

Canadian drinking-age laws have significant effect on deaths among young males

March 18 2014



A recent study authored by Dr. Russell Callaghan demonstrates the significant effect drinking age laws can have on youth mortality rates. The findings were published in the international journal *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*. Credit: University of Northern British Columbia

A recent study by a University of Northern British Columbia-based scientist associated with the UBC Faculty of Medicine and UNBC's Northern Medical Program demonstrates that Canada's drinking-age laws have a significant effect on youth mortality.

The study was published yesterday in the international journal *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*. In it, Dr. Russell Callaghan writes that when compared to Canadian males slightly younger than the minimum legal drinking age, young men who are just older than the drinking age have significant and abrupt increases in mortality, especially from injuries and [motor vehicle accidents](#).

"This evidence demonstrates that drinking-age legislation has a significant effect on reducing mortality among youth, especially young males," says Dr. Callaghan.

Currently, the minimum legal drinking age is 18 years of age in Alberta, Manitoba, and Québec, and 19 years in the rest of the country. Using national Canadian [death](#) data from 1980 to 2009, researchers examined the causes of deaths of individuals who died between 16 and 22 years of age. They found that immediately following the minimum [legal drinking age](#), male deaths due to injuries rose sharply by 10 to 16 per cent, and male deaths due to motor vehicle accidents increased suddenly by 13 to 15 per cent.

Increases in mortality appeared immediately following the legislated drinking age for 18-year-old females, but these jumps were relatively small.

According to the research, increasing the drinking age to 19 years of age in Alberta, Manitoba, and Québec would prevent seven deaths of 18-year-old men each year. Raising the [drinking age](#) to 21 years across the country would prevent 32 annual deaths of male youth 18 to 20 [years](#) of age.

"Many provinces, including British Columbia, are undertaking alcohol-policy reforms," adds Dr. Callaghan. "Our research shows that there are substantial social harms associated with youth drinking. These adverse

consequences need to be carefully considered when we develop new provincial alcohol policies. I hope these results will help inform the public and policy makers in Canada about the serious costs associated with hazardous drinking among young people."

Provided by University of Northern British Columbia

Citation: Canadian drinking-age laws have significant effect on deaths among young males (2014, March 18) retrieved 6 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2014-03-canadian-drinking-age-laws-significant-effect.html>

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