



# ABOUT A.A.

...a newsletter for professional men and women

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## More Women, Young People Joining A.A. Worldwide

Many more women and young people are joining Alcoholics Anonymous in the United States, Canada, and other countries in our survey.

Since 1968, the proportion of women in A.A. has risen from 22% to 29% in the United States and Canada. In West Germany and France, the percentage of women is slightly higher.

The percentage of people under 30 in U.S. and Canadian A.A. groups grew from 7.6 in 1974 to 11.3 in 1977. This represents an increase of more than 50% in just three years.

These findings were announced in Warsaw, Poland, September 3, 1978, at the 32nd Annual International Congress on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence, by John L. ("Dr. Jack") Norris, New London, New Hampshire, chairperson emeritus of the General Service Board of A.A. (for the U.S. and Canada), retired medical director of the Eastman Kodak Company, Rochester, New York, and a world authority on occupational medicine.

The 1977 survey of alcoholics at A.A. meetings in the U.S. and Canada was the fourth such continental study (conducted every three years) since 1968, Dr. Jack said.

## A.A. in Other Nations Surveyed for First Time

Similar data were also collected, he said, from alcoholics in A.A. in Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, El Salvador, Finland, France, Mexico, and West Germany. The U.S.-Canadian questionnaire was carefully translated into the tongues of other lands and distributed by their own counterparts of the General Service Board in New York. (See Table 1.)

## Factors Surveyed

Information requested in the 1977 survey included the following: date of first A.A. meeting, date of last

drink, time since last meeting, frequency of meeting attendance, factors responsible for coming to A.A., age, sex, nature of employment, membership in an A.A. group, sponsorship activities, counseling or treatment in addition to A.A., and addiction to other drugs.

Table 1. 1977 SURVEY

| <u>Countries</u>         | <u>Numbers in Sample</u> |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Argentina                | 91                       |
| Brazil                   | 1,930                    |
| Colombia                 | 94                       |
| El Salvador              | 47                       |
| Finland                  | 572                      |
| France                   | 93                       |
| Mexico                   | 62                       |
| West Germany             | 1,190                    |
| United States and Canada | 15,163                   |

## Sampling, Survey Method Explained

Dr. Jack's report deals mainly with the U.S. and Canada, since the sample size (15,163) is large enough for drawing statistically significant conclusions, he said, and because surveys in the previous nine years made comparisons possible and trends noticeable.

The 91 area delegates to A.A.'s General Service Conference (United States and Canada) distributed one-page questionnaires to approximately 3% of the groups in their areas. (The delegates are regional representatives elected to two-year terms by the groups in their areas and constitute an assembly which meets in New York each year to discuss and vote upon issues of general significance to the Fellowship.)

Most respondents in 1977 had not been members of A.A. when the 1968 and 1971 surveys were made—which adds significance to the stability of the results, Dr. Jack added.

**Warning About Bias in Data**

At the outset Dr. Jack warned about one inevitable bias in the results. Since questionnaires were completed only at A.A. meetings, members who were attending meetings in the summer of 1977 are over-represented in the sample.

In addition, one segment of A.A. membership is not represented at all—those who join A.A., recover from alcoholism, and eventually stop attending A.A. meetings. There is no way to find and count this group of anonymous alcoholics, or those alcoholics who may have attended a few A.A. meetings but continue to drink.

**Unbiased Results Possible**

However, it is possible to derive results not significantly affected by the bias, Dr. Jack said. First, the frequency of attendance at meetings is established for each respondent by the survey itself, and can be used to remove bias from other data. Second, many characteristics seem unrelated to frequency of meeting attendance and so are not biased by it.

In what follows, many results are cited simply in reference to the *samples* (for example, the 15,163 respondents of the 1977 survey in the U.S. and Canada). When data are corrected for frequency of attendance at meetings, as discussed above, results are stated to be for the *population* of alcoholics active in A.A. (for example, in the U.S. and Canada in 1977).

**Some General Findings**

Some broad results are summarized here, before details are presented.

The average length of sobriety in the samples ranged from 40 months (Finland) to 49 months (Hispano-American countries). For all four surveys, the U.S.-Canadian average has been close to four years.

Some derived quantities for the U.S.-Canada *population* are:

1. An arbitrarily selected member with less than a year's sobriety has about a 43% chance of going through the next year without a drink—significantly better than the 35% measured in 1974.
2. A randomly chosen member with from one to five years' sobriety has an 80% likelihood of going through the next year without a drink and also remaining active in the A.A. Fellowship. This was also true in 1974.
3. A member with more than five years' sobriety has a 90% chance of going through the next year both not drinking and remaining active in A.A. This, too, was observed in 1974, Dr. Jack said. (See Table 2.)

**Table 2. LIKELIHOOD OF STAYING SOBER ANOTHER YEAR**

| <u>This Year</u>       | <u>Next Year</u>          |                           |
|------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
|                        | Inferred from 1974 Survey | Inferred from 1977 Survey |
| Sober less than 1 year | 35%                       | 43%                       |
| Sober 1-5 years        | 79                        | 79                        |
| Sober 5 years or more  | 91                        | 90                        |

**Some Characteristics of A.A. Changing**

1. As noted earlier, the proportion of women in A.A. in the United States and Canada has increased from 22% to 29% since 1968. Moreover, according to Dr. Norris, among the 7,169 respondents who have joined A.A. since 1974 the percentage of women was 32%, indicating a continuing overall trend, he noted. (See Table 3.)
2. The percentage of young people (30 years of age or

**Table 3. PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN IN A.A.**

| 1968 | 1971 | 1974 | 1977 | Among Members Joining Since 1974 |
|------|------|------|------|----------------------------------|
| 22%  | 26%  | 28%  | 29%  | 32%                              |

under) in the sample has increased from 7.6% in 1974 to 11.3% in 1977, an increase of over 50%. (See Table 4.)

**Table 4. AGE GROUP PERCENTAGES, 1968-1977**

|               | 1968 | 1971 | 1974 | 1977  |
|---------------|------|------|------|-------|
| 30 and under  | 7.1% | 5.9% | 7.6% | 11.3% |
| 31 through 50 | 57.1 | 56.4 | 55.0 | 51.9  |
| 51 and over   | 34.0 | 36.8 | 36.5 | 35.1  |

**Findings in New Areas**

1. Our 1977 survey asked for the first time a single question about drugs—whether the respondent had

**Table 5. DRUG ADDICTION AMONG ALCOHOLICS – 1977**

|       | Those 30 Years Old or Less | Those Coming to A.A. in the Past 3 Years | Total Sample |
|-------|----------------------------|--|--------------|
| Women | 55%                        | 29%                                      | 28%          |
| Men   | 36                         | 15                                       | 14           |
| All   | 43                         | 19                                       | 18           |

been addicted to any drug besides alcohol. Lack of detail and definition in the question makes us cautious about the results, Dr. Jack noted. But it is undoubtedly significant that the percentage of A.A. members positively responding is 18%, that the percentage of women is roughly twice that of men (28% vs. 14%), and that the percentage of young people is *more* than twice that of the total sample (43%), he said. (See Table 5.)

2. Month-by-month analysis of the behavior of A.A. newcomers during the early stages of recovery enables us to describe some additional features of the A.A. process in statistical terms, the chairperson continued.

In many groups, A.A. newcomers are urged to “try A.A.” by attending meetings regularly for 90 days. Apparently, those that do stay this length of time, by and large, remain in attendance, the chairperson said. After correcting the data for this effect, we find that about 50% of alcoholics who “try A.A.” for 90 days will stay sober for the next year, Dr. Jack said.

He emphasized two implications of these findings: (1) Professionals working with alcoholics might want to emphasize the 90-day trial period; and (2) A.A. members themselves must make every effort to help newcomers during those early days.

**Frequency of Meeting Attendance**

As already indicated, frequency of attendance at A.A. meetings declines slightly with increased sobriety. A similar slight decline is noted with age, Dr. Jack observed, and he said the same trend was noted in 1974, but that the frequency of meeting attendance was greater in 1977, whatever the sobriety. He pointed out that this may reflect the increased availability of

**Table 6. FREQUENCY OF MEETING ATTENDANCE—1977**

| Frequency of Attendance | Total Sample | Those Less Than 31 Years Old | Joined A.A. in the Past 3 Years | Total Population |
|-------------------------|--------------|------------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------|
| 3 or more times a week  | 64%          | 67%                          | 67%                             | 31%              |
| Once or twice per week  | 32           | 27                           | 29                              | 32               |
| Less than once per week | 4            | 6                            | 4                               | 37               |

A.A. meetings. "There has been a 25% increase in the number of groups since 1974 and many groups have increased the number of meetings they hold," he said. (See Table 6, page 3.)

**Factors Responsible for Joining A.A.**

The survey asked respondents to name the two most important factors in their coming to A.A. Table 7 shows the results. Dr. Jack noted that the role of another A.A. member was most important, as in the past, but the influence of professional counseling and treatment increased from 14% to 24%. However, in France and West Germany referrals by physicians were much more significant.

Forty-eight percent of the respondents indicated they had help with a drinking problem before approaching A.A., the chairperson added. Forty-six percent said such help continued or began after they joined A.A., and 84% of those held that such help was important in

**Table 7. FACTORS RESPONSIBLE FOR JOINING A.A.\***

| Influence              | Before 1974 | Since 1974 |
|------------------------|-------------|------------|
| A.A. Member            | 46%         | 41%        |
| "On my own"            | 28          | 38         |
| Family                 | 23          | 21         |
| Doctor                 | 10          | 10         |
| Counseling & Treatment | 14          | 24         |

*\*Each respondent cited two factors.*

their recovery, he noted. This is an increase of about 25% over those in the 1974 survey and may indicate increased awareness and cooperation among all who deal with alcoholics, Dr. Jack said.