

Nicole Boothe

Mrs. Culpepper

February 6, 2012

The Legal Drinking Age Is Working

Candy Lightner, the founder of Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD), lost her daughter Cari when she was struck by a drunk driver in 1980. The driver had repeat offenses for drinking and driving, yet had still chosen to drive intoxicated. MADD's goal is to put an end to drunk driving. Four years after Cari's death, the National Minimum Drinking Age Act was passed in 1984 making it illegal for anyone under the age of twenty-one to drink alcohol. Since this law passed, many people, especially those between the ages of eighteen to twenty-one, believe the minimum drinking age should be lower back down to eighteen years old. Those within the age range of eighteen to twenty may be only thinking about their personal wants and not about what is best for the people as a whole. The National Minimum Drinking Age Act has helped young people rid feelings of depression or suicide, prevent alcohol-related health problems, and reduce the number of crashes due to drinking and driving.

When teenagers begin drinking, various issues start to take place. At the onset of puberty, many children are meeting powerful physical and emotional changes. Adding alcohol to the already challenging changes going on in a child's life can only lead to more problems. Research is continually showing the public that the younger children are when they begin drinking, the greater the risk is that they will harm themselves and those around them. About 300 young people die from suicide as a result of underage

drinking each year. Young people who started drinking “before the age of 15 were four times more likely to [develop] alcohol dependence” when compared to those who waited until the age of twenty-one or older to drink (“Underage Drinking” 1). This risk of developing alcohol dependence or alcoholism can be reduced by fourteen percent for every year the person drinking delays alcohol use (“Dangers”).

Not only does waiting until the age of twenty-one reduce the chance of developing alcohol dependence, but it also reduces the risk of other major health problems. Drinking alcohol during puberty will “upset the critical hormonal balance necessary for normal development of organs, muscles, and bones” (“Underage Drinking” 4). A specific problem for the liver is that elevated levels of enzymes that register organ damage have been discovered. The most important organ of the body, the brain, is being negatively affected because in young adults the brain is not yet fully developed (“Underage Drinking” 4). Although those who are under the age of seventeen “are able to consume much larger amounts of alcohol than adults” before feeling the side effects, it is affecting them in a much more harmful way (“Underage Drinking” 2). Research has been conducted and scientists agree that “the human brain continues to develop into a person’s early 20’s” (“Dangers”). Alcohol exposure to the still developing brain of adolescents creates negative, long-lasting effects on a person’s intellectual efficiency. The ability to make rational decisions, for example, is very important in one’s life yet is being hindered by alcohol exposure (“Underage Drinking” 2).

Drinking and driving is a major problem in the United States that is a direct result of a person’s inability to make rational decisions while intoxicated. Young drinkers are prone to “alcohol-induced impairment of their driving skills,” and as a result,

approximately 1,900 people under the age of twenty-one die from alcohol related car wrecks every year (Dangers). Although young people are not the only offenders of drinking and driving, those between the ages of sixteen to twenty have double the chance of being involved in an alcohol-induced fatality than those over the legal drinking age. Males between the ages of sixteen to twenty have the greatest chance of being involved in a fatal crash no matter what their BAC, blood alcohol concentration, measures. Although this demographic had the greatest chance of being involved in a fatal crash, the numbers were particularly high in the BAC range of 0.15 or higher. This range was 15,000 times more likely to result in a fatal crash (Hingson and Winter).

Since the drinking age was raised to twenty-one in the National Minimum Drinking Age Act, research shows that alcohol-related crashes among drivers have been reduced by more than half since 1982. The estimated prevented alcohol related driving deaths is about 22,000, which is 900 a year ("21" 1). In addition to preventing these deaths, a separate study found that people who grew up with the higher drinking age, compared with those who grew up with the lowered drinking age, drank less as teenagers and also once they turned twenty-one. This reduces the risk of alcoholism, depression, and suicides that result from alcohol use. The National Minimum Drinking Age Act has improved the lives of Americans and lowering the drinking age from where it is now would be a tremendous mistake.

Works Cited:

"21 Is the Legal Drinking Age." We Don't Serve Teens Home Page. Federal Trade Commission. Web. 28 January 2012.

"Dangers of Teen Drinking." We Don't Serve Teens Home Page. Federal Trade Commission. Web. 28 January 2012.

Hingson, Ralph, and Michael Winter. "Bac and Fatal Crash Involvement." Alcohol Research & Health 27.1 (2003): 66-67. Academic Search Complete. Web. 23 January 2012.

"Underage Drinking." U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Center for Substance Abuse Prevention. 67(2006): 1-7. Web. 26 January 2012.