

YOUNG PYROMANIACS: CURRENT RESEARCH AND PERSPECTIVES

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Nowadays the phenomenon of pyromania is not fully understood and it keeps a lot of mysteries. To decipher these mysteries is a socially significant task as the results of an arsonist's activity may be enormously dramatic. Throughout last 5–6 years, Belarusian Mass Media report about at least one case of deliberate firesetting a year.[1,2,3] And although there are quite few occasions, the fashion to accompany parties with fireworks, accessibility of the equipment for firesetting and the growing popularity of fire-shows make the increase in the number of purposeful arsons more possible and expected.

As J. Merrick, C. H. Bowling and H. A. Oma report in the journal *Frontiers in Public Health* [4], the research of firesetting that has been carried out so far is mostly theoretical. The main problem behind the lack of empirical findings is impossibility to understand the etiology of arsonists' behavior and, thus, difficulty to develop a strategy of dealing with it. In this work we make a rough trial to gather information on pyromania as an object of studies, laying emphasis on the phenomenon of children-arsonists.

The most profound source of information about young pyromaniacs is **Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders. This clinician's handbook** classifies pyromania as «a disorder of impulse control, meaning that a person diagnosed with pyromania fails to resist the impulsive desire to set fires». [5, p. 669-670] There are all the reasons to accept Freud's hypothesis of interconnection between the rush for firesetting and a primitive desire to demonstrate power over nature. Another Freud's idea, the one of the fire being a symbol of the male sexual urge, has been used by some researchers to explain the fact that pyromania is predominantly a male disorder. [6]

Gale Encyclopedia of Mental Disorders provides a classification of children who set fires. First, they may be treated either as nonpathological firesetters, just playing with fire to conduct a kind of scientific experiment without proper understanding of the danger, or as pathological pyromaniacs who have major psychological problems. The latter are further subdivided into five categories, which do not exclude each other:

- children who set fire *as a cry for help* because of depression or some problems in family (e.g. parental separation, different kinds of abuses, etc.);
- teens (11–15 years old) who are *delinquent firesetters* and intend to damage property because of uncontrolled aggression;
- *severely disturbed firesetters* recognized as either psychotic or paranoid, and evidently reinforced by the perception aspects of fire setting;
- *cognitively impaired firesetters* who fail to control their impulse due to special conditions (neurological or medical, like fetal alcohol syndrome);
- *sociocultural firesetters* who seek for recognition among the antisocial adults from their surrounding. [6]

As far as very little is known about the causes of so diverse behavior of pyromaniacs, we consider the following complex of measures as absolutely crucial on the way to develop a grounded treatment strategy for arsonists:

- 1) to prevent pyromania better assessments of young people and their families should be hold;
- 2) fire-safety education must be incorporated into the curriculum not as a separate discipline but as a part of all the school subjects;

3) deeper studies on the causes of chronic and episodic firesetting should be carried out;
4) research into self-control (as a general character trait that can be taught and practiced like a human skills) should be promoted and sponsored by the government.

So, as many other problems, the first steps to pyromania start in the childhood. The particularity of this disease is that it is much easier to prevent it in childhood than to treat it in adulthood. Such prevention should be based on profound scientific observations, thus, it is really important to develop a complex strategy and take simultaneous measures so that child's problems would not turn into adult crimes.

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