

# Youth crimes spike immediately after drinking age

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A new study from the Northern Medical Program at the University of Northern British Columbia has shown that minimum legal drinking age (MLDA) legislation in Canada can have a major effect on crimes committed by young adults. Young people just older than the legal age had significant increases in commission of all crimes, including violent crimes and nuisance crimes, compared to those immediately under the restriction.

In the study, published August 30 in the international journal *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*, Dr. Russ Callaghan and his research team looked at national Canadian police-reported crime statistics between 2009-2013. They found that release from drinking-age restrictions was associated with increases in perpetration of any crime in Canada by 7.6% among males and by 10.4% among females.

In addition, the perpetration of violent crimes (a category including physical or sexual assault, as well as robbery) increased by 7.4% for males and 14.9% for females. Increases were also observed in nuisance crimes, such as disorderly conduct and property crimes, among both males and females.

"As soon as youth are given legal access to alcohol, there are immediate effects on their involvement in police-reported criminal behaviours," says Dr. Callaghan, the study's lead author and an associate professor in the Northern Medical Program. "The number of police-reported criminal incidents involving both male and females who have just reached the

legal drinking age rises dramatically, a pattern which illustrates the impact that alcohol-related legislation can have on crime including violent crimes and overall public health."

At present time, the minimum legal drinking age is 18 years of age in Alberta, Manitoba, and Québec, and 19 years in the rest of Canada. Recently, the Canadian Public Health Association and a national expert-panel working group not only recommended that the legal drinking age be raised to at least 19 years, but also identified 21 years as the ideal. The current findings provide support for the position that raising the [drinking age](#) would likely reduce [crimes](#) in the newly alcohol-restricted age groups.

"Our research provides current information for both Canadian and international policymakers to draw on when considering alcohol policy reform and the effectiveness of MLDA legislation," says Dr. Callaghan. "Drinking-age laws can have major consequences extending to public safety. They are an important part of contemporary alcohol-control policies designed to limit alcohol-related harms among [young people](#), including severe harms which may result from the perpetration of [violent crimes](#)."

Dr. Callaghan's research is part of a larger series of studies he is pursuing over the next several years that investigate the impact of alcohol-related legislation on a variety of harms, including young people's binge drinking, alcohol-related injuries requiring hospital-based treatment, and patterns of criminal victimization among youth.

**More information:** Do drinking-age laws have an impact on crime? Evidence from Canada, 2009–2013, DOI: [dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.drugalcdep.2016.07.023](https://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.drugalcdep.2016.07.023) , [www.drugandalcoholdependence.c ... -8716\(16\)30220-4/pdf](http://www.drugandalcoholdependence.com/article/S0926-6410(16)30220-4/pdf)

Provided by University of Northern British Columbia

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