012, thirty-three articles from 2013, nineteen articles from 2014, twenty-four articles from 2017. It's not hard to see that the drinking age has been a popular topic throughout history and drastically increased starting in 2008. These articles reflect the attitude of citizens and scientists toward the drinking age, and we will discuss both side of the previous statement. Furthermore, government's attitude towards the statement also matters since they made the law, and every person has the duty to follow it. What other countries deal with the minimum age is another aspect to view the United States drinking age, since their experience may help us to build our laws. Last, we will talk about the pros and cons for both sides so that future expectations can be made based on current articles and the official.

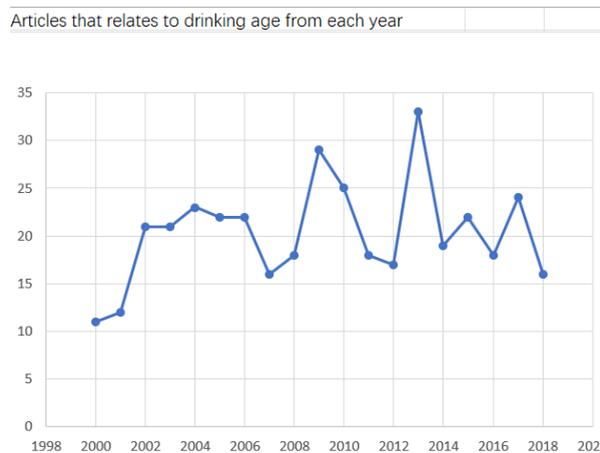


Figure 1: The number of papers from 2002 -2017.

3. The Policy of Drinking Age in Some Countries

While the U.S. is still arguing whether the minimum drinking age should be lowered or not, maybe looking at other countries about their policies relating to the age of drinking alcohol is a good idea. Learning from other countries, and getting some experience may help the U.S. to make its final decision. Based on a recent survey, it shows that: In Europe, the legal age to consume alcohol is often between 16 and 18. In the case of recent studies, far more 15 to 16-year-olds in 34 of 35 European countries than American teens of similar age report drinking in the month before that. There were larger amounts of individuals who said they had never been intoxicated in their entire life in all but three European nations, had been drunk during the previous year in all but four, and had drunk within the previous 30 days in all but five nations [2]. A lower minimum drinking age can help to reduce the pressure associated with underage drinking, which can lead to healthier attitudes towards alcohol consumption. In the U.K., there are more than 74000 bars, leading them drinking beers with no pressure, just like drinking water. Still, as the survey proves, more over-drinking situations happen compared with the U.S, and over-drinking may influence young people not only that night, including car accidents, and unprotected sex, but also a great influence their future life, such as an increased chance of cancer or liver problems. Compared with China, China's minimum drinking age policy can help to promote responsible drinking habits among young people. In China, alcohol is an essential good in both official business and family gatherings. If someone has a high tolerance for alcohol, then people will be more likely to respect him. On the contrary, the minimum drinking age policy may be difficult to enforce, especially in areas where alcohol is widely available and cultural attitudes towards drinking are relaxed. Like the study said: Despite drinking alcohol has consistently been a part of Chinese culture, the country's commercial alcohol goods have expanded more than 50 times per

person since 1952. Parallel to this, there is evidence of a significant increase in the prevalence of substance abuse, which has increased to the third largest mental disease from ninth place [3]. What China did to control the drinking age is not optimistic

4. Opinions on Whether Lowering the Drinking Age

4.1. Practice of the US Government

From the government aspect, the goal of legal alcohol intake age is reducing the potential injuries that happen to young people, the key word is ‘protection’. The government is against lowering the age. From public health document department, published in 2010 says: The research points out that higher the minimum age at which one can drink legally to 18 may result in a rise in drinking and suffering related harms [4]. However, according to laws from different states, some states listed exceptions for teenagers to drink alcohol, including family exceptions, location exceptions, or both. In history, there was a period, an exception, in the War with Vietnam the drinking age was lowered from twenty one to eighteen because people wanted the voting age lowered from 21 to 18. They declared that if you could fight in Vietnam, then you could drink alcohol at 18. Still, those exceptions are not allowed in many states, and the government didn’t lower the drinking age by changing the previous law they made in 1984 since the law faces all young adults, not for those exceptions.

4.2. Academic Research on the Drinking Age

4.2.1. Positive Opinion on Lowering the Drinking Age

An article from the American Journal of Preventive Medicine implies that we should decrease the age limit. According to the article, it said: In America as a whole, excessive alcohol use contributes for about 4600 fatalities and 275,000 years of life lost each year among youngsters. Beer was the second most popular alcoholic beverage, coming in at 19.2%, behind liquor (43.8%) [5]. More than that, according to the survey conducted by MD Miller: In all, 44.9% of secondary school pupils confirmed to drinking over earlier 30 days [6]. The truth is that due to the high legal drinking age, many students drink too much at parties, bars, or even at the dorm with friends because the chance to drink is less. That’s the reason why excessive drinking happens so often in the US, and the drinking situation of young people is not optimistic. The law is too strict towards teenagers so some of them start to go against the law. The data proves that Teen drinking appears to be barely affected by the MLDA [7]. If everyone followed the law, there would not have so many students or teenagers who prefer liquor. It seems like the law is protecting teenagers, but instead, it kills more than saves. It would be better if lowered the minimum drinking age so that without the restriction, they would not drink too much at the party since they are allowed to drink everywhere legally.

The University of Alabama claimed that: Based on logic, it must come as no surprise that approximately 1,825 college students die from alcohol-related accidents each year and that an estimated 599,000 traditional-age pupils receive injuries as a result of drinking [8]. Another study holds nearly the same position: Both in teens and students in colleges, heavy episodic drinking and alcohol use disorders are common [9]. Behind these figures are accidents committed by teenagers after they were drunk. Parents don’t expect their children to be the victims of such accidents. All these cases could have been avoided. What we need to do is to reduce the drinking age limit to 18. Teenagers will have a certain psychological, learning, or emotional pressure at a certain time. However, if drinking becomes the only way for them to release stress or escape from reality, it will increase the chance of emergencies. On the contrary, if we let go of restrictions and every college student has the opportunity to drink, the emergency cases will be reduced.

More than that, based on another research article conducted by Jessica A. said that: According to Hingson et al.'s Citation, 100,000 college students have unsupervised liaisons after drinking each year, with 400,000 of them being too intoxicated to agree ... A study entitled "Snapshot of Annual High-Risk College Drinking Consequences" reported that more than 97,000 college-aged people experienced sexual assault or date rape as the outcome of drinking alcohol [10]. Sexual assault, rape, and sexual behavior without protection, those behaviors will directly change their life, no matter sending a young man to jail, or a young girl giving birth at school or home since abortion is illegal in some states. Other data also proves the same evidence: Alcohol consumption is a factor in a minimum of half of sexual attacks and most rapes of college women take place while the victim is too drunk to defend herself [11]. Underage teenagers, including college students, will have a dramatic influence on their life once previous crimes happen. Again, the goal of the minimum drinking age law is to protect adolescents. Lowering the age limit will let teenagers more familiar with the alcoholic product, and let them know how many shots is their maximum before losing consciousness, increasing the drinking times, not quantity.

4.2.2. Negative Opinion on Lowering the Drinking Age

Some conservations argue that the minimum drinking age shouldn't be lowered. instead, it should be raised to twenty-five so that alcohol will not have an impact on brain development. They point out that: 'In a Wall Street Journal story on alcohol's effects on young minds, it was stated that "from a biochemist's perspective, the brain doesn't fully mature until age 25, and can exhibit these side effects of drinking liquor until then." [12]. They believed that it would influence the development of the brains of teenagers. From around sixteen to twenty-three is the golden age for teenagers to learn knowledge and determine their future, what they want to do, and what kind of person they want to be. Alcohol will only lead them to lose their target, become addicted to it, and with lots of side effects after drinking. It may show by having unpredictable diseases as age gets older and older as time passes. In order to protect the brains of teenagers, the law should raise the minimum age for drinking.

Besides, scientific research conducted by the University of Chicago told us that: 'The alcoholic surroundings at age 14 has a direct connection to binge drinks at later ages; a legal drinking age of 18 is linked to a 7% higher likelihood of binge drinking no fewer than 4 times in the previous month at afterwards. The authors of the additional study, Norberg, Beirut, and Grucza (2009), investigate whether having an MLDA of lower than 21 (vs 21) is related to alcohol use disorders in people between the ages of 21 and 53. According to their findings, the frequency of alcohol use disorders rises by 32% when the MLDA is lower than 21 [13]. The first study suggests that drinking at an early age is strongly associated with a high chance of binge drinking later in life. The other evidence also agrees with the previous statement: Study shows the danger of abusing drinking increases with the age as young individuals first use it [14]. A lower legal drinking age, such as eighteen, is also associated with an increased probability of binge drinking later as ages increase. This suggests that having a high minimum legal drinking age may help prevent binge drinking by delaying exposure to alcohol and reducing the probability of early age of heavy drinking. Here is another document that supports the statement: For the population surveyed and NLAES/NESARC populations, intake was linked to greater probabilities of dropping out of high school by 4% and 13%, accordingly. We found that women (5%–18%), Blacks (5%–19%), and Hispanics (6%), all experienced larger effects. The likelihood that young individuals will complete high school increases as they become older and begin drinking [15]. The second study suggests that a low minimum drinking age's state is associated with an increased probability of alcohol disorders, which are severe and might get someone killed because of heavy alcohol consumption. This also provides support for the statement that minimum drinking ages should be thrown away to protect health and reduce negative consequences related to alcohol use.

4.3. Discussion

From both sides, people who advocate lowering or maintaining the minimum drinking age all provide reasonable explanations to support their statement, every decision has its pros and cons, and so does technology. Rather than focusing on the minimum drinking age, it is important to focus on alternative solutions to reducing the harms associated with underage drinking. What protects the young people most, and what decision we should make since the goal of lowering or maintaining the age is to protect young people better. While there may be differing opinions on how best to achieve this goal, it is clear that any decisions related to the minimum drinking age should be based on careful consideration, and make different choices based on different cultures and living habits based on different areas.

5. Conclusion

Through the collection and sorting of existing literature on the drinking age, the following characteristics were found: the trends in literature research in recent years keep in a relatively high position, meaning lots of researchers are working on whether to lower the drinking age or not; and also based on their opinion, more scholars believed that the minimum drinking age should be lowered. This article provides a research review on the issue of the drinking age, mainly focusing on the past solid evidence of whether to lower the drinking age or not, and a comprehensive review has been conducted. Based on the current research, most governments still hold their opinion that setting the MLDA to be eighteen years old. From both perspectives, they mainly focus on several parts: Responsibility, potentially negative effects on themselves and others including sexual assault, binge drinking, development of the brain, and future study career. The point of this research is to let the government make the correct decision based on their unique agriculture and make the fittest rule for the young people, not the decision maker themselves.

However, this paper still has some limitations, such as the collected papers in this research may not have covered all the academic research. It can be further discussed in future research.

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