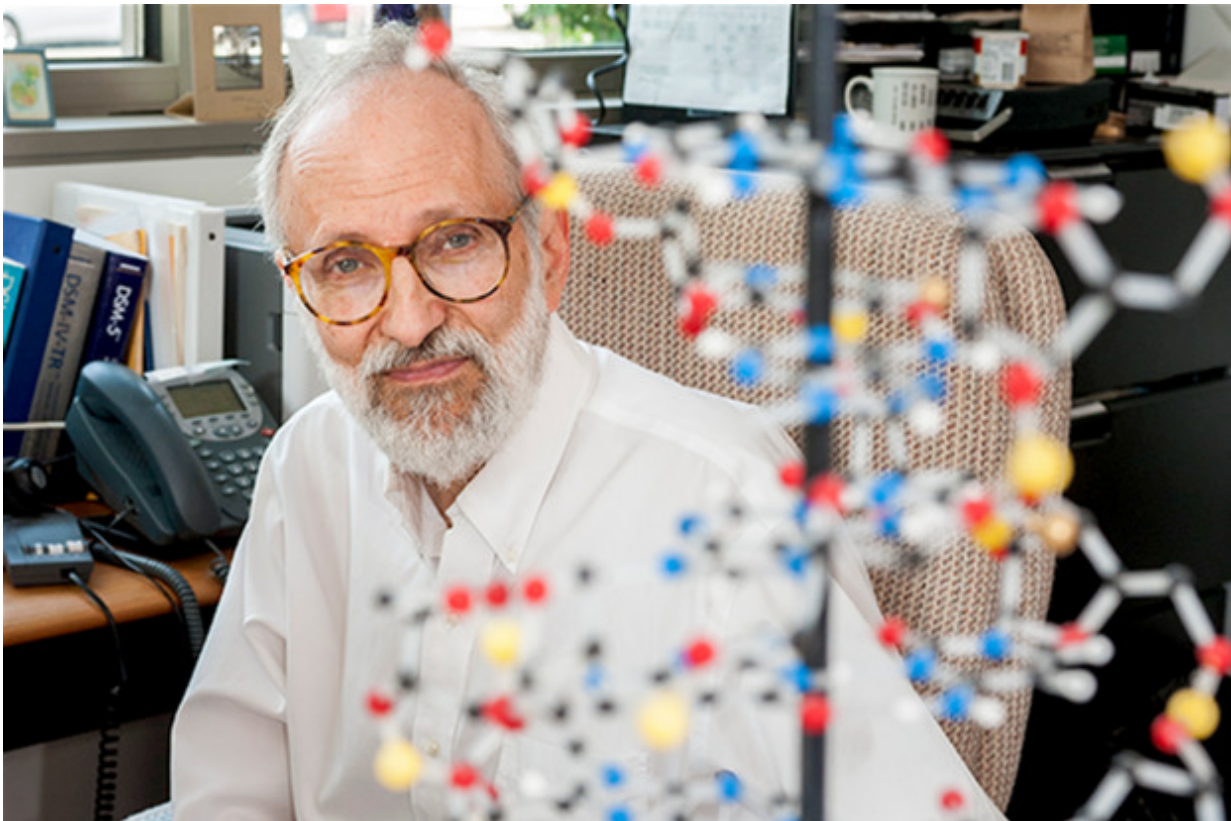


Study finds marriage protects against risk for developing alcohol use disorders

May 17 2016, by Anne Dreyfuss



Kenneth S. Kendler, M.D.

Marriage is causally related to a significant reduction in risk for development of alcohol use disorders, according to a new study conducted by researchers at Virginia Commonwealth University and

Lund University in Sweden.

The study, which is titled, "Effect of Marriage on Risk for Onset of Alcohol Use Disorder: A Longitudinal and Co-Relative Analysis in a Swedish National Sample," scientifically confirms the common observation that alcoholism is bad for marriages and that [marriage](#) might help protect against [alcohol](#) use problems. It was published in the *American Journal of Psychiatry* on May 16.

"With this study, we were trying to determine if marriage influences individuals' future risks for alcohol use disorders," said first author Kenneth S. Kendler, M.D., professor of psychiatry and human and molecular genetics in the Department of Psychiatry, VCU School of Medicine. "The answer is yes, and actually quite profoundly."

First marriage resulted in a 59 percent reduction in [risk](#) of alcoholism in males and a 73 percent reduction in risk for females. In both sexes, the protective effect of marriage was significantly stronger in those with versus those without a family history of alcohol use disorder. "It is the person who is most vulnerable to the risk of alcoholism from a genetic background who might be the most sensitive to the protective effects of marriage," Kendler said.

More than 3.2 million individuals born in Sweden between 1960 and 1990 were involved in the study, which was limited to people who were single at the onset of the study and who had no personal history of alcoholism. The correlative design of the study supported the conclusion of the causal effect of marriage on the development of alcoholism.

The study also found the inverse association to be true: Marriage to a spouse with a history of alcohol use problems is associated with an increased risk for alcohol use disorder. A history of deviance in the spouse was more strongly related to risk for alcohol use disorders in

women than in men.

"While being married to a spouse who now or in the future stays free of alcohol problems is quite protective, marrying someone who now or in the future develops [alcohol problems](#) is the opposite," Kendler said. "It is considerably worse than being single."

The results could help in the development of effective social treatments to combat the disease.

"Maybe this is something that Alcoholics Anonymous figured out a long time ago," Kendler said of the 12-step program that implements sponsor relationships to offer guidance and support through the addiction recovery process. "This study is part of forming a strong scientific base for understanding how important social influences can be on [alcohol use disorder](#)."

The research team is currently engaged in a follow-up study that examines how divorce impacts the development of alcohol use disorders. The team's hypothesis is that divorce will substantially increase the risk for alcoholism. In future studies, the group hopes to examine other societal influences such as employment and having children.

More information: Kenneth S. Kendler et al. Effect of Marriage on Risk for Onset of Alcohol Use Disorder: A Longitudinal and Co-Relative Analysis in a Swedish National Sample, *American Journal of Psychiatry* (2016). [DOI: 10.1176/appi.ajp.2016.15111373](https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.ajp.2016.15111373)

Provided by Virginia Commonwealth University

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