

## **Part 1- Annotated Bibliography**

### **Introduction**

The sources that are written below address the debate over the drinking age in the United States. Currently, the drinking age in the U.S. is twenty one, since Congress passed the National Minimum Drinking Age Act in 1984, raising it from eighteen years old. However, almost forty years later, there is still much argument over why or why not the drinking age should be moved back down to eighteen. The following articles provide information and data that discuss this argument, and create a foundation to help broaden one's judgment on this topic.

### **Annotations**

*18 interesting pro lowering the drinking age statistics.* HRF. (2015, April 7). Retrieved February 19, 2022, from <https://healthresearchfunding.org/18-interesting-pro-lowering-drinking-age-statistics/>

Important statistics regarding the drinking age in our country are listed in this article. Out of 1,000 arrests, 2 of them are for underage drinking, showing that it is not a high police priority to enforce the law. Also, countries where the drinking age is eighteen have fewer drunk driving accidents and deaths. In many areas in the US, it is legal for someone under 21 to drink as long as they have their parents permission and are doing it on their property. This article closes stating how lowering the drinking age will help combat binge drinking problems among young adults.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2020, September 3). *Minimum legal drinking age of 21 saves lives.* Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Retrieved February 21, 2022, from <https://www.cdc.gov/alcohol/fact-sheets/minimum-legal-drinking-age.htm>

This CDC article provided various statistics on why underage drinking is a public health problem in our country. Excessive drinking contributes to 3,500 deaths among people under 21 years old each year in the US. Underage drinking is also strongly linked to alcohol dependence later in life and suicide and violence. The article concludes with stating that underage drinking is still a serious problem in many communities across America.

Mandal, S. (n.d.). *Reasons to Challenge the Drinking Age.* NYRA. Retrieved February 18, 2022, from <https://www.youthrights.org/issues/drinking-age/reasons-to-challenge-the-drinking-age/>

This article from the national youth rights association highlights the ineffectiveness of the high drinking age in the United States. Compared to many European countries that have lower drinking ages, the US has a higher amount of drinking related problems, such as alcoholism and "heavy episodic drinking". The current age can also cause unsafe drinking habits to occur, such as binge drinking in unsupervised environments.

*Should the drinking age be lowered in the US? 13 pros and cons.* Drinking Age. (2022, February 17). Retrieved February 19, 2022, from <https://drinkingage.procon.org/>

This article listed the pros and cons of lowering the drinking age. Lowering the drinking age could lead to serious medical issues in teens, as alcohol consumption can interfere with the development of the brain's frontal lobes, which are responsible for emotional development and forming organizational skills. This can lead to later issues, such as depression and a greater occurrence for addiction to occur. The current drinking age in the US also reduces the number of drunk driving accidents, since the law was changed accidents have decreased by a third.

*Lower drinking age may lead to increased high school dropout rate: Study.* Partnership to End Addiction. (n.d.). Retrieved February 19, 2022, from <https://drugfree.org/drug-and-alcohol-news/lower-drinking-age-may-lead-increased-high-school-dropout-rate-study/>

In this article, researchers describe how lowering the drinking age back down to eighteen may increase the high school dropout rate. Researchers examined drop out rates before 1984, when the National Drinking Age Act was passed, and found there was a 3% increase in dropout rates. There was a 4% increase of dropping out in already at-risk groups, such as African Americans and Hispanics, and a 40% increase among high schoolers who had parents with drinking problems. Translated into today's numbers, with 3.3 million high schoolers expected to graduate at the end of this year, the 3% dropout rate would add an additional 99,000 dropouts. Although many are calling to lower the drinking age to reduce binge drinking and alcohol related accidents among college students, researchers are worried how the age change will affect high school students and the national dropout rate.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2020, September 3). *Minimum legal drinking age of 21 saves lives.* Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Retrieved February 21, 2022, from <https://www.cdc.gov/alcohol/fact-sheets/minimum-legal-drinking-age.htm>

This CDC article provided various statistics on why underage drinking is a public health problem in our country. Excessive drinking contributes to 3,500 deaths among people under 21 years old each year in the US. Underage drinking is also strongly linked to alcohol dependence later in life and suicide and violence.

## **Part 2- Write Up**

In 1984, Congress passed the National Minimum Drinking Age Act, that required all states to raise the age for alcohol purchase and possession to twenty one years old, or states would lose 10% of their federal highway funds. By 1988, all fifty states in the union had complied with the mandate and changed the age to twenty one. Today, almost forty years later, the legal age to purchase and consume alcohol in the U.S. is still being heavily debated, as it is one of the highest drinking ages in the world. Many argue that the minimum legal drinking age (also known as MLDA), has become a gateway to unhealthy drinking habits, such as binge drinking in unsafe environments. However, many researchers have defended the drinking age, as it has important medical benefits for young adults, and helps steer high school-aged teens away from the consequences of alcohol and partying.

In the United States, eighteen is the legal age of adulthood. At this age, you can join the military, be prosecuted as an adult, and be able to move out and buy your own house or apartment, so why can't you be able to buy a drink at your local bar? Many argue that the high drinking age does more harm than good. High non-compliance with MLDA-21 promotes general disrespect and non-compliance with other areas of US laws. MLDA-21 encourages young adults to acquire and use false identification documents to procure alcohol (Should the Drinking Age be Lowered? Pros and Cons, 2019). The consequences of being caught with a fake id can be severe. According to the University of Southern California's Department of Public Safety, those caught with a fake ID can face "misdemeanor possession that may be punished by up to 1 year in jail, summary probation, community service, and/or monetary fines up to \$1,000. Felony possession of a fake ID may be punished by up to 3 years in state prison, formal probation, community service, and/or monetary fines up to \$10,000", (DPS USC, 2019). Restaurants and bars can also face severe consequences if they are caught serving patrons who have fake ids. They are subject to thousands of dollars in fines, liquor license suspension, and even closure if they are caught serving alcohol to underage customers who used fake ids. By lowering the drinking age to eighteen, the number of fake ids used would decrease, and young adults, including college students would be able to go out without having to worry about facing severe consequences just to get a drink. The lower drinking age would also benefit

bars and restaurants, as they would be able to confidently serve alcoholic drinks to young adults, without facing the consequences of fines and even closure.

Many argue that the drinking age should be also lowered in order to promote healthier drinking habits among eighteen to twenty years olds. The high drinking age in the United States leads many underage drinkers to drink in secret, and when alcohol, which is also known to be an emotion-amplifying drug, is involved, the outcomes can be dangerous. According to the National Youth Rights Association, “Concentrating all the alcohol for the week into a single party leads underage drinkers to consume 90% of their alcohol through binge drinking. Underage drinkers may consume extra alcohol in order to get rid of evidence and avoid detection. They may also drink more since they do not know when they will be able to drink again and do not want to waste a scarce resource. Binge drinking is an extremely dangerous way to consume alcohol, costing the US \$224 billion annually in healthcare and other damages”. Binge drinking, especially when done in secrecy to hide it from parents and law enforcement, can lead to alcohol poisoning and sickness, unintended violence and other hazardous situations to potentially happen. By lowering the drinking age, eighteen to twenty year olds can openly drink in secured environments, and develop safe drinking practices.

There is much evidence provided to support that the current legal drinking age is beneficial to the development of young adults. “Alcohol consumption can interfere with development of the young adult brain’s frontal lobes, essential for functions such as emotional regulation, planning, and organization. When alcohol consumption interferes with this early adult brain development, the potential for chronic problems such as greater vulnerability to addiction, dangerous risk-taking behavior, reduced decision-making ability, memory loss, depression, violence, and suicide is greater”, (Should the Drinking Age Be Lowered from 21 to a Younger Age?, 2019). Lowering the federal drinking age could put teens at risk of serious health problems that will affect them for years to come. At age twenty one, the brain becomes more developed, making young adults less susceptible to later face the medical consequences of underage drinking.

Decreasing the drinking age back to eighteen can also potentially negatively affect high school students in the U.S.. “Lowering the minimum drinking age from 21 to 18 could increase the high school dropout rate, a new study suggests. The presence of legal-aged peers in a high school setting increases access to alcohol for younger students, researchers report in the *Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs*. The researchers examined dropout rates in the years before the minimum drinking age was raised to 21 by the National Minimum Drinking Age Act of 1984. They found 17-year-olds were affected by their 18-year-old peers, *Time* reports”, (Partnership to End Addiction, 2015). Many teens turn eighteen when they are still in high school, and lowering the drinking age would give high schoolers easier access to alcohol, as they could easily get it from friends and other peers. This would cause an increase in partying, falling behind in school, and high schoolers making the choice to drop out instead of continuing their education.

The high drinking age in the United States, compared to many other countries around the world, has been debated for decades. Many researchers say that the long wait for a drink has opened the doors to binge drinking, and alcohol to be consumed heavily in unsafe environments. Those who take the chance at trying to purchase alcohol underage with a fake id put themselves at risk to face fines and convictions, along with also putting businesses at risk. Raising the drinking age to twenty one however, has allowed to delay the prevention of serious chronic problems to form in young adults, such as depression and addiction, as the frontal lobes in the brain are more developed. The higher drinking age in the United States has also decreased the high school dropout rate, as high schoolers have harder access to alcohol, and are less distracted by going out and partying. There are various strong arguments formed on both ends on why the drinking age in the U.S. should be lowered, or stay at twenty one years old.