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Alcohol Abuse among Teenagers

Alcohol consumption among young people is one of the most topical contemporary issues. It should be admitted that it is a problem that concerns the whole society and not only certain individuals or small parts of the population. It has been pointed out by many scholars that it is not only children from problem families who engage in illegal drinking, so the reasons that make youngsters succumb to this unfavorable behavior are worthy of examination. The goal of this paper is to identify the factors that drive teenagers to consume alcohol.

According to the National Research Council, a significant number of 12- to 14-year-olds are consuming alcohol. While those teenagers who drink usually don't do it as often as adults, they tend to drink more excessively (Bonnie & O'Connell 52).

One of the factors that contribute to the problem of teenage drinking is accessibility of alcohol. It is very easy for young people to obtain alcoholics, and the percentage of those who can get it without much difficulty grows significantly with age. More than 90 percent of twelfth graders have effortless access to alcohol (Johnston, O'Malley, and Bachman 53). Thus, by the senior year of high school it no longer feels like a forbidden fruit, it is everywhere and it seems like a perfectly logical thing to give it a try. Besides, in the United States children "grow up in a world filled with messages about alcohol" (Bonnie & O'Connell 70). They are informed about the detrimental effects of underage drinking in health class and are warned by their parents, but the image of alcohol they acquire from the world around

them as a whole is still rather positive. It is presented as an ordinary and normal part of life both of adults and teenagers. As a consequence of drinking being both accessible and acceptable, occasional alcohol consumption becomes wide-spread among teenagers.

Another factor is the actual changes that adolescents need to adjust to. Their bodies are altering drastically along with their own minds and the social context. According to Steinberg and Cauffman, aspiration for autonomy and opportunity to be able to make one's own decisions increases with age (56). Teenagers start looking older and are now expected to behave more like adults. They also want to assert themselves to their peers and to be perceived as mature and independent. Alcohol seems like a thing that could help accomplish this goal, as it is a symbol of adult status in USA.

There are many interconnected causes of alcohol consumption among young people that are related to social pressure. As they strive for more independence, teenagers become less influenced by parents and get "highly concerned with peer conformity, which can make them particularly susceptible to peer influence" (Bonnie & O'Connell 73). Young people try to follow real or imagined norms of their community, which often involves drinking and other kinds of risky behaviors.

Some of the reasons why adolescents drink are not so different from the ones that drive adults. Using alcohol makes social interactions less stressful, lowering their inhibitions and helping them relax, just as it does for grown-ups (Jones, Corbin, and Fromme 58). Teenagers also seek to experience such positive effects as lessening of anxiety and tension, boosting of self-confidence, and feeling of courage (Prendergast 100). Such perception probably originates from the representation of drinking in the media. Teenagers get the idea that alcohol can make them feel more comfortable from films and TV shows and engage in the activity themselves due to lack of well-recognized alternatives.

While certain personal characteristics have a relation to the likelihood of teenager drinking alcohol, the key causes of underage drinking can be attributed to social factors, as indicated in the material presented. Alcohol is very easy for young people to obtain from a certain age. And since drinking is frequently seen not only in media, but also in their own environment, adolescents perceive it as a fact of life, something normal, despite the information regarding its harmful effects. As alcohol consumption is only allowed to adults, they use it to assert their independence and create a favorable status among peers. Additionally, alcohol is sometimes used by them as a way to alleviate anxiety and feel more relaxed in a social setting. Understanding these factors may help in finding effective measures to combat the problem of alcohol abuse among teenagers.

Works Cited

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