



Update

A NEWSLETTER FOR PROFESSIONALS

Australian NA Research Abstracts

"Sharing Private Experience in Drug Treatment Self-Help Groups: Reflections from an Outsider." M. Keenan, J. Toumbourou, G. Storey, C. Clark, and M. Hamilton.

In press.

Although self-help groups are emphasized in government policy and form an accessible component of the drug treatment system, there have been few accounts documenting the processes within such groups offering support for drug treatment and recovery. This paper represents an attempt to "translate" the experience of participating in self-help groups (based on the 12-step Narcotics Anonymous model) from a perspective considered relevant to treatment professionals. The observation, in this study, of flexible, sophisticated, and sensitive group management practices contrasted with many professional expectations. The act of publicly "sharing" private experience was identified as an important ritual within these groups, providing a mechanism for individuals to gradually increase their personal commitment to the groups and for group assumptions to be restated. The possible functional implications of sharing for group affiliation and the process of recovery were explored. Correspondence: Dr. John Toumbourou, Drug and Alcohol Research Team, Department of Public Health, University of Melbourne, 200 Berkeley Street, Carlton, Victoria 3053, Australia.

"The Meaning of Recovery: an Ethnographic Study of NA in Melbourne." Mary O'Brien.

Presented at the ICAA 1996 Congress in San Diego as a work in progress toward publication. There is a diversity of opinion on what constitutes recovery from drug addiction, ranging from the maintenance of a stable lifestyle to abstinence from drug use. Twelve-step programs, advocating abstinence, have been acknowledged as having an important role in the treatment of drug addiction, however they have also been criticized as containing concepts which medicalize and individualize addiction. The aim of this study was to explore the experience and meanings of recovery from addiction for individuals who have been or are currently involved in the Narcotics Anonymous (NA) Fellowship. The data was drawn from an ethnographic study which combined semi-structured in-depth interviews with current or former participants in the NA program, observation at public NA events, and participation in the social world of a small network of NA members. This paper examines the construction of recovery by NA members through themes such as "unmanageability," "powerlessness," and "clean time." An individual's meaning of recovery shifts over time according to their involvement in meetings and other activities of the fellowship such as "working the steps," having an active relationship with a "sponsor," and undertaking "service." The complex relationship between recovery and abstinence is explored, noting that while abstinence may be a necessary component of recovery within the NA program, abstinence from drug use in itself does not constitute recovery. These findings suggest that recovery from drug addiction using a 12-step approach is more processual and dynamic rather than a simple outcome. This suggests that a more complex understanding of NA is required rather than NA as being characterized as simply an abstinence-based program. Correspondence: Mary O'Brien, Centre for the Study of STDs, La Trobe University, 11-13 Lincoln Square South, Locked Bag 12, Carlton South, Victoria 3053, Australia.

Please send us copies or source information on published as well as "fugitive" or "grey" research literature about Narcotics Anonymous. We hope to periodically publish abstracts of the material we receive to make it easier for you to study our organization. If you would like a set of abstracts for the NA research materials we have on file, write to the Communications Officer at our World Service Office.