



A STUDY ON THE CAUSES OF ALCOHOLISM

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Abstract

Alcoholism, now clinically termed Alcohol Use Disorder (AUD), is a complex and debilitating condition characterized by the compulsive seeking and use of alcohol despite its negative consequences. It is not simply a matter of willpower or moral failing, but rather a multifaceted issue arising from a confluence of biological, psychological, and social factors that are intricately intertwined. Understanding these underlying causes is crucial for effective prevention, intervention, and treatment strategies. One of the most significant contributing factors to alcoholism is genetics. Research consistently demonstrates a strong heritable component to AUD. Individuals with a family history of alcoholism are at a significantly higher risk of developing the disorder themselves. While no single "alcoholism gene" has been identified, studies suggest that multiple genes influence various aspects of alcohol metabolism, the brain's reward system, and personality traits that may increase vulnerability. For instance, variations in genes affecting how the body processes alcohol can lead to different levels of tolerance and physiological responses, potentially influencing drinking patterns and the likelihood of dependence. However, genetics alone do not dictate destiny. Psychological factors play a crucial role in the development and maintenance of alcoholism. Individuals struggling with underlying mental health conditions such as depression, anxiety disorders, bipolar disorder, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) are at an increased risk of using alcohol as a form of self-medication.

Keywords:

Alcoholism, Stress, Disorder, Psychological

Introduction

Alcoholics seem to have a number of cultural factors in common, one of which being their religious beliefs. The conservative Protestants, as one would anticipate, have a very low percentage of heavy drinkers and an extraordinarily high rate of alcohol abstainers. This makes them a religious group that seems to be particularly resistant to the effects of alcohol. In addition, orthodox Jews are not likely to be alcoholics since they often drink wine in moderation and mostly in religious settings. This makes it less probable that they take alcohol. Catholics have the largest percentage of heavy drinkers, followed by Reform Jews and liberal protestants, all of whom have quite high alcohol consumption rates. The ratio of heavy drinkers is highest among Catholics. The percentage of people who attend church meetings seems to have a significant correlation with abstinence across all religious communities. (Miller , 2019)

At the same time as religious affiliation and cultural perspectives have a substantial influence in influencing alcohol use among adolescents, peer group behavior seems to play a large effect overall. In the event that a college student resides in a fraternity house and celebrates weekends with beer parties, it does not make a difference where those students come from. Children and teenagers who are raised in households where alcohol is used are more likely to be encouraged by their peers to engage in excessive drinking.

It is important to point out that the much higher prevalence of alcoholism among men in comparison to women may be attributed to the demands that society places on them. It is possible that women have never been expected by society to drink in order to relax, or that men have always felt greater pressure to do so than women have. If that is the case, then the rise in the number of female alcoholics might be attributed to the fact that women are increasingly entering the workforce, which has historically been dominated by males.

The temporary relief offered by alcohol can create a maladaptive coping mechanism, leading to dependence over time. Personality traits such as impulsivity, low self-esteem, and a high need for novelty seeking have also been linked to a greater propensity for risky drinking behaviors and the development of AUD. Furthermore, individuals with a history of trauma or abuse may turn to alcohol as a way to numb emotional pain and cope with difficult memories. (Jones, 2018)

The social environment in which an individual lives and interacts significantly influences their likelihood of developing alcoholism. Cultural norms and attitudes towards alcohol consumption play a crucial role. In societies

where heavy drinking is normalized, encouraged, or readily accessible, the risk of developing AUD tends to be higher. Peer pressure, particularly during adolescence and young adulthood, can significantly influence drinking behaviors. Individuals surrounded by heavy drinkers may feel compelled to conform, leading to increased alcohol consumption and potential dependence. Family dynamics also play a critical role. Growing up in a household with alcoholic parents not only increases genetic predisposition but can also expose individuals to dysfunctional coping mechanisms, trauma, and a normalization of excessive drinking. Socioeconomic factors such as poverty, unemployment, and lack of educational opportunities can also contribute to stress and despair, potentially leading individuals to seek solace in alcohol.

Furthermore, early life experiences can have a profound impact on an individual's vulnerability to alcoholism. Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) such as abuse, neglect, and parental separation have been consistently linked to an increased risk of developing substance use disorders, including AUD, later in life. These experiences can disrupt healthy emotional development and coping skills, making individuals more susceptible to using alcohol as a maladaptive way to manage distress.

According to the findings of a number of studies, the effects of alcohol on reinforcement are associated with certain neurochemical pathways. There are a number of people who have reported that drinking alcohol causes a rise in the levels of dopamine, norepinephrine, and opioid peptides in a certain region of the brain. This may be the reason why alcohol has a 'feel good' impact. People make an effort to consume alcohol once again because the subjective experience of these neurochemical alterations is comparable to that of being thrilled.

The genetic differences in alcohol-metabolizing enzymes are the primary focus of research on the genetics of alcoholism. This is due to the fact that it is believed that even a little alteration in the molecular structure of these enzymes, which is brought about by a mutation, may have a major influence on their ability to remove alcohol from the body. Several experts believe that research in this area has the potential to uncover heritable risk factors for alcoholism and provide insight on the mechanisms that lie under the surface of the illness. (Wilford , 2018)

Literature Review

Harris et al. (2019): In spite of the fact that alcohol has an effect on every system in the body, the central nervous system is the one that is most obvious and immediately impacted by alcohol use. Several components of this system, which supports all of a person's complex features (thoughts, emotions, and behaviors) via chemical and electrical processes that take place in billions of nerve cells at any given instant, may be inherited by an individual

who is afflicted with alcoholism. Differences in the myriad of ways in which alcohol influences the activity of nerve cells may be inherited, and these differences can either contribute to neurochemical vulnerability or resistance to alcoholism. Within the realm of neurochemistry, these hypotheses are among the most common and well accepted.

Victor et al. (2018): People who are more inclined to become alcoholics may have nerve cell membranes that are less permeable to the effects of alcohol, which alter the conduction of nerve impulses and the movement of sodium and potassium ions. This may affect the likelihood that these individuals will become alcoholics.

Horton et al. (2018): On account of variances in the degree to which particular enzymes are susceptible to the inhibitory effects of alcohol, there is a possibility that some individuals have a hereditary predisposition to alcoholism. Considering that the transmission of nerve impulses is reliant on enzymes controlling ion current across the nerve cell membrane, this would also have an impact on the process of nerve impulse transmission.

Omenn et al. (2019): Because of variances in the ways in which their brain cells receive and send chemical signals via neurotransmitter release and absorption systems, some individuals have a hereditary predisposition to alcoholism. Individuals who are genetically inclined to alcoholism may be more likely to develop an addiction to alcohol if they are exposed to an excessive amount of drugs that are similar to morphine. There may be a genetic predisposition to drinking that is caused by differences in the neurochemical systems of reinforcement that are present in the brain.

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Alcoholism, like other types of aberrant conduct, is likely caused by a number of different factors, the relative relevance of which will vary from person to person.

1. The Psychodynamic Perspective

According to psychodynamic theorists, those who have a personality that is reliant on oral dependence are more likely to develop alcohol issues. During the formative years of this person, they presume that they did not have the opportunity to fulfill their essential urge for oral gratification. The individual's personality is characterized by self-doubt, apathy, and dependence, and as a result of this misery, they are compelled to get oral pleasure via the use of devices such as smoking, eating, and drinking. Problem drinkers who are adult males are more likely to be classified as anxious, submissive, socially unsuccessful, and furious, according to the findings of Jones's

study on the drinking habits of middle-aged individuals. When they were in their adolescent years, most people gave the impression that boys were more extroverted than girls. During the same time period, they reported having higher degrees of inferiority complex and social connections that were less rewarding in comparison to the other males who participated in the study. Because they were impulsive and unsure of themselves when they were youths, Jones claims that these guys had a difficult time building lasting connections with one another. By doing more longitudinal study, it will be possible to get a better understanding of the roles of psychodynamic and personality characteristics in relation to alcohol use and abuse.

2. The Cognitive Perspective

Alcoholism is fueled and maintained by either positive reinforcement (when objectives are accomplished) or negative reinforcement (when stress is decreased), according to cognitive theorists. Positive reinforcement occurs when the individual achieves their goals. Cognitive theorists, as is their custom, relate the use of alcohol to internal cognitive processes rather than to reinforcers that come from the outside. The following are examples of these: attributions, self-evaluations, and expectations.

According to the expectancy theory, one of the most significant aspects that plays a role in deciding whether or not an individual would engage in the use and abuse of alcohol is their anticipation of the consequences that it will have on them. One great example is the manner in which parents behave. Young children get an understanding of the repercussions of alcohol use by watching their classmates and celebrities on television. Over the course of time, these anticipations will eventually fuse together to form a schema that will determine how the person will act when they are given the opportunity to consume alcohol. Numerous studies have shown that individuals, on the whole, have favorable expectations toward alcohol. These expectations include the fact that it will enhance their social and physical experiences, make them more self-assured and forceful, reduce their levels of stress, boost their power and aggression, enhance their sexual performance, and make their sexual and physical pleasure more manageable. In spite of the fact that many people have negative expectations about alcohol, such as the fact that it inhibits performance and fosters irresponsibility, many people also have positive expectations, which causes them to drink excessively and often.

3. The Learning Perspective

Some people find that alcohol assists them in coping with the difficulties of life. An example of the sort of reinforcement that they utilize to acquire this habit is when they are welcomed by their peers who place a high

value on drinking. In the capacity of both a learner and a model (the act of seeing how other people "fix" their drinking problems). There is a possibility that alcohol may be reinforcing for brief periods of time due to the fact that it provides many people with a nice sensation of relaxation. However, since drinking is not a viable coping method, their lives have not altered in any way over this time. Because they believe they are even less capable of dealing with the problem in a positive manner, they increase the effectiveness of their unhealthy coping techniques.

On top of that, people could seek out alcohol because of the short-term stimulating effects it has, which can be reinforcing since it makes them feel good. Similar to other psychological phenomena, reinforcement is supported by neurochemical processes when it comes to its functioning. Alcohol is known to have a reinforcing impact, which is a fact that is well accepted by academics. It is believed that these effects are the result of certain processes in the brain, which contribute to the formation of the reward system in the brain. These processes are thought to be located in a specific cluster of nerve cells, according to conventional wisdom.

4. The Socio-cultural Perspective

In a follow-up study of young men who had been extensively questioned while they were adolescents, the researchers found that socioeconomic status and ethnic origin were the primary factors that differentiated those who became alcoholics from those who did not become alcoholics. There is a favorable correlation between the level of education attained and the socioeconomic position of the population and the incidence of alcoholism. In terms of ethnic groups, guys of Irish and American Indian heritage had a higher likelihood of becoming alcoholics compared to those of Indian or Latino descent. There is a specific cause for concern about the statistics concerning American Indians. In a congressional hearing that took place in 1985, it was shown that twenty-three percent of non-American Indian adolescents living in metropolitan areas drank at least moderately, while eighty percent of American Indian adolescents living on reservations drank at least slightly.

5. The Biological Perspective

A multitude of changes, both biophysical and psychological, have been connected to the use of alcohol. After only one drink, one of the most typical adverse effects is reduction in nervousness. When a person drinks more alcohol, the depressant effect of alcohol has an influence on the processes that occur in the brain. The individual's disposition becomes very unstable, and they begin stumbling. There is a significant impairment in sensory perception.

It has been shown via research conducted on rats that changes in alcohol metabolism may be generated through the use of genetic engineering. According to the findings of a study on adoption, this is the case even after the first few weeks of a child's life have passed. There is a growing body of research suggesting that some individuals are more prone to develop an alcoholism than others, and academics are widely in agreement that environmental variables may also play a role in the development of alcoholism.

There are both inherited and environmental factors that contribute to the development of alcoholism, according to research conducted on individuals who were adopted when they were young but whose original parents were alcoholics. Hereditary alcoholism may be broken down into two categories: male-limited and milieu-limited. Both of these categories have been investigated. Only males are susceptible to the male-limited type, which is defined by a susceptibility that appears at an early age in individuals' lives. Additionally, the milieu-limited type of alcoholism is characterized by a combination of inherited susceptibility and environmental stimuli, and it is often more severe than the male-limited form of alcoholism.

6 Personality Factor

Personality may be defined in a number of different ways. One description describes it as the continual adaptation of an individual to his environment. Another definition describes it as the most unique integration of an individual's structures, style of behavior, interests, attitudes, techniques, abilities, and aptitudes.

In an effort to find a solution to this problem, researchers have hypothesized that people who drink tend to have features that are comparable to those of people who do not drink alcohol. Indicative of emotional immaturity is the tendency to have unrealistic expectations of life and to react to failures with intense feelings of anguish and inadequacy. Having a tendency to get quickly disappointed, having doubts about one's own capabilities, and having a fear of being labeled as either masculine or feminine.

A significant number of mental health professionals, including psychiatrists, psychoanalysts, and psychologists, are of the opinion that alcoholics possess a negative character trait or attributes. It has been shown that several of these traits are present. A few examples of these characteristics include a lack of empathy, manipulation, aggression, impulsivity, egotism, sociability, dependence on others, sadness, anxiety, hysterical conduct, hypochondriac thinking, and ambivalence. Other characteristics include a lack of understanding and compassion for others. According to Donovan, alcoholics are also said to suffer from a lack of self-confidence, an unstable sense of identity, a low tolerance for frustration, castration anxiety, neurotic symptoms, schizophrenia

withdrawal, or sexual immaturity. These are all conditions that are associated with alcoholism. It is true that these are only a few of the personality characteristics that have been linked to alcoholism for a very long time.

Many antecedent signals and subsequent reinforcers work together to keep alcoholism going strong, according to the behavioral viewpoint. Social acceptance, the capacity to participate in calm social behavior, and the avoidance of psychological strain are some of the proposed main reinforcers. All of these things might have a role, but the core assumption of most behavioral theories is that stress reduction is the primary motivation for heavy drinking.

Conclusion

Alcoholism is a complex disorder with no single cause. It arises from a dynamic interplay of genetic predispositions, underlying psychological vulnerabilities, and influential social and environmental factors. Understanding these intricate connections is essential for developing comprehensive prevention strategies that target at-risk populations, effective intervention methods that address the multifaceted nature of the disorder, and compassionate treatment approaches that support individuals on their journey to recovery. Recognizing the tangled web of causes allows for a more holistic and ultimately more successful approach to combating this pervasive and devastating condition

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