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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 on the role of the parent in teenage alcoholism.

The prevalence of alcohol abuse among teenagers in the United States provides a justification for the research study on the role of parents in teenage alcoholism. The National Survey on Drug Use and Health conducted a survey 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 important to notice that there is a genetic influence on the onset of alcoholism within the adolescents. Certain genes are sometimes implicated in the hereditary traits in humans. The genes interact with each other, and the influence of the environment brings about the alcoholism trait. These genes have a small influence on the alcoholism trait but cumulative variations and interactions of these genes have a tremendous impact. Genome-wide association studies reveal

that genes which encode for the enzymes that are involved in the metabolism of alcohol have the largest effect on the trait of alcoholism.

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

The influence of genetics on alcoholism is well demonstrated by family studies and twin studies. In their 2015 book, *The Heritability of Alcohol Use Disorders: A Meta-Analysis of Twin and Adoption Studies*, Verhulst, 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.

The influence of the genetic alcoholism from the parent to the offspring is well illustrated by twin studies. Twin studies conducted while making comparisons between 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 who share the same characteristics including sex. Fraternal twins are the twins from different zygotes, and they could have many differences in the 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 the alcohol at a certain 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 50% chance of becoming alcoholics if one of the twins starts drinking. In most cases, if one twin becomes an alcoholic, it is almost definite that the other twin will also depend on alcohol at some point with the availability of environmental influence 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 the 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 of his/her life, there is a big chance that his/her children will start abusing alcohol if they are exposed to an alcohol abuse in their environment. Genetics do not have an influence on alcoholism entirely. Teenagers with the 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 an important role in determining whether these children will choose abusing alcohol or avoiding 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 teenage alcohol abuse substantially.

The influence of the parent can also be in the form of creating an environment where the child is able to 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 towards drug and alcohol abuse. Religion, in this sense, refers to beliefs and practices that are held by the family of the teenager 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 the childhood by family.

PARENTS AND THEIR WORK

The aspect that parents are workaholics plays an important 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 end up spending a majority of their time with the other 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 by granting the children their wishes, they have

a right to be considered as 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 the teenagers to cater for their needs without proper guidance is the pence that is mostly used to purchase alcohol, and the regular consumption of it turns into alcoholism. Thus, the lack of oversight on 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 a majority of teenagers tend to engage themselves with the TV programs that have a bad influence on their behaviors. The current music trends portray drug use and drunkenness as a “cool” factor, and without the proper guidance from the parents, teenagers expose themselves to the negative characters ending up in alcoholism. It is the fact that media has the capability to 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 role of parents to understand what way they can protect their teenage children from the evils of society.

CONCLUSION

The parent of the teenager has a key 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. There are certain variations of the parents’ genes that influence the hereditary alcoholism within children. The parents’ behavior regarding children’s alcohol consumption also plays a crucial role in the development of teenage alcoholism.

Catering for all the needs of the child from the parents' side will help reducing the risk of the child to develop depression that can probably cause 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 very important in helping the child steer away from negative peer influence. Parent should always be keen to provide attention and love for their children to be conscious of the changes and needs of the child throughout their development.

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