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New research suggests: Drinking Age of 21 Saves 1,200 Women a Year

Tuesday, 29 November 2011 18:41

The 1984 federal act established 21 as the minimum legal drinking age. Since then, several studies have seemingly validated this move by linking the previous drinking age of 18 to higher rates of suicides, homicides, DUI accidents, and alcohol- and drug-use disorders during the years when those restrictions were in effect. It's unclear, however, if these negative consequences endure.

The study, *"The Legacy of Minimum Legal Drinking Age Law Changes: Long-Term Effects on Suicide and Homicide Deaths Among Women,"* and published in the journal *Alcoholism: Clinical & Experimental Research*, analyzed data on living populations from the U.S. Census and American Community Survey as well as records from the U.S. Multiple Cause of Death files, 1990-2004. The combined files contained information on more than 200,000 suicides and 130,000 homicides for people who turned 18 between 1967 and 1989, the years that legal drinking ages were in flux.

While the study seemed to indicate that there is no association between minimum drinking age and homicide or suicide, it did show that women exposed to laws that enable drinking as early as 18 years of age are at elevated risk for both suicide and homicide. The authors estimate that the current national drinking age of 21 may be preventing around 600 suicides and 600 homicides a year.

The study's conclusion: Higher minimum drinking ages may lower rates of suicides and homicides among women later in life.

This study bolsters the adoption of the legal drinking age of 21 and also concludes that the law may also save lives and reduce problems during adulthood. It shows the importance of maintaining these laws, and developing other interventions aimed toward reducing drinking among young people.

SOURCE: The Atlantic/life/archive/2011/11/