

Are You MADD?

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## Are you MADD?

Mothers Against Drunk Driving, also known as MADD, has been a powerful non-profit organization paving the way to change in the United States through advocating and educating against drunk driving. Established in 1979, the aim of MADD was to raise awareness and help prevent drunk driving and the loss associated with it. More than 35 years later, MADD continues to progress and exert social influence in their fight to combat drunk driving. Through education of drunk driving and penalization where needed, MADD as well as individual society members can stand up and help save lives through creating awareness and acting against drunk driving.

### **Why MADD?**

MADD was established in 1979 by Beckie Brown, who after experiencing the loss of her 18 year old son due to a drunk driving accident, decided to take a stand against the harmful and potentially fatal behaviors of drunk driving. Brown's mission through the establishment of MADD was and continues to be to advocate as a voice of logic in order to educate against drunk driving with the hope of reducing drunk driving related accidents and deaths. Through her tireless representation, she managed to influence law and arouse social support and interest.

### **The Social Dilemma**

Drunk driving in the late 60s was a concept unrevealed. Accidents involving alcohol were not thought of as caused by alcohol; but rather as operator error and mere coincidence of the two incidents having taken place together (Loewit-Phillips & Goldbas, 2013). The outcry of Brown in 1979 as a result of her lost son awakened a numb society to the real issues and dangers lurking behind drunk driving. She helped to identify the high numbers of death and accidents involved in drunk driving, and helped make the information more available to the public. Through this

social realization, she was able to bring attention to the matter to not only the public, but to local, state, and federal law as well.

Through the efforts of MADD, awareness was increased dramatically and legislative action was taken to help prevent drunk driving. In the late 90s and early 2000s, a red “MADD” ribbon could be found on countless vehicles across the nation by individuals in support of the beliefs surrounding MADD’s organization. While lesser support can be visibly seen in recent times, the outcry of the public still remains as prosecution of drunken driving remains a high priority.

### **MADD Social Policies**

The organization of MADD has helped identify the major problems associated with drunk and drugged driving within the United States. Through pervasive effort, Mothers Against Drunk Driving has influenced social change and legislative action, as well as influencing individuals within society.

Perhaps the biggest credit that can be gifted to MADD’s organizational influence on social policies is the implementation of the legal drinking age law. In 1984, the Federal 21 Minimum Drinking Age Act was signed into effect as a result of countless amounts of effort from public, legislative, and MADD efforts. As time has progressed since implementation, several regulations have been put in place to help keep the law enforced. Countless public service announcements, televised ads, radio ads, and imagery have infiltrated public eyes, thereby keeping the seriousness of the issue a present thought of the public. Policies continue to develop in reaction to the seriousness of underage drinking, alcoholism, and other such related

issues that encompass alcohol. Through these efforts, policies are rigorously generated in order to keep up with the ever changing shift in citizen behavior.

The Federal 21 Minimum Drinking Age Act certainly cannot be overshadowed by the reduction in drunken driving related deaths and injuries, nor can it overshadow the amount of public awareness that has been created. It is in part through the tireless efforts of MADD that so much has been able to be accomplished in the movement towards a more sober driving state of public mind. Today, MADD continues to influence individual social action through pledges of sober driving, fundraising, and providing assistance to victims and families of drunk driving.

### **Problems of Implementation**

Some social unrest spurred as a result of the implementation of the law requiring individuals to be at least 21 to drink. With this unrest came the hesitance to enforce the legal drinking age of 21. A common argument heard to date is that if an individual is “old enough to die for their country, they should be able to drink.” The continued unrest associated with punishing drunk driving as a crime can be countered with the concept presented by Koshland (1989), who compares the hardness of law to “statistical mortality,” or in other words, the harm that is created on some now will serve as a betterment for all in the future.

In order to help enforce the new law of age restricted drinking, the threat of loss of government funds for highway construction was introduced. This introduction of state penalization resulted in stricter adherence from each state in relation to the minimum age law. Regardless of each state’s reasoning for enforcement, it has finally been nationally well-received that driving under excess of each state’s blood alcohol legal limit is a crime punishable by law.

## **Effects on Human Services**

The age requirement on alcohol consumption has posed its own challenges to human service delivery. With drunk driving being a heavily penalized crime, there are advantages and disadvantages for agencies. As a result of a higher crack down on drinking and driving, more people are being referred into agencies to help them overcome alcohol consumption problems; but by the same token, agencies who are experiencing a rising need to focus on alcohol treatment are faced with further funding deficits to provide the best possible services. It would seem that more focus is still need to provide policies for agencies who service this population of growing need.

## **If You Aren't, Be MADD**

Mothers Against Drunk Driving has been a powerful influence in the battle against drunk and drugged driving. Through their commitment to educate the public and provide services to those impacted, MADD has exerted a needed presence in the fight against intoxicated driving. With organizations such as MADD and human service agencies fighting to do their part in combating alcoholism and intoxicated driving, the only question remains is this: are you MADD yet?

## References

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