



Student's name

Professor's name

Course

Alcohol Consumption by Youth in the US

Alcohol consumption by youth is one of the most dolorous social problems in the US. It would not be fair to state that there is a lack of research in this area, but not all aspects of underage drinking have been studied thoroughly yet. Some researchers argue that genetic predisposition is to blame, while others do not concur and claim that underage alcoholism is simply a whim of juveniles. In any event, consequences of the prolonged alcohol consumption (malfunction of the cardiovascular system, disruption of metabolism etc.) affect juveniles faster than adults. Even with all preventive measures and laws that are in place to stop underage alcohol consumption, it is still a problem that is plaguing the youth of America. The problem is on the rise because of improper education, genetic predispositions, peer pressure, catchy advertising, and diffusion of information about alcohol on TV. Ultimately, successful and opportune prevention hinges on three factors – upbringing, education, and anti-alcohol legislation.

Medical practice provides a plethora of examples of infants being poisoned by alcohol. Torr argues that alcohol poisoning in little babies “happens if their mother or wet-nurse drink wine or beer in order to stimulate the production of breast milk” (83). Such a slipshod behavior of parents has been shown to cause seizures, or even worse, epileptic fits in babies. According to Currie-McGhee, there was a case when parents of a four-month-old baby girl had taken legal action against a baby-sitter accused of regaling the infant with wine so that it would be fast asleep (126). Some parents, deceived by the idea that alcohol enhances appetite, give small portions of certain alcoholic beverages to their children. This



practice is reputed to cure anemia, improve sleeping, and alleviate the teething process. Some parents tend to think that using alcohol in small doses in early childhood prevents alcohol abuse by these individuals at a mature age. Ignorance, delusions, and prejudices of this kind oftentimes court disaster for little babies, up to the lethal outcome.

It is important to remember that children and juveniles develop alcoholism very quickly. It takes an adult from five to ten years to transmogrify from a habitual intemperate into an alcoholic, while the period necessary for a juvenile to develop chronic alcoholism is four times less (Currie-McGhee 156). The faster alcoholism develops, the more irreversible its consequences are. Alcohol is known to weaken, handicap and hinder development of all organs and systems in the human body. The younger the organism is, the more detrimental effect alcohol has on it. This contributes to the high mortality of juveniles and youths who suffer from alcoholism.

Healthy children do not usually have an inclination for alcohol. On the contrary, taste and reek of alcoholic beverages make them sick. According to Piehl, "It is the effect of alcohol, and not its taste, that attracts teenagers" (47). The vast majority of teenagers, who are being introduced to alcohol, experience the surge of energy, burst of courage, false strength and warmth, as well as exceptional readiness for any sort of enterprise and innumerable pleasant ideas in their brains. A slight degree of inebriety does not make children lose their self-control. Teenagers understand that if they drink unbeknownst to parents, the latter may not be suspicious, and consequently, will not scold them for minor behavioral changes. They develop a conviction that consumption of alcohol is an absolutely normal and natural phenomenon in life. A physically immature organism needs more and more liquor, and formation of alcoholic dependence takes place. This entails tragic consequences for a person who has been introduced to alcohol very early and for the society in general.



Sociological research bears out the claims that alcohol environment, which consists mainly of the closest relatives who drink, is the first factor that encourages underage drinking (Torr 95). Untoward influence of senior brothers and sisters may be negative and crucial for teenagers, even if parents do not drink. Most often, chronologically gifted representatives of families that drink have a low level of education. Consumption of alcohol in such families is not considered to be an evil practice, and parents usually do not worry about exposing their children to intoxicating liquors. Meantime, children growing up in permissive families resort to drinking outside of family on average 9-10 times more frequent as compared to the teens whose parents strictly prohibit them from drinking alcoholic beverages (Piehl 59). Even those children who are brought up in teetotal families, but whose biological parents suffer from alcoholism, follow the suit of their biological parents four times more often than their peers do (Torr 123).

An enhanced pretension to maturity is another important reason behind alcohol consumption by youth. Juveniles regard alcohol consumption as a symbol of independence, virility, and as a means of self-assertiveness. Ignorance and lack of information about detrimental effects of alcohol abuse only contribute to such an outrageous behavior. Deceptive pleasure that juveniles derive from small portions of alcohol inculcates on them an erroneous assumption of alcohol's wholesome impact. Popularization of alcohol consumption in movies and TV programs further exacerbates the situation. American sociologists tend to think that examples set by drunken movie stars are the most effective means of grafting habitual intemperance onto those children who spend nearly five hours a day watching TV. According to Windle, "the most popular TV programs broadcasted between 8 pm and 11 pm include 21.06 instances of alcohol consumption" (163). To boot, positive characters hoist a couple of drinks five times more often than negative characters (Windle 163).



Peer pressure is another important reason that explains alcohol consumption by youth. School-age children from dysfunctional and underprivileged families (one-parent families) experience a shortage of communicative skills and sociability. Lack of spiritual closeness with parents and communication in general results in children looking for alternative companies in the street. As a rule, alcohol is a compulsory element of having fun in such companies (Piehl 88). Juveniles who drink in these heterogeneous companies are imbued with self-esteem and have all chances to gain respect of their mates, but cannot realize themselves in school and home. Participation in an “alcohol company” spearheaded by an instigator with a criminal record is fraught with serious consequences, save for alcoholism. Initiation into bad company often stipulates that a novice should undergo a series of tests – acts of hooliganism and other criminal offences. The ensuing conflicts increase the number of dropouts. Currie-McGhee argues, “Emerging adults change jobs without regret, as they tend to regard them as a means of earning money to purchase liquor” (129).

Children with teetotal directives and aspirations associate this period of life with a maximum spiritual growth, studying, and professional predilections. On the other hand, kids that drink regard these forms of activity as incongruous with their constant and insurmountable desire to hoist a couple of beers. Such important functions of an organism as thinking, attention, memory, and metabolism deteriorate because organism cannot dispense with alcohol anymore. Juveniles cannot cope with the problem singlehandedly and must undergo treatment.

Another reason of juveniles’ propensity to drink alcoholic beverages has been observed in recent years. It is popular with children whose parents trouble excessively about their children’s well-being. Attempts to fend an offspring off from the inevitable troubles and responsibilities are conducive to the development of personality traits like irresponsibility, dependency, lack of will and competence in everyday life (Merino 71). Judging their outward



show, one would find them happy, easy-going, docile, quiet, and submissive. They have a “conciliatory” kind of character without a pronounced flamboyant individuality. According to Merino, “Juveniles’ unwillingness to overcome hardships induces them to search for easier ways of solving problems” (56). Alcohol consumption for young people of this caliber is the most tantalizing and available (due to the opulence of parents), though illusory, way out of the problems. They are “produce of the milieu”. Consorting with a good company may result in them becoming honest people, diligent students, and assiduous employees.

According to Windle, “Alcohol consumption by juveniles, irrespective of the amount, is considered pathology as it always leads to alcohol poisoning” (135). Underage drinking is especially dangerous because juveniles lack a period of moderate consumption. Any acceptable dose of alcohol is excessive for teenagers because the mere fact of its consumption should be regarded as an abuse. Fortunately, not all juveniles are doomed to live according to the aforementioned scenario. The overwhelming majority of children in the US receive secondary education and many graduate from the tertiary education institutions.

Unfortunately, reasons and mechanisms of chronic alcoholism development still baffle scientific interests. On the other hand, it is a matter of conventional wisdom that alcoholism is a disease characterized by the human organism acquiring tolerance to ethanol. Juveniles constitute the most susceptible to the social vices group. Catchy advertisements on television, save for other as dangerous factors, brainwash their consciousness and goad adolescents to have a couple of drinks. Juveniles fall down before the juggernaut of alcohol omnipotence. American society needs to launch a large-scale campaign against the ubiquity of alcohol in daily life of juveniles as well as institutionalize a body aimed at increasing sobriety of juveniles.



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