



Sample Essay

What are the causes of alcoholism among teenagers?

<i>Comments about structure</i>	Essay
<p>Introduction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Identify subject area</i> • <i>Introduce central issues</i> • <i>Define key terms</i> • <i>Why is topic of interest?</i> • <i>Hypothesis</i> • <i>Outline how essay is structured</i> <p>1st Body Paragraph <i>Topic sentence—main idea: five social causes</i></p> <p><i>Support—introduces 1st social cause: acceptance</i></p>	<p>Recent media reports in New Zealand highlight the increasing prevalence of alcohol abuse by adolescents. While it is true that not all binge drinkers are alcoholics, concern is growing at the number of young people who exhibit signs of alcohol dependency, which in turn, can lead to alcoholism. Alcoholism can be defined as “a chronic disorder marked by excessive and usually compulsive drinking of alcohol leading to psychological and physical dependence or addiction” (“Alcoholism”, 2011, para. 1). This topic is of interest because of the adverse psychological and physical effects alcoholism among teenagers may have on the individual and the wider community. Treatment for those concerned is available in many different forms, but by then the major damage is already done. This essay will argue that the best way to protect people from the consequences of alcohol abuse is through education and prevention of the problem in the first place. In order to do this, it is necessary to know the causes. Alcoholism is a complex problem and the reasons for its existence are no less complicated. What makes young people become dependent on drink? Jefferson (2002) analyses the causes under three main categories: social, psychological, and biological. This essay begins by outlining the main social causes of alcoholism. It then identifies the underlying psychological factors and considers the complex relationship between social and psychological factors. Finally, the essay briefly introduces the two main types of biological dependence.</p> <p>There are five key social causes that may lead to the use of alcohol by teenagers (Bowman, 1995). The first involves the basic human need for acceptance by a group. Bowman (1995) explains that in teenage circles, the use of alcohol symbolises unity, friendship and sociability. Adolescence is a time when most people need to feel part of a group, and by accepting drink when offered, the teenager believes him/herself to be a member of that group.</p>





<p><i>Support—2nd social cause: rebellion</i></p> <p><i>Support—3rd social cause: male competitiveness</i></p> <p><i>Support—4th social cause: adult status</i></p> <p><i>Support—5th social cause: alientation</i></p> <p><i>Concluding section: restate main idea and link to next paragraph</i></p>	<p>Adolescence is also a time of rebellion. Consuming alcohol expresses a general rejection of conventional adult standards. This, then, is another cause of alcohol use and possible abuse by youths. A third cause is a definition of alcohol from Lewis (1999), as “a symbol of aggressive and masculine behaviour” (p.95). Teenagers especially tend to judge others on their ability to consume large quantities of drink in a short time. Being able to out-do the next person creates a sense of power. Such competitiveness is conducive to an abusive drinking style. Related to this is the belief that drinking symbolises adult status. Teenagers find themselves at a difficult stage between childhood and adulthood. As teenagers are eager to leave one stage and advance to the next, imitation becomes another cause of drinking (Bowman, 1995). The fifth socially-related cause that Bowman (1995) discusses is that of alienation. This could be from peers, parents or both. Bowman goes on to state that the actual reason for feeling alienated could be anything from simply not fitting in due to differing values and attitudes, to the presences of a rift between parents and children as a result of a broken home. The frustration of not being able to relate to or communicate with people can cause many teenagers to find refuge in alcohol. This leads to the psychological causes relating to alcoholism (Jefferson, 2002). The social aspects discussed above are not the immediate causes of alcoholism among teenagers. Instead, they are the causes of various psychological effects, which in turn may lead to alcohol dependence.</p>
<p>2nd Body Paragraph <i>Topic sentence—main idea: four psychological causes</i></p> <p><i>Support—1st psychological cause: inducing pleasure</i></p> <p><i>Support—2nd psychological cause: tension reduction</i></p> <p><i>Support—3rd psychological cause: excuse actions/attention seeking</i></p> <p><i>Support—4th psychological cause: reinforcement</i></p>	<p>Roberts (2002) identifies four psychological causes. He argues that the basic psychological reason for drinking is to promote a feeling of satisfaction, that is, to induce pleasure or avoid discomfort. In a recent research project, Roberts found that the use of alcohol as a form of tension reduction is a direct consequence of the feeling of alienation. He also notes that alcohol induces a feeling of relaxation, which is satisfying to the drinker. It is this attempt to reduce tension, which can lead to abuse. When a teenager discovers alcohol as a result of any of the causes discussed thus far, he/she often also discovers that drunkenness can be used as an excuse for his/her actions or as a means of gaining attention. This leads to what Davis (2001) describes as the main psychological cause of alcoholism: drinking for reinforcement.</p>



<p>2nd Body Paragraph [cont.]</p> <p><i>Summarise key points</i></p> <p><i>State relevance—reinforcement of satisfaction is the main cause of alcoholism</i></p> <p>Concluding section: <i>restate main idea and link to next paragraph</i></p>	<p>The relationship between psychological causes and social elements is complicated, but, as discussed above, young people, consume alcohol for various reasons: group acceptance, rebellion, power, imitation, tension reduction, as an excuse for their actions, and to seek attention. It is as a reinforcement of these conditions that they continue to drink. As soon as they discover that alcohol can satisfy them for whatever reason, the automatic progression is to drink more. Reinforcement of satisfaction is therefore the immediate cause of alcoholism. Many youth today express antisocial, depressive, or delinquent behaviour. Personality disorders such as these, although not a direct cause of problem drinking, seem to produce psychological conditions that may lead to an increase in alcohol consumption (Adams, 1998; Davis, 2001). In such cases, alcoholism is more likely to develop than with people who do not exhibit such tendencies. These disorders, however, are not sufficient causes of alcoholism but merely contributory conditions. From psychological motivations, the next area to consider is biological causes</p>
<p>3rd Body Paragraph</p> <p><i>Topic sentence—main idea: two biological causes</i></p> <p><i>Support—1st biological cause: abnormalities of body functions</i></p> <p><i>Support—2nd biological cause: genetics</i></p> <p><i>State relevance—contributing factor</i></p> <p><i>Concluding section: restate main idea</i></p>	<p>The final category that Jefferson (2002) identifies is a biological cause. There are two main classes of biological dependence. The two classes are abnormalities of body functions and genetics. Many alcoholics have abnormal bodily functions, but although studies have been made, it has not yet been proven whether these are causes or effects of excessive drinking. The facts are still uncertain how much of an effect genetics has on the development of alcoholism. Even though studies suggest genetic factors alone cannot be blamed as the cause of dependence on alcohol; they at least contribute to the cause. It needs to be understood that one of the classes of biological dependence, on its own, will not necessarily lead to alcoholism, but people in these classes are more susceptible to problem drinking if social and psychological causes are also present.</p>



<p>Conclusion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Restate main hypothesis</i> • <i>Summarise key points</i> • <i>Implications</i> 	<p>In conclusion, this essay has argued that the most effective means of protecting people from the consequences of alcohol abuse is through education and awareness of the causes. It is clear that the causes of alcoholism among teenagers are varied and complex. There may be contributory biological factors, in which case those susceptible could be made aware of possible problems. The underlying causes however are social ones, and these in turn cause psychological effects, which are the immediate cause of alcoholism. The implications are clear: all teenagers are subject to the possibility of alcohol abuse and possibly, dependence. Unfortunately, the social factors discussed are difficult to control. In order to attempt to prevent alcoholism among young people, there needs to be early identification of problem drinking. Better still, teenagers themselves need to be aware of the causes.</p> <p><i>Note: this essay was adapted from a model essay written by Kathryn Rountree in her 1991 book entitled 'Writing for success: a practical guide for New Zealand students', published in Auckland, New Zealand by Longman Paul. The original essay appears on page 15.</i></p>
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