

About AA

A.A. Surveys Its Membership: A Demographic Report

The General Service Office of Alcoholics Anonymous has conducted a triennial survey of its membership since 1968. This demographic analysis is intended to inform A. A. members and the professional community of current trends in membership characteristics measured against the results of previous surveys. The 1986 survey is the seventh such survey and is as comprehensive as previous ones although the sample was slightly smaller than in 1983: 7,000 members in the United States and Canada took part in the scientifically designed study. The sample was constructed by selecting at random a number of groups roughly proportional to the registered number of groups in each area.

The focus in these results is on broad trends and characteristics of the Fellowship as they are represented by U.S./Canada averages. An analysis of variance of the various characteristics has not yet been done. However, the sample is so large that the confidence limits for sampling error of most overall U.S./Canada averages can be expected to be very narrow. For example, the 90% confidence limits of the proportion of women (34%) are less than $\pm 3\%$.

New Trends

Survey results continued to indicate a strong increase in the percentage of members who, in addition to their alcoholism, were addicted to drugs. On the other hand, the relative membership of young people seems to be almost stationary after a past trend of steady increase.

How the Survey Was Constructed

As Table 1 shows, the size of this latest A.A. sample is the smallest in any year since its inception. Its validity continues to be high, however, because of the random sampling techniques used. The 1986 results are also consistent with trends previously observed, thereby suggesting a reasonable validity of all the surveys.

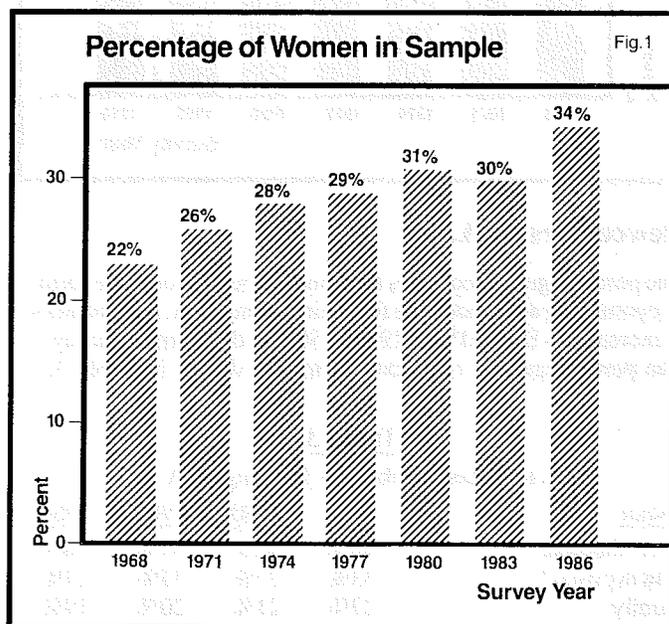
Table 1

Year of survey	Reported membership of U.S./Can. groups	Size of sample
1968	170,000	11,355
1971	210,000	7,194
1974	331,000	13,467
1977	404,000	15,163
1980	476,000	24,950
1983	653,000	7,611
1986	803,000	6,977

The sample is biased toward alcoholics who attend meetings frequently, but since "frequency of meeting attendance" is measured by the questionnaire, this bias can be removed. Such calculations indicate that most results are the same, to two significant figures, for this sample and for the sampled population. One important departure is the measurement of age distribution where the proportion of young people is probably one or two percentage points less than the sample indicates, since they indicate somewhat more frequent meeting attendance.

Women in A.A.

The percentage of women in the sample was 34% — a slight increase from the percentage indicated in the 1983 survey (Fig. 1). The ratio of men to women in A.A. is, as before, approximately two to one.



Young People in A.A.

The percentage of young people (defined as those 30 years of age or younger) in the sample was 21% — an insignificant increase from the last survey. This result seems to indicate the abatement of a nine year trend during which there was a steady increase of membership among young people.

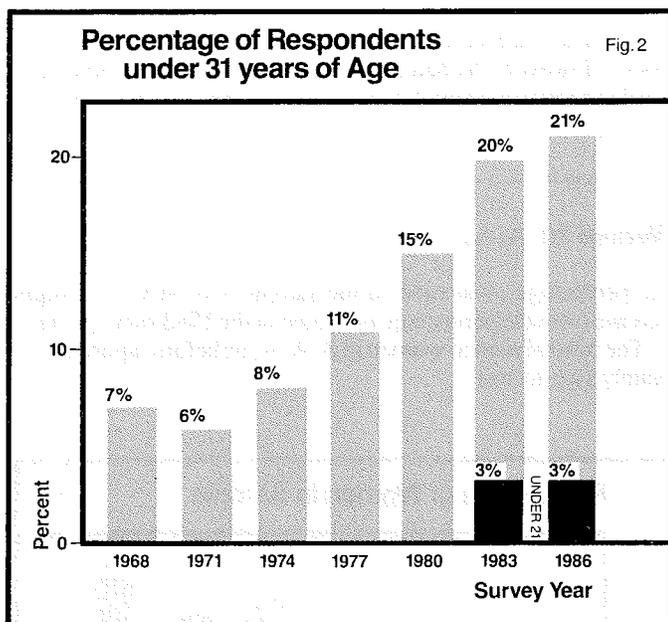
Characteristics of Young People

The separate analysis of young people conducted in 1983 was not repeated in this latest survey, but the results of that analysis are reproduced here in Table 2 for comparison with other results.

Table 2

Characteristic	Total	Under 31	Under 21*
Percent of women	30%	33%	42%
Average sobriety (mos.)	45	17	11
Addicted to drugs	31%	60%	79%
A.A. member important	38%	35%	33%
Couns. & rehab important	30%	38%	51%

*These 1983 data were from an enriched, larger sample specifically aimed at young people.



Newcomers to A.A.

The percentage of alcoholics that credit a 'rehab' or some form of counseling as responsible for their coming to A.A. continues to increase — from 31% in 1980 to 36% in this current survey. The percentage that cite other factors is shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Factors Responsible for Coming to A.A.

Factor	1977	1980	1983	1986
A.A. member	44%	42%	37%	36%
"On my own"	33%	27%	27%	27%
Family	22%	21%	20%	19%
Couns. & rehab	19%	26%	31%	36%
Doctor	10%	9%	7%	7%

Alcoholics Also Addicted to Drugs

Those in the sample reporting addiction to a drug (in addition to their alcoholism) rose to 38% from the 31% observed in the 1983 survey. The trend since 1977, when this question was first included in the survey, is shown in Table 4.

Table 4

% Addicted to Drugs

	1980	1983	1986
Women	34%	40%	45%
Men	20%	27%	35%
All	24%	31%	38%

Additional Highlights

Some other observations and insights:

- The average length of sobriety (total abstinence from alcohol) of those reporting was 51 months — somewhat greater than reported in previous years.
- The average member in this sampling attends between three and four meetings a week.
- The age of those taking part in the 1986 survey ranged from 12 years of age to over 85.

Two New Films Available

- "Young People and A.A.," a 28-minute film approved by the General Service Conference, in which young A.A. members share their experience, strength and hope, will be available late fall. Cost of the film will be: \$15 for 1/2" videocassette, with closed captions for the hearing impaired. Also available for sale, 16mm print, \$150; \$35 weekly rental.
- "It Sure Beats Sitting in a Cell," is a new 17-minute film based on material contained in the A.A. pamphlet of the same name. In it, various A.A. members whose drinking led to their imprisonment, tell their stories. Cost of 1/2" videocassette will be \$15, with closed captions for the hearing impaired. Available for sale, 16mm print, \$100; or \$35 weekly rental.

Bill W. Letters

Laud Outside Friends

A.A. co-founder Bill W. was quick to appreciate that "many streams of influence and many people, some of them non-alcoholics," have helped to carry the message of the Fellowship.

Responding to a complimentary letter written in 1955 by Dr. Howard P. Powell, pastor of the Edenton Street Methodist Church in Raleigh, North Carolina, Bill sends thanks "for every word you said" (about A.A.). "Actually," he explains, "Alcoholics Anonymous could never have come into being or continued to grow without friends like yourself. No one in particular invented A.A. All our ideas have been drawn from religion and medicine; and our friends, by their enthusiastic recommendations, have brought us where we stand today."

Similarly, in a 1959 letter to writer Janet G. Harbison of Princeton, New Jersey, Bill praises "the superb piece you did for *Presbyterian Life*." He adds that he "can't imagine what A.A. would do without its many devoted and understanding friends. We never could have got underway in the first place, nor could we have since continued to develop as we have."

With a quick change of date, observes archivist Frank M., "these letters from Bill would be as fresh and on-target in 1987. It is such remembrances that give the Fellowship a sense of its past, and how that past has shaped what we are today."