

July 1, 2009

EDITORIAL

Binge Drinking on Campus

College presidents who have been blaming drinking-age laws for drunkenness at their schools had better look at their own policies. While the amount of binge drinking — downing five or more drinks in a row — remains high at colleges, it has dropped sharply among people of the same age who do not attend college.

Last year, more than 100 college presidents and chancellors called for reconsidering the legal drinking age, which was raised to 21 by all states during the 1980s.

Their reasoning seemed to be that by making it illegal for most college-age students to drink, the laws had inadvertently made it more likely that students would engage in clandestine — and difficult to supervise — binge drinking. There was some talk that the minimum age for drinking should be reduced back to 18.

Now comes new evidence that the age-21 requirement has been generally effective in reducing binge drinking — except among college students. That was the conclusion of a study by researchers at the Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis, published in *The Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*.

The study, based on information collected over a 27-year period by the National Survey on Drug Use and Health, found that binge drinking by men between 18 and 20 years old who did not attend college dropped by more than 30 percent over that period but remained statistically unchanged among similar-aged men on campus. There was no difference between college and noncollege women in the 18- to 20-year age group but a big upsurge in binge drinking by older college women.

Just why the college crowd continues to drink so heavily is not clear. Students are less likely to live with parents or spouses who can ride herd on their drinking. Most have older friends who can legally buy alcohol. Fraternities and sororities may also foster irresponsible drinking. Whatever the causes, the solutions almost certainly lie mostly within the colleges — perhaps with better counseling or stronger bans on under-age drinking — not by lowering the legal drinking age.

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