

Alcoholism Treatment

The Human Relations Area Files has announced the conclusions reached through a twelve-month review of 134 studies bearing on the effectiveness of Alcoholics Anonymous (A.A.) and counseling in the treatment of alcoholism. The effectiveness of these two approaches is a key issue, as more than 50 per cent of the 2 million people treated for alcoholism in the United States each year are involved in one or both of these types of programs.

The key conclusions about Alcoholics Anonymous are:

There is no scientific evidence that Alcoholics Anonymous is more effective than other approaches used in alcoholism treatment. What evidence does exist suggests that A.A. is about as effective as most other approaches.

The majority of people who turn to A.A. for help with their abusive drinking drop out of the program before they become meaningfully involved in it. In this regard, A.A. is much like other programs, which also suffer from high dropout rates.

Alcoholics Anonymous seems to be most effective when used for follow-up care by persons who have recently completed an inpatient rehabilitation program,

While Alcoholics Anonymous attracts a wide range of people from all walks of life, it is clear that A.A. works for only a minority of alcoholics. Unfortunately, research to date has not yet identified

the specific social and psychological characteristics which distinguish those people most likely to benefit from involvement in A.A.

The key conclusion about Al-Anon (for relatives/friends of alcoholics) is:

Members of Al-Anon who are married to men with drinking problems are better able to cope than nonmembers with their husbands' abusive drinking and related problems.

The key conclusions about counseling are:

Although hard scientific evidence is lacking, the available evidence suggests that counseling is often an effective component of the alcoholism treatment program.

Recovered alcoholics are not more effective counselors than nonalcoholics.

Counselors with extensive work or professional experience are not necessarily more effective than those with limited experience.

Participation in a formal counselor training program often increases a counselor's knowledge about alcoholism and sharpens his or her therapeutic skills.

The review project was directed by David Levinson and resulted in the publication of *A Guide to Alcoholism Treatment Research: Volume III. Alcoholics Anonymous and Counseling.*