Gene impedes recovery from alcoholism

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People who are alcohol-dependent and who also carry a particular variant of a gene run an increased risk of premature death. This is a recent finding from the interdisciplinary research at the Department of Psychology and the Sahlgrenska Academy at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden.

Researchers in the longitudinal project Goteborg Alcohol Research Project (GARP) have been investigating the dopamine D2 receptor gene and found that a variant of this gene is overrepresented in people with severe alcohol dependency, and that it is linked to a number of different negative consequences that can be of vital significance to the person affected.

"Our research shows that alcohol-dependent individuals, who are also carriers of this gene variant, run 10 times the risk of dying prematurely, compared with the average population," says Claudia Fahlke, a representative from the research team.

In a study published recently in the journal Alcohol and Alcoholism (issue 46), the research team shows that this gene variant also appears to be associated with a higher tendency among these individuals to suffer a relapse, even if they have undergone treatment for their alcohol dependency. This may provide one explanation as to the higher mortality rate in people suffering from alcohol dependency, who are carriers of this gene variant.

"This knowledge emphasises the importance of developing methods for

early identifying individuals who are also carriers of this gene variant, since the consequences can be so serious," says Jan Balldin at the Sahlgrenska Academy, University of Gothenburg.

Provided by University of Gothenburg