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Role of Parents in Teenage Alcoholism

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Teenage alcohol abuse is the consumption of alcohol of any amount by youths below the age of 19. It is this gradual alcohol abuse that leads to dependency and addiction, which is the onset of alcoholism. The high prevalence of alcohol abuse among teenagers is a cause of concern and a reason to contemplate the role of the parent in teenage alcoholism.

The prevalence of alcohol abuse among teenagers in the United States justifies the research study on the role of parents in teenage alcoholism. The National Survey on Drug Use and Health was surveyed in 2016 and discovered that more than 7.3 million American adolescents were abusing alcohol. This represented 19 percent of all teenagers in America who engaged in the illegal consumption of alcohol.

GENETIC INFLUENCE

It is essential to notice that there is a genetic influence on the onset of alcoholism within adolescents. Specific genes are sometimes implicated in human hereditary traits. The genes interact with each other, and the impact of the environment brings about the alcoholism trait. These genes have a minor influence on the alcoholism trait, but cumulative variations and interactions of these genes have a tremendous impact. Genome-wide association studies reveal that genes that encode for the enzymes that are involved in the metabolism of alcohol have the most significant effect on the trait of alcoholism.

Alcohol dehydrogenase and aldehyde dehydrogenase are the enzymes that metabolize alcohol, and the variations of genes that encode these enzymes play a primary role in making alcoholism a hereditary trait. The variations of the alleles that code for these enzymes can predispose an individual to binge drinking or prevent the individual from drinking altogether.

Family studies and twin studies well demonstrate the influence of genetics on alcoholism. In their 2015 book,  *The Heritability of Alcohol Use Disorders: A Meta-Analysis of Twin and Adoption Studies*, Verlhust, Neale, and Kendler discovered that most families with alcoholics usually have more than one member who is addicted to alcohol. On the contrary to this observation, some families did not have any individual abusing alcohol despite the prevalent environmental exposure and consistent stress in the family. Such a variation in family trends can lead a researcher to conclude that alcoholism is hereditary to a given extent.

Twin studies well illustrate the influence of genetic alcoholism from the parent to the offspring. Twin studies conducted while comparing identical and fraternal twins can be used to explain the extent of the genetic influence. Identical twins are twins that develop from one zygote, which divides into two equal halves, developing into twins with the same characteristics, including sex. Fraternal twins are twins from different zygotes, and they could have many differences in genetic composition.

A study conducted by the University of Washington and the University of Queensland revealed significant differences in the prevalence of alcoholism in identical and fraternal twins. The study had 5,889 study participants consisting of male and female identical and fraternal twins from different societies. The study revealed that out of the total number of participants involved in the study, 32% of the males, regardless of the type of twins, would experience dependency on alcohol at a particular phase of their lives. On the other hand, 7% of all females involved in this study, regardless of the twin type, would also be addicted or dependent on alcohol at some point of time in their lives. These statistics show the general rate of alcohol abuse and dependency in the society. This study is also critical in setting a precedence for the twin studies.

Male identical twins have a 50% chance of becoming alcoholics if one of the twins starts drinking. In most cases, if one twin develops alcoholism, it is almost definite that the other twin will also depend on alcohol at some point with the availability of environmental influences such as stress or peer influence. In female identical twins, the chance for one twin to develop alcohol dependence later in life if the other starts abusing alcohol is 30%.

The same study also involved the male fraternal twins. They had a 33% chance of both becoming alcoholics, whereas in female fraternal twins, the chance was 16%. The high prevalence of alcohol dependence between identical twins being higher than those in fraternal twins indicates that genetic influence in alcoholism is higher than anticipated. It is, therefore, scientifically rational to conclude that if a parent is an alcoholic or was an alcoholic at some point in their life, there is a big chance that their children will start abusing alcohol if they are exposed to alcohol abuse in their environment. Genetics do not influence alcoholism entirely. Teenagers with a genetic propensity to alcohol start abusing it as soon as they are exposed to such a behavior.

PATENTS’ ATTITUDE TOWARDS ALCOHOL ABUSE

The behavior of a parent towards criticizing or supporting alcohol abuse of their children also plays a vital role in determining whether these children will choose to abuse alcohol or avoid it. This approval or criticism of alcohol abuse can be direct (e.g., the parents buy alcohol for the children at parties) or indirect (via the social environment - religion, etc.). In recent years, the prevalence of parents providing their teenage children with alcohol has gone up, increasing the rates of adolescent alcohol abuse substantially.

The influence of the parent can also be in the form of creating an environment where the child can have access to alcohol consumption or limited ideations towards the same. A good example is the influence of religion on the teenager. A parent who cultivates a religious foundation in the child provides an environment that alienates the child from environmental influences toward drug and alcohol abuse. Religion, in this sense, refers to beliefs and practices held by the teenager's family in question. A teenager who is part of a Christian congregation is very unlikely to abuse alcohol due to the values and principles that were cultivated from childhood by family.

PARENTS AND THEIR WORK

The aspect that parents are workaholics plays a vital role in teenage alcoholism. The busy lifestyle provides less time for the parents to give love to the teenagers. As a result, most of these teenagers spend most of their time with their peers rather than their families. This can lead to alcoholism or other form of unhealthy activities.

In addition, the superior accountability for the actions of the teenagers is delegated to the parents who have paradoxically substituted love and concern for money and material goods. Research indicates that most parents believe that granting their children their wishes gives them the right to be considered good parents. However, this means that their hard work to attain more wealth and effectively meet the needs of the children has been misjudged for concern and good parenting. The money offered to teenagers to cater to their needs without proper guidance is one that is mainly used to purchase alcohol, and regular consumption of it turns into alcoholism. Thus, the lack of overlook of the behavior of the teenagers by the parents and the lack of time to guide and express love to them can be viewed as a role that parents play in encouraging teenage alcoholism.

Additionally, many statistical researches state that most teenagers engage with TV programs that negatively influence their behaviors. The current music trends portray drug use and drunkenness as a “cool” factor. Without the proper guidance from the parents, teenagers expose themselves to the negative characters, ending up in alcoholism. It is a fact that media can scrap off the dignity of an individual and influence their behaviors. Whatever teenagers listen to and also watch has the power to alter their principles. Thus, it is the parents' role to understand how to protect their teenage children from the evils of society.

CONCLUSION

The parent of the teenager has a vital role to play in reducing the inclination of the adolescent towards alcohol and drug abuse. The influence of “the genetic make-up” of the parent in causing alcoholism in teenagers has been confirmed through a series of family and twin studies. Certain variations of the parents’ genes influence hereditary alcoholism in children. The parents’ behavior regarding children’s alcohol consumption also plays a crucial role in the development of teenage alcoholism.

Catering to all the needs of the child from the parent’s side will help reduce the risk of the child developing depression, which can probably be caused by alcohol abuse. The parent has a role to act as a model and a source of inspiration for the child. Communication between the parents and the children about social challenges such as alcoholism is essential in helping the child steer away from negative peer influence. Parents should always be keen to provide attention and love for their children and be conscious of the changes and needs of the child throughout their development.

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