

About

1998 Membership Survey: A Snapshot of A.A. Membership

Folk wisdom in Alcoholics Anonymous suggests that if you ask a dozen members a question, chances are you'll receive a dozen different answers—all delivered with absolute conviction. Mindful of the lack of objective information about A.A. membership, and concerned that A.A.s and professionals alike were hampered in helping alcoholics because of it, the trustees of the General Service Board decided in 1968 to begin conducting anonymous surveys of the membership. The first such survey was implemented in 1968, and succeeding surveys have been taken every three years (except for 1995, when the survey was deferred a year by General Service Conference Action).

At first, the data were treated with caution. Dr. John L. Norris, then chair (nonalcoholic) of the General Service Board, observed that "members who filled out the questionnaire represent only those who attended the particular meetings at which the survey was conducted," and the sample overall consisted of members who attended meetings most frequently. In succeeding years, though, data within the survey made it possible to compensate for frequent meeting attendance, and the adoption of a scientific sampling process in 1983 allowed the use of significantly fewer questionnaires with no decrease in accuracy. Today, survey results can be used reliably to provide information about A.A. as a whole, though not necessarily about any one group or area.

Survey results over the years have highlighted significant trends in the nature and composition of A.A.'s membership. The founding members in the 1930s and '40s were predominantly men, well along in years; many tended to doubt the ability of women to get sober—and some told young people to go out and come back when they'd had enough to drink. Those days are long gone. The percentage of women members, negligible in the beginning, had already risen to 22% in 1968, and climbed to 35% by 1989; it then dipped to 33% in 1996 and then went up to 34% in 1998. The rising number of younger people coming to the Fellowship has been one of the most encouraging trends. In 1968, the average age of members was 46, compared to 41 in 1989. The average age is now leveling off, with 45 years in 1998, up slightly from 44 in 1996 and 42 in 1992. Within that average, about half the membership is under the age of 50, with 2% under 21, 9% in the 30 or under group, 28% aged 31-40, and 30% aged 41-50.

Last summer, questionnaires for 639 randomly selected A.A. groups were distributed through delegates of the General Service Conference, with the request that they be filled out within a designated time frame. Questions (consistent with those of preceding years) ran the gamut from age,

gender, marital status, and occupation to frequency of meeting attendance, length of sobriety, method of introduction to A.A., group membership, sponsorship, whether members sought professional help before and after sobriety, and whether they inform their doctors about A.A. membership. A total of 6,800 forms were completed and returned to the General Service Office, where results were tabulated by G.S.O.'s Electronic Data Processing department.

In addition to age and gender data, the survey shows that A.A.s come from the widest possible variety of occupations. The average length of sobriety is more than 7 years, with 47% sober more than 5 years (up from 45% in the last survey), 26% between one and 5, and 27% less than a year. Members attend an average of two meetings a week; 85% belong to a home group, and 75% have a sponsor.

The 1968 survey clarified the need for A.A. to work more closely with professionals in the field, and culminated in the formation of a Professional Relations Committee (now Cooperation With the Professional Community). Succeeding surveys have underlined the importance of outside help in pointing alcoholics toward A.A. and in providing additional help during sobriety. In 1998, 34% of members were introduced to A.A. through treatment facilities, 11% by court order, and 17% by a counseling agency or health care provider. Before coming to A.A., 60% of members received some type of treatment or counseling, and 75% of those members said it played an important part in directing them to A.A. After coming to A.A., 62% of members received some type of treatment or counseling, and 83% of those believe it was important to their recovery. As in the past several surveys, 75% report that their doctors know they are in A.A.

Results of the survey are available in an update of the leaflet "Alcoholics Anonymous Membership Survey," (P-48), 2.15.

A.A. to Celebrate 65 Years in 2000

June 29 to July 2, Minneapolis, Minnesota will be the site of A.A.'s International Convention, celebrating 65 years of sobriety around the world.

Beginning with the first, in Cleveland, Ohio, in 1950, A.A.'s International Conventions have often been milestones in the growth of our Fellowship. Held every five years to celebrate the anniversary of A.A.'s founding, International Conventions have grown to be some of the

largest events of their kind in the world. International Conventions are a joyous fun time: to celebrate sobriety, to greet old and new friends, to renew the miracle and wonder of the Fellowship. For non-A.A.s and the World at large it is an opportunity to witness the success and growth of A.A. around the world.

Specialized Literature Fills Linguistic And Other Special Needs

The General Service Office stocks a wide-ranging inventory of A.A. material in numerous languages and dialects, as well as books and tapes for the use of members with special needs. The Big Book, *Alcoholics Anonymous*, is available from G.S.O. in more than 32 languages, as well as a number of special formats: large type, audio cassette, Braille, American Sign Language (the first 11 chapters on video), 3.5" diskettes for Microsoft Windows, a portable edition, and an abridged soft-cover pocket version.

It has long been recognized that the A.A. message spreads fastest when literature is available, and the ongoing task of translating A.A. literature into other languages and producing it in special formats is high on the list of priorities for A.A. service offices throughout the world. Much of the A.A. literature is also available in Spanish and French. Within the U.S. and Canada, basic materials have been translated into a number of Native American aboriginal languages, in both print and audio cassette form.

The catalog, Conference-approved Literature & Other Service Material, lists publications produced both here and overseas in many languages, as well as information on ordering directly from other A.A. service centers.

An especially helpful service piece is "A.A. Literature and Audiovisual Material for Special Needs" which lists material for the blind, visually impaired, deaf, and hard-of-hearing members. In addition to the Big Book, such resources as *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, *Daily Reflections*, and three basic pamphlets have been published in Braille, and several books and pamphlets are also available in large-print versions, as well as on audiotape cassette. Another source of A.A. information and individual experience is a selection of audio cassettes of Grapevine articles, produced by the A.A. Grapevine and listed in the Grapevine catalog.

The Big Book and *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* may be ordered in American Sign Language, and a number of A.A. videos are available with close captioning. In addition, several pamphlets have been produced in easy-to-read format.

New Services Now Part of A.A. Web Site

In April 1999, several new features were added to the G.S.O.'s A.A. Web Site (www.alcoholics-anonymous.org). A click of the mouse will now bring you current issues of the *About A.A.* newsletter, as well as the service piece "Information on Alcoholics Anonymous." Another key service for professionals is an e-mail response form for requesting additional information about Alcoholics Anonymous.

G.S.O.'s Web Site was inaugurated in December 1997 as a public information tool. Available in English, Spanish and French, it provides accurate and consistent information about Alcoholics Anonymous to the general public, the media, and professionals. The Web Site features extensive background information in the A.A. Fact File and three pamphlets—"Is A.A. for You?," "A Message to Teenagers," and "A Newcomer Asks." The anonymity letter to the media, a list of central offices/intergroups in the U.S. and Canada, and a list of international general service offices, along with links to their web sites, all widen the scope of information about A.A.—what it is, where to find it. You can also log on to find out about the International Convention 2000, and beginning September 1, 1999, it will be possible to register electronically for the Convention.

More insight into A.A. is reflected in the personal experience of individual members, awaits when you use the hyperlink to A.A.'s international monthly journal, the A.A. Grapevine (www.aagrapevine.org). The pocket-sized monthly, written by A.A. members with occasional articles by friends of A.A., offers a practical inside view into how A.A.s stay sober and features articles by a cross section of members.

A glance at the number of hits on G.S.O.'s A.A. Web Site over the past two years makes it clear that this electronic medium is doing an effective job of making information about A.A. available. In January 1998, 27,613 inquiries were recorded; in June, 29,641; in October, 38,578; and in December, 41,217. Thus far in 1999—in January there were 46,778, in March it peaked at 61,338 and then went down each following month, to 55,800 in June.

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