

Use of False Identification for the Purchase of Alcohol

A common strategy utilized by underage individuals seeking to purchase alcohol is the use of false identification. Responsible retailing practices require those who sell alcohol to verify the age of the consumer prior to completing a transaction to ensure that the individual is older than the minimum legal drinking age of 21. In an effort to circumvent age verification protocols, underage individuals use false identification (e.g., driver's license, passport, state-issued ID card) that has a date of birth that presents them as 21 years of age or older.

False identification can be produced in a number of different ways, including:

- An altered birth date on a valid piece of identification;
- A valid piece of identification that is sold or lent to an underage individual; or,
- A manufactured piece of identification.

While there is variance in state statutes, it is illegal to manufacture, possess, and use false identification to purchase alcohol. Furthermore, some states have enacted provisions that target individuals who lend valid identification to minors.

Research Highlights:

- Students possessing a fake ID have been found to be more likely than their peers to use alcohol (Durkin et al., 1996; Martinez et al., 2007).
- In a cross-sectional online survey of 1,098 underage students at a large Midwestern university, 21% of respondents reported possessing a fake ID. Of those who owned false identification, 93.5% reported having used it, and only 29.1% reported having been caught (Martinez and Sher, 2010).
- Arria et al. (2014) conducted a longitudinal study of 1,015 college students to examine whether false ID use increased the risk for alcohol use disorder. The researchers found that false IDs were used by almost two-thirds (66.1%) of the sample. They noted that false ID use may contribute to alcohol use disorder risk by facilitating more frequent drinking. As a result, students who use false IDs represent an important target population for alcohol prevention activities. The study further identified predictors of false ID use frequency which include earlier onset of alcohol consumption, greater levels of alcohol and drug involvement during high school, higher levels of sensation-seeking, Greek life involvement, and living off-campus.
- Another longitudinal study authored by Martinez et al. (2007) examined the relationship between false ID ownership to heavy drinking. A sample of 3,720 undergraduates were assessed during the summer prior to commencing college and each semester during their freshman and sophomore years. The study revealed that the ownership of false IDs increased over time (12.5% precollege to 32.2% at the end of their sophomore year). Ownership of a false ID also predicted concurrent and next-semester heavy drinking. Similarly to Arria et al. (2014), the researchers identified the acquisition and use of false IDs as a “significant public health problem” and recommend that punitive measures be applied to underage individuals who own and use false identification for the purpose of purchasing alcohol.

- In examining the effectiveness of false ID and social host laws, Fell et al. (2014) found that false ID supplier laws were associated with decreases in underage drinking and driving fatal crashes. False ID supplier laws make it illegal to produce false identification as well as transfer a valid or false identification to another person. Currently, 24 states have adopted this type of false identification law and the study estimates that 14 lives are saved annually as a result.

Prevalence:

All 50 states and the District of Columbia prohibit any individual under the age of 21 from using false identification for the purpose of obtaining alcohol. According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), 42 states authorize the suspension of a driver's license for youth who use a false ID to purchase alcohol.

Responsibility.org Position:

The Foundation for Advancing Alcohol Responsibility supports the application of penalties for underage persons who use, manufacture, and/or possess fraudulent identification for the purpose of procuring alcohol.

References:

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