Recent report of teenagers indulging in alcoholism and the rise in the number of alcoholic cirrhosis is alarming (1). With improved awareness of hepatitis B and C transmission, immunization of children against hepatitis B and better anti-viral/interferon therapy of hepatitis C, alcoholic cirrhosis would soon be the number one cause of chronic liver disease.

Physicians commonly come across fatty liver on ultrasonography. Most of the times we tend to brush it aside as part of the obesity/metabolic syndrome the patient has. But beware. We have seen dozens of cases this year who confessed to using alcohol for years. Therefore it would be wiser to diagnose alcoholic fatty liver disease rather than the blindly used term NAFLD.

The social and medical consequences of alcoholism among teenagers and the youth of Kashmir can be disastrous. In another decade we would have hundreds (possibly thousands) of cases of alcoholic cirrhosis. Most, if not all, would die unless the liver is transplanted.

Many road traffic accidents here are suspected to be due to drunken driving. Many truck and Sumo drivers who visit our outpatient divulge history of having alcohol during driving. Unfortunately there is no check on this too.

Free availability of alcohol is an issue. A few years back in one of the APICION meetings, when we asked Prof. Gillmore, the President of Royal College of Physicians, London, about whether there was any medicine which could help a person who indulges in “social drinking” from becoming alcoholic, he had no answer.

With the first liquor outlet opening in 2005 the number has increased drastically. The consumption of alcohol is higher in Kashmir region as compared to the Jammu region. The statistics three years back reveal the consumption of 1.2 million bottles of liquor and beer in the valley of Kashmir (2). The number sure has risen. Around 20% teenagers indulge in opiates and poly drug abuse. Many are traumatized by the events in the last twenty two years of turmoil. So most of the teenagers are vulnerable and may indulge in alcoholism if it is freely and easily available. Unfortunately things might spiral out of control.

More than the government, I think it is the social groups who can play a role in tackling the menace.

Comments and suggestions from the readers are welcome.

References:
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Author Information: Sarosh A. Khan, MD is Senior Consultant, Internal Medicine working in Modern Hospital, Rajbagh, Srinagar, Kashmir, India. Pin: 190008. He is the Editor in Chief of Physicians Academy. Affiliations: Member American College of Physicians and Member American Academy of Family Physicians. Email: drsarosh@gmail.com