

Title: Helping behaviors by alcoholics with long-term sobriety.

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Summary:

Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) and 12-step facilitated treatments encourage individuals with substance use disorders (SUD) to consider the needs of others and engage in helping behaviors as a method to become sober. Only a handful of prospective studies have examined the link between helping behaviors to both becoming sober and maintaining sobriety. Although the benefits of helping behaviors to the first year of sobriety have been demonstrated, very little is known about the role of helping behaviors in long-term sobriety. It is not clear whether helping behaviors increase or decrease over the course of long-term sobriety, or whether helping behaviors in particular areas of life are more important than others. The purpose for the present study was to provide preliminary data to examine the long-term course of helping behaviors in multiple domains of life (home, work, community, AA) as measured by the Prosocial Behavior Questionnaire (PBQ). Adults with 20+ years of sobriety were contacted to participate in this study through their alumni membership in chemical dependency treatment. Eleven of the fifteen adults identified with this length of sobriety decided to participate and completed the PBQ anonymously. Participants completed the PBQ in reference to three points in time: the month prior to treatment, the month of their first year anniversary, and in the past month (year 20 of sobriety). Internal reliability ranged from moderate to high among each 9 item scale across life domains (Cronbach's alpha = 0.61–0.92). Controlling for baseline level of helping behaviors (one month prior to treatment), helping behaviors at one year of sobriety were highest in the domain of AA in comparison to home, work, and community. This pattern was also seen at more than 20 years of sobriety, with the exception that levels of helping behaviors at home significantly increased to comparable levels as those within AA. Helping behaviors within AA were consistently rated as very important to sobriety. Utilization of the PBQ in larger studies is needed to confirm the validity of this instrument. Helping behaviors in AA appear to be important to early and long-term recovery.

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