



Put In Your 2¢ Worth...

About 2¢ a drink yields \$44 million annually to reduce the impact of alcohol problems in Missouri.

Question:

Why don't we simply adopt Europeans' more relaxed attitude toward alcohol use by kids and lower the legal drinking age to 18, 17 or even 16?

Answer:

Trans-cultural comparisons are difficult, complicated and often misleading. Countries which have a lower legal drinking age often have more severe restrictions in related areas (e.g. education, public safety) and are "intolerant" in many ways Americans would find quite unacceptable. Some European countries report very serious alcohol-related problems among their youth. With few exceptions, U.S. researchers and public health authorities oppose a reduction in the minimum legal alcohol purchasing age.

MISSOURI ALCOHOL IMPACT FACT #60

- Very few "experts" in the field suggest that the U.S. would be better off with a lower minimum age. They argue that the majority are drinking anyway, "forcing" them to flout the law, undermining legal authority and credibility. Some argue that the current "21" might actually encourage abusive drinking by making it a "rite of passage" to adulthood and by forcing it to occur in uncontrolled and risky environments.
- The most comprehensive and through examination of the underage drinking issue, conducted by the National Research Council, Institute of Medicine of the National Academy of Science, finds that "the facts do not support this [the above] argument. Research clearly shows that most European countries not only have higher levels of consumption (an expected consequence of the lower drinking age, but also higher levels of problematic drinking among youth... In short, there is no evidence that the lower drinking ages in Europe are protective."*
- "Finally, and most importantly,..... raising the minimum drinking age in the United States significantly decreased self-reported drinking, fatal traffic crashes, alcohol-related crashes, and arrests for DUI among young people. The 21-year old minimum drinking age may also moderate drinking beyond adolescence."*
- Recent research on adolescent brain research, risk of dependency on alcohol, subsequent use of other drugs, life expectancy, death rates for the 15-24 age group, and lack of basic knowledge about the physiological effects of alcohol are additional arguments for retaining "21."

* *Reducing Underage Drinking: A Collective Responsibility.* Washington, DC: The National Academies Press, 2004. See especially page 158-166. For more detailed international perspectives, see Babor et al, *Alcohol: No Ordinary Commodity: Research and Public Policy.* Oxford University Press, 2003.

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