

About AA

2014 A.A. Membership Survey Reveals Current Trends

One of the questions professionals often ask about Alcoholics Anonymous is: “How effective is A.A.?”

This is a good question that can be difficult to answer, since A.A. does not keep track of individual members or do case studies, and its members remain anonymous. The only statistical information from A.A. itself are the random surveys, directed to A.A. groups, about the Fellowship that have been conducted by the General Service Office once every three years since 1968. Alcoholics Anonymous conducts this survey to keep members informed on current membership characteristics. The survey also provides information about A.A. to the professional community and to the general public as part of A.A.’s purpose to carry our message to those who still suffer from alcoholism.

In 2014 more than 6,000 A.A. members from the U.S. and Canada participated in the most recent random survey of the membership. Survey questions cover personal statistics (age, gender, race, occupation, marital status), A.A. activity (frequency of meeting attendance, group membership, sponsorship), how the individual was introduced to A.A. (A.A. members, family, etc.) and experience with professionals, including experiences with treatment facilities, the medical profession, and other types of counseling.

The 2014 survey provides an interesting snapshot of the A.A. Fellowship. The survey shows that the typical member is 50 years old, likely to be married, attends a home group, has been sober almost ten years, attends two and a half meetings a week, and has a sponsor. (In fact, most got a sponsor within the first 90 days of sobriety.)

As have past surveys, the 2014 survey highlights the importance of one-on-one work between members and between the Fellowship and professionals. Thirty-two percent of A.A. members were brought into the program by another A.A. member, while an equal percentage came in through a treatment facility. Before coming to A.A., 59% of the members received some kind of treatment or counseling (such as mental, psychological or spiritual) related to their alcoholism. Twelve percent of A.A. members were introduced to the program through the judicial system.

Importantly, 74% of those members who received treatment or counseling said it played a crucial part in directing them to A.A. (Fifty-eight percent of A.A. members continue to receive treatment or counseling; of these, 84% said it played an important part in their continuing recovery.)

Other statistics in the 2014 survey show that men outnumber women 62% to 38% (as opposed to 65% to 35% in the 2011 survey). The occupations in the survey cover a wide range, from manager/administrator, professional/technical and skilled trade to laborer, sales worker, educator and homemaker. The single largest

category for respondents (19%) was “retired.”

Key findings of the survey are available in the pamphlet “Alcoholics Anonymous 2014 Membership Survey” (P-48). There is also an easel display, 27" high, 39" wide (M-13) \$22.00. To order, write to the General Service Office, Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163. The survey is also available online at aa.org in the “Press/Media” section.

Why Anonymity?

To nonalcoholics, the concept of anonymity within Alcoholics Anonymous may at times seem contradictory. A.A. s often choose to use their full names in personal dealings or while attending conferences or seminars with the members of the professional community. At the same time, however, they retain their anonymity when it comes to the press, radio, television or social media.

The concept of anonymity lies at the very heart of what it means to be a member of Alcoholics Anonymous. In his essay “Our Anonymity Is Both Inspiration and Safety” (collected in the book *The Language of the Heart*), A.A. co-founder Bill W. lays out the reasons for anonymity on a personal level. Particularly in the early years of the program, alcoholism had such a stigma attached to it that anonymity was intended to provide a degree of safety not only to the recovering alcoholic, who might lose his or her job if the news got out, but to their family, whose reputation might suffer. Too, any alcoholic seeking help, Bill writes, would “regard our anonymity as assurance that their problems will be kept confidential.”

In the 80 years since the program began, the concept of anonymity has grown and developed. In the early days of A.A., for instance, it could actually be difficult for alcoholics to find a meeting—they often had to be directed to them by word of mouth from recovering alcoholics, or by police, clergy or members of a judicial body. Now, of course, meetings are listed online or are just a phone call away. And A.A. has “open” meetings to which members of the general public are invited. And, as Bill writes in “Our Anonymity Is Both Inspiration and Safety,” “It should be the privilege of each individual A. A. to cloak himself with as much personal anonymity as he desires.”

There is one notable exception to this, however. “All groups or members,” Bill writes, “when writing or speaking for publication as members of Alcoholics Anonymous, feel bound never to disclose their true names.” This concept eventually became A.A.’s Eleventh Tradition: “*Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, and films.*”

There are several good reasons for this. On one level, as Bill writes, “it prevents our founders and leaders, so called, from becoming household names who might at any time get drunk and give A.A. a black eye.” Even more importantly, as Bill puts it in the book *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*: “We of A.A.... have to soberly face the fact that being in the public eye is hazardous, especially for us. By temperament, nearly every one of us had been an irrepressible promoter, and the prospect of a society composed almost entirely of promoters was frightening. Considering this explosive factor, we knew we had to exercise self-restraint.”

Anonymity, Bill continues, “is a constant and practical reminder that personal ambition has no place in A.A.” In fact, as the Twelfth Tradition states: “*Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.*” It represents humility, and the desire of A.A.s to “grow and work in unity” in their twin goals of staying sober and helping other alcoholics to achieve sobriety.

New Class A Trustees

The General Service Board of Alcoholics Anonymous is made up of 21 trustees — 14 are A.A. members. Seven trustees, known as Class As, serve a six-year term.

At A.A.’s 2015 General Service Conference in April, two new Class A trustees were selected. They are Leslie Backus, of Savannah, Georgia, and Peter Luongo, Ph.D., from Germantown, Maryland. Both are addiction professionals, Backus through her work in a treatment center and Luongo as former director of the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene Alcohol and Drug Abuse.

Nonalcoholic Professionals Attend A.A.s 80th Birthday Celebration

Alcoholics Anonymous has long benefited from nonalcoholics who have reached out to help the program in so many different ways. Dr. William Silkworth provided invaluable healing and advice to Bill W. at Towns Hospital; Sister Mary Ignatia helped Dr. Bob sober up countless alcoholics in Ohio; the pioneering Warden Clinton T. Duffy encouraged the formation of A.A. groups in prison; the Reverend George Little worked hard to bring A.A. to Canada; and, of course, there are the seven Class A (nonalcoholic) trustees of the General Service Board of A.A., who provide A.A. with important perspective and can make their full names known in the media.

Perhaps no group of nonalcoholics looms so large as those professionals in the fields of health care, addiction medicine, corrections and the law, whose working lives often intersect daily with Alcoholics Anonymous. It was wonderful to see so many of these nonalcoholic professionals, from various fields, at the International Convention in Atlanta, July 2-5, 2015. (A.A.’s International Conventions have been held every five years since the 1950 meeting in Cleveland drew 3,000 attendees. In Atlanta, approximately 57,000 attended.)

One such professional was Lisa Haughey, a Reentry Coordinator for the Georgia State Department of Corrections. Lisa helps inmates negotiate the difficult transition back into society as their prison terms end; part of her job is training A.A. volunteers who bring meetings into the prisons. In Atlanta, Lisa was on the Saturday panel addressing “A.A. as a Resource for Professionals.”

The International Convention, Lisa says, “was certainly one of the strongest energy experiences of my life. I was surprised at how much it affected me. You look around and see people who are so different—different races, nationalities, socioeconomic statuses. Yet they were there because they had this one thing in common: they had turned their lives around. I am in a business where this is what we are attempting to do with people. So this was very awe-inspiring.”

Another nonalcoholic professional in attendance was Dr. John Kelly, Associate Professor of Psychiatry in the field of Addiction Medicine at Harvard Medical School, who spoke on the Saturday panel “A.A. and the Alcoholism Field.” Dr. Kelly is currently completing a thorough review of scientific studies regarding addiction treatment collected over the past 25 years. The results he says, will provide strong evidence that A.A. and the Twelve Steps are effective as a treatment for alcoholism.

Dr. Kelly’s found the Convention “wonderful” and a great experience.

Dr. Joyce Johnson took part in the Saturday panel “A.A. as Resource for the Military.” Johnson is a Rear Admiral (ret.) who served in the U.S. Public Health Service and whose last active duty assignment was with the U.S. Coast Guard as director, health and safety, and “surgeon general.” She is an osteopathic physician board certified in Psychiatry and Public Health/ Preventive Medicine as well as a Certified Addiction Specialist. Starting with the ride in her hotel elevator, she says, Atlanta was “an incredible experience. There was a total sense of community, a sense of being welcomed, people knowing each other, even if they don’t actually know each other. The entire Convention was a situation where everyone treated everyone with care and respect.”

Johnson praised A.A.’s “tremendous contribution” to the military, giving alcoholics in the armed services “a very supportive environment.” She attended the Friday night opening Flag Ceremony and Big Meeting at the Convention, impressed by “so many people in one space with so much enthusiasm. And I felt completely welcomed as a nonalcoholic.”

How Can A.A. Help You?

Would you be interested in having an A.A. presentation at one of your professional gatherings? Or would you like information about recovery from alcoholism in A.A.? If so, please contact the C.P.C. desk at the General Service Office, P.O. Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163, or cpc@aa.org. We welcome your questions, comments and requests.

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