

Histories reveal teens suffer from parents' binges

By Arlene Funke
staff writer

"When my dad went on a binge, we (kids) would have to go to our aunt's house so he wouldn't beat us up," said Karen, 14.

"He beat up my mom sometimes," she added.

Kevin, 16, stopped bringing his friends home because Dad would become mean when he drank alcohol. His mom would complain.

"Sometimes they got in fights when the kids were there, and some of the kids were scared to come over," said Kevin.

Another teen suffered guilt feelings after her alcoholic father was killed in a car crash, which claimed two other lives.

THESE ARE just a few of several cases studied in 1977 by Jacques McNicol, a Redford Township resident who formerly lived in Livonia.

Ms. McNicol in 1977 made a six-month study of the effect of alcoholism on children while taking a course in "Independent Human Studies" at Schoolcraft College. She said she chose her topic because of a "life-long exposure to alcoholism," including some ex-

periences of family members and friends.

Her interest was heightened while working as a secretary at Brighton Hospital, an alcoholism treatment facility.

In compiling her data, Ms. McNicol interviewed 15 teens with one or more alcoholic parents, 17 non-alcoholic spouses, three alcoholic fathers and one alcoholic mother.

She drew on the resources of Alateen, an organization which helps teenage children of alcoholics. And she included comments from 32 alcoholism therapists.

"I HOPE to write a book about it," said Ms. McNicol. "I would feel very gratified if my study could help people."

The case histories draw a picture of children of alcoholic parents living with embarrassment, humiliation, and loss of trust and respect. It often includes physical and mental abuse, a lack of self-esteem and family break-up.

According to the therapists, each alcoholic negatively affects the emotions of at least four other persons.

For example, children of alcoholics may have trouble keeping up their

grades or getting along with others. Many expressed fears of becoming alcoholics themselves.

As Ms. McNicol put it, the children's deprivation of stability and affection "will have direct consequences in development for adult living."

Ms. McNicol concludes that counseling and education through the schools or community are essential. She believes teachers, school counselors and youth leaders must be able to recognize the needs of these children and to get help for them.

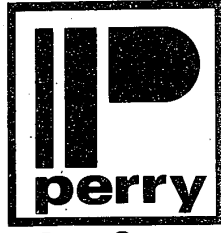
Help may take the form of counseling, removal from the home or joining

a self-help group such as Alateen, a support group for children aged 13-20 whose parents are alcoholics.

The Alateen sessions bring youth together to talk about their problems. At the time of the study, the families of Karen and Kevin hadn't become involved in a counseling program.

Joe was one of several teens surveyed who joined Alateen. Earlier, Joe had suffered permanent damage to one eye after his father threw a chair at him during a drinking binge.

After joining Alateen, Joe said he was feeling much better about himself.



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