Alcoholism Essay, Research Paper

I am sitting at home playing Nintendo with my roommate, jake, when I hear a

knock at the door. I wonder who in the world would be coming over this late at

night, because it’s after midnight. As I open the door, the tired, bloodshot

eyes of my upstairs neighbor, Steve, stare at me. ?Hi Sam,? Steve says. As

he attempts to enter my apartment, he stumbles on the slight rise where the

weather strip runs under the door. As he trips, his forehead smashes onto the

edge of the coffee table leaving a deep and bloody gash. I run in the bathroom

and grab a towel while Jake tries to help Steve. It doesn’t take us long to

realize that Steve is going to need stitches and is in no condition to drive. He

smells strongly of alcohol. We place a make-shift bandage on his cut and throw

him in Jake’s Chevy truck. On the way to the hospital, Steve starts complaining

about being really cold. He is talking incoherently and half crying. I ask Steve

what he has been doing, and he just hangs his head down mumbling about drinking.

Steve isn’t a social drinker. He drinks alone. He explains that he has been

drinking by himself all night long. Steve is not a young college kid

experimenting with alcohol. Steve is over thirty years old. Steve drinks nearly

every night. Steve is an alcoholic. Alcoholism is a disease that affects many

people in the United States today. It not only affects the alcoholic, but also

their family, friends, co-workers, and eventually total strangers. The symptoms

are many, as are the causes and the effects. Alcoholism is defined as a pattern

of drinking in which harmful consequences result for the drinker, yet, they

continue to drink. There are two types of drinkers. The first type, the casual

or social drinker, drinks because they want to. They drink Dodd 2 with a friend

or with a group for pleasure and only on occasion. The other type, the

compulsive drinker, drinks because they have to, despite the adverse effects

that drinking has on their lives. The symptoms of alcoholism vary from person to

person, but the most common symptoms seen are changes in emotional state or

stability, behavior, and personality. "Alcoholics may become angry and

argumentative, quiet and withdrawn or depressed. They may also feel more

anxious, sad, tense, and confused. They then seek relief by drinking more"

(Gitlow 175). "Because time and amount of drinking are uncontrollable, the

alcoholic is likely to engage in such behaviors as [1] breaking family

commitments, both major and minor; [2] spending more money than planned; [3]

drinking while intoxicated and getting arrested; [4] making inappropriate

remarks to friends, family, and co-workers; [5] arguing, fighting and other

anti-social actions. The alcoholic would probably never do such things, nor

approve of them in others unless he was drinking" (Johnson 203). The cause

of alcoholism is a combination of biological, psychological, and cultural

factors that may contribute to the development of alcoholism in an individual.

Alcoholism seems to run in families. "Although there is no conclusive

indication of how the alcoholism of families members is associated, studies show

that 50 to 80 percent of all alcoholics have had a close alcoholic

relative" (Caplan 266). Some researchers have suggested that in several

cases, alcoholics have an inherited, predisposition to alcohol addiction.

Studies of animals and human twins have lent support to this theory. Alcoholism

can also be related to emotional instabilities. For example, alcoholism is often

associated with a family history of manic-depressive illness. Dodd 3

Additionally, like many other drug abusers, alcoholics often drink hoping to

"drown’ anxious or depressed feelings. Some alcoholics drink to reduce

strong inhibitions or guilt about expressing negative feelings. Social and

cultural factors play roles in to establishing drinking patterns and the

development of alcoholism. In some cultures, there is conflict between

abstaining and accepting the use of alcohol as a way to change moods or to be

social, thus making it difficult for some people to develop stable attitudes

about and moderate patterns of drinking. Society tends to aid in the development

of alcoholism by making alcohol seem glamorous, showing that by drinking, you

will become more popular, more glamorous and more worthy of respects from

others. The physical effects of alcoholism are some what gruesome. Excessive in

take and prolonged use of alcohol can cause serious disturbances in body

chemistry. "Many alcoholics exhibit swollen and tender livers. The

prolonged use of large amounts of alcoholism without adequate diet may cause

serious liver damage, such as cirrhosis of the liver" (McCarthy 505).

Alcoholism also causes loss of muscular control. The condition, delirium

tremens, known primarily to heavy drinkers, causes hallucinations along with

loss of control of muscular functioning. When this condition develops and the

alcoholic slows their drinking, withdrawal syndrome can and often does occur.

This may include agitation, tremors, seizures, and hallucinations. Alcoholism

also causes damage to the brain. Alcoholics may suffer from lack of

concentration. The alcoholic may also experience "blackouts,"

occasional onsets of memory lapses, and possibly complete memory loss. They may

also suffer from more serious forms of brain damage. The social effects of

alcoholism can be as devastating as the physical effects. Dodd 4 Children of

alcoholics may be affected by the parents alcoholism in several different ways.

Having a problem- drinker parent often increases the risk of becoming a problem

drinker oneself. This may happen for reasons such as identification with or

imitation of the alcoholic parent. It may also happen because of the social and

family conditions that are thought to be associated with the development of

alcoholism. These include family conflict, job insecurity, divorce, and social

stigma. Alcoholism is an outrageous public health problem. "The Institute

of Medicine of the National Academy of Sciences estimates that alcoholism and

alcohol abuse in the United States cost society from $40 to $60 billion

annually, due to the lost production, health and medical care, motor vehicle

accidents, violent crime, and social programs that respond to alcohol problems.

One half of all traffic fatalities and one-third of all traffic injuries are

related to to the abuse of alcohol" (Caplan 266). Accidents and suicides

that are associated with alcohol problems are especially prominent in the teen

years. It is estimated that over 3 million teens between the ages of 14 and 17

in the United States today are problem drinkers. Alcoholism is a serious problem

in today’s society. It is extremely important that the public, including the

large groups of users and abusers of alcohol, gain as much knowledge as possible

about the symptoms and effects of alcoholism if we ever want to see the

reduction of statics involving fatalities, injuries, diseases caused from the

use and abuse of alcohol. Education and realization of the effects alcoholism

can have on the different aspects of a person’s life are the best ways that we

can help control the number of alcoholics in the United States.

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