

Early AA Recovery Rates

Of alcoholics who came to A.A. (from 1935 to 1955) and really tried, 50% got sober at once and remained that way, 25% sobered up after some relapses, and among the remainder, those who stayed on with A.A. showed improvement. (Big Book, page xx.)

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Dr. G. Kirby Collier, psychiatrist: "I have felt that A.A. is a group unto themselves and their best results can be had under their own guidance, as a result of their philosophy. Any therapeutic or philosophic procedure which can prove a recovery rate of 50% to 60% must merit our consideration." (Big Book, page 569.)

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Records in Cleveland show that 93 percent of those who came to us (in the early days) never had a drink again. (Dr. Bob and the Good Oldtimers, page 261.)

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It is probably fair to say that 3 out of 4 who came during that period, and who have since remained with the groups, have recovered from their alcoholism. (Quarterly Journal of Studies on Alcohol, Vol. 6, No. 2. A talk given by Bill Wilson, September 1945.)

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About two thousand recoveries now take place each month. Of those alcoholics who wish to get well and are emotionally capable of trying our method, 50 percent recover immediately, 25 percent after a few backslides. The remainder are improved if they continue active in A.A. Of the total who approach us, it is probable that only 25 per cent become A.A. members on the first contact. A list of seventy-five of our early failures today discloses that 70 returned to A.A. after one to ten years. We did not bring them back; they came of their own accord. (N.Y. State Journal of Medicine Vol. 50. A talk given by Bill Wilson, July 1950.)

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This is from the August 1946 AA Grapevine: "MINNEAPOLIS RECORD INDICATED THAT 75% ARE SUCCESSFUL IN A.A." The Minneapolis Group, in March 1943, inaugurated a system for keeping a record of the sobriety of members from three months on up. As a result, the following exact percentages have been arrived at:

For the Year 1945 -

5 year members - 100% successful, 0% slipped

4 year members - 100% successful, 0% slipped

3 year members - 100% successful, 0% slipped

2 year members - 89% successful, 11% slipped

18 month members - 90% successful, 10% slipped

1 year members - 80% successful, 20% slipped

9 month members - 82% successful, 18% slipped

6 month members - 70% successful, 30% slipped

3 month members - 48% successful, 52% slipped

(Of those who slipped in 1945, only 16½ % have worked back to any degree of sobriety.)

Overall Percentages -

1943 - 78% successful, 22% slipped

1944 - 83% successful, 17% slipped

1945 - 77% successful, 23% slipped

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One-hundred-percent effectiveness with non-psychotic drinkers who sincerely want to quit is claimed by the workers of Alcoholics Anonymous. The program will not work, they add, with those who only "want to want to quit," or who want to quit because they are afraid of losing their families or their jobs. The effective desire, the state, must be based upon enlightened self-interest; the applicant must want to get away from liquor to head off incarceration or premature death. He must be fed up with the stark social loneliness, which engulfs the uncontrolled drinker, and he must want to put some order into his bungled life.

As it is impossible to disqualify all borderline applicants, the working percentage of recovery falls below the 100-percent mark.

According to A.A. estimation, fifty percent of the alcoholics taken in hand recover immediately; twenty-five percent get well after suffering a relapse or two; and the rest remain doubtful. This rate of success is exceptionally high. (From the March 1941 Saturday Evening Post article by Jack Alexander.)

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Concerning the original twenty nine case histories, it is a deep satisfaction to record, as of 1955, that twenty-two have apparently made full recovery from their alcoholism. Of these fifteen have remained completely sober for an average of seventeen years each, according to our best knowledge and belief. (From page 167 of the Second Edition of the Big Book.)

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For the first time in 10 years he feels he has found a path to a decent life. It's too early to tell whether he'll stay on it, but AA's record of 75 per cent recovered is in his favor. (From the June 26, 1945 Look magazine article called "Case History of an Alcoholic".)

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Complete abstinence appears the only way out, but except in rare cases that has been impossible of attainment. Religion, psychiatry, and medicine have been tried, but with only sporadic success. The members of Alcoholics Anonymous, however, appear to have found an answer, for they claim that at least fifty per cent of those they interest have stopped drinking completely. (From a sermon preached on November 26, 1939 by Rev. Dilworth Lupton at the First Unitarian Church [Universalist - Unitarian], Euclid at East 82nd

Street, Cleveland, Ohio. It was called "Mr. X and Alcoholics Anonymous" and Mr. X was Clarence Snyder. This sermon was turned into one of the first pamphlets concerning A.A.)

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"Members of Alcoholics Anonymous answer a call from a man who admits the liquor habit has completely licked him," the Sacramento Union newspaper of Dec. 12, 1943 reported. In the early days of AA, the Fellowship sought and received more publicity than today. "Fifty per cent of AA 'cures' take effect immediately and are permanent," the article said.

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Greater Little Rock AA was seven years old last March...It is interesting to note that the first five men, the founders of the movement here, all are alive and only one ever had a relapse. They are living, walking proof of the statement that "it works." Records Carefully Kept: The Little Rock Plan (Arkansas) was, we believe, the first of its kind in the country. By adhering strictly to the "Plan" hundreds have been brought into AA and because this group has kept accurate records and statistics, we can report that our success is better than the national average of 75%; or to put it another way, our "slip" record is lower than the 25% expected and reported from other groups over the country. (AA Grapevine, September 1947)

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Philadelphia A.A. Statistics 1940-1941

The Philadelphia A.A. group was formed February 20, 1940

Special Report On AA Work At The Philadelphia General Hospital

December 13, 1940

The following is the complete experience of the Philadelphia A.A. Group with patients of the Philadelphia General Hospital since March 15. On this list are included only those men who have attended at least two or three A.A. meetings and have signified their intention of following the A.A. program.

Brief notes on the various individuals follow:

Joseph A. - Dry seven months, no trouble.

Frank B. - Dry five months, one slip after he left group one month ago.

Herbert C. B. - Dry four months, no trouble.

Joshua D. B. - Probably psychopathic; continuous slips.

Charles J. C. - Dry nine months, no trouble.

John D. - Dry four months through Philadelphia General Hospital and Byberry.

Joseph D. - Dry four months, no trouble.

George G. - Dry one month, no trouble.

John H. H. - Continuous slips before and after hospitalization.

William K. - Dry four months, no trouble.

Alfred K. - Dry four months, no trouble.

Arthur T. McM. - Dry eight months, no trouble.

William P. - Continuous after two hospitalizations, only attended five meetings, no work.

Harry McC. - Dry eleven months, one slip two months ago, hospitalization then.

James S. - Continuous slips before and after hospitalization.

George K. - Continuous trouble up to two months ago, first hospital May.

C. M. M. - Dry nine months, no trouble.

Hugh O'H. - Dry two months, no trouble.

Edmonds P. - Dry nine months, hospitalization recent, trouble since.

William J. P. - Dry three months, no trouble.

James R. - Dry five months, no trouble.

William R. - Dry six weeks, no trouble.

Carl R. - Dry eight weeks.

Biddle S. - Dry four months, hospital trouble now dry one month.

Thomas S. - Dry four months, one slip.

David W. - Dry seven months, no trouble.

William W. - Dry nine months, no trouble.

Margery W. - Dry three months, no trouble.

Nineteen out of twenty-eight who have come through the Philadelphia General Hospital have had no trouble. Of the nine who have had trouble, five have been with the group and had trouble previous to hospitalization.

This list was made at the request of Jack Alexander, writer for the Saturday Evening Post.

(Signed) A. W. Hammer M. D. - Surgeon

(Signed) C. D. Saul, M. D. - Chief resident, Saint Luke's Hospital

(Signed) Philadelphia General Hospital, By: John F. Stouffer M. D. - Chief Psychiatrist

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From:

AA

Philadelphia Group

Post Office Box 332

William Penn Annex
To:
Alcoholic Foundation
30 Vesey Street
New York, N. Y.
December 14, 1940

Gentlemen:

We believe that the time has arrived when we can give you a preliminary statement of the results of the work of Alcoholics Anonymous in Philadelphia since its inception in this city on February 20, 1940. This in effect is a ten months' report but for all practical purposes it can be considered only nine months because about a month was occupied in working out methods of prosecuting the activities.

According to the records of the Group, which have been kept with reasonable accuracy, ninety-nine men and women have during this period attended at least two meetings of the A. A. Group. In other words, they have had a fair opportunity to familiarize themselves with the A. A. program of recovery as given at the Thursday night meetings held at Saint Luke's and Children's Hospital.

Of the ninety-nine, seventy have remained dry without any slip at all; thirteen others are recovering from one or more slips, and sixteen have slipped without recovery up to the present time. It is not impossible that some of these sixteen may yet return to the Group.

Of the seventy, who have been dry without slips, thirty-nine have been dry from one to three months; seventeen from three to six months; twenty-five from six months to a year, and five from one to three years.

Obviously these five were not dried up through the activities of the Philadelphia A. A. Group but have recovered from alcoholism in other localities and through other means.

You can see that the Philadelphia A. A. Group has a core of thirty men who, we have every reason to believe, will never drink again. Seventeen more have gotten by the three months' critical period. It has been our observation that the first three months are the most difficult and that the man who gets by that period has every reason to believe that he is on the road to complete recovery.

We are even more sanguine of results which shall be achieved since we succeeded in opening our clubhouse about one month ago. It is being used extensively, especially by the unmarried men and is proving helpful not only as a social center but as a base for the spreading of the A. A. message.

We can testify as physicians to the increasing interest in A. A. work among members of the medical fraternity and are grateful for the opportunity that the A. A. has given us of assisting in the recovery of the unfortunate victims of alcoholism.

(Signed) A. W. Hammer M. D. - Surgeon

(Signed) C. Dudley Saul, Chief Resident Saint Luke's Hospital

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Statistical Record of Philadelphia Alcoholics Anonymous Group (dated 9/29/41)

The Philadelphia A. A. Group was formed February 27, 1940, with seven men as a nucleus. Six of these are definitely recovered cases.

We consider a man or woman an active member of A. A. when they have been dry in the group two months and have attended at least six general meetings.

We now have an ACTIVE MEMBERSHIP of one hundred and thirteen alcoholics, eighty-three of whom have not had a drink since their first A. A. meeting. Five of these have been dry from two to four years, twenty-seven dry from one to two years, forty-one dry from six to twelve months and twenty-six dry three to six months.

Twenty-three of these active members came directly from the Philadelphia General Hospital, thirteen from other hospitals and institutions.

There have been only twenty-three active members who do not appear to be recovering. These are not included in the above figures. Neither are the fifty other men and women who are now in the process of becoming members.

This gives us a total general membership of Two Hundred men and women.

To the best of our knowledge, the foregoing is correct.

(Signed) Dr. A. Weise Hammer

(Signed) Dr. C. Dudley Saul

Medical directors

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At the first meeting of The Alcoholic Foundation (what later became G.S.O.) on April 11th, 1938, Hank P. was asked to recount the A.A. work to date. The following report was made: In the Eastern section, 41 alcoholics recovered, 6 alcoholics in the questionable class, 12 alcoholics upon whom a great deal of time has been spent but so difficult that the cases are classed as practically hopeless, there are 10 alcoholics who have recovered but who are out of touch with the group, there are at present over 25 prospects to be contacted. (This is a 74% recovery rate.)

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August 10, 1938 Letter from Bill W. to Dr. Esther L. Richards at Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore MD - In Akron, Ohio the experience has been astonishing to say the least. I was out there three years ago on business, and sold three very ordinary alcoholic citizens on this idea. One of those men was a good surgeon, though pretty well shot to pieces with liquor. These three were left with the idea that they must work with other alcoholics or perish themselves, which, by the way, we have found is pretty nearly so. Out there, they have taken on all comers and have gone so far as to take several men out of the State Asylum at Massillon, all of whom are

apparently making good but one. During the first year and a half, these three were successful with approximately ten more. Then the thing began to grow in a sort of geometrical ratio, so that there are now between sixty and seventy on the 'ball'. I should say that much more than half of these men have never had any relapse whatever. Most of the remainder have had one or two relapses and have become still better afterward. The number of people they have been unable to do anything for at all has been small. I would guess that there has been a high degree of success with at least two thirds of all the cases they have approached.

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August 12, 1958

Dear Howard,

Thanks deeply for your highly interesting letter of July 29th. I was thrilled by your account of the Old Timers meeting with the vast sobriety record that it portended. And also your observations on our 50%-25%-25% claim.

I think you have something when you say that perhaps we give false hope to the newcomer by those figures. Actually, those figures have never been intended to apply to all drunks who come within range of A.A. and attend a meeting or so. They apply to those who really come in and take the treatment over a considerable period of time. On that narrow classification, I think the figures will stand up. In Philadelphia, for example, they kept records for a very long time, accurate ones. Not too long ago they case up figures on old timers which seemed to prove our claimed percentages. When the new edition of the A.A. book came out, the same thing happened. The story-tellers had better than the claimed percentage. So I think it ought to be emphasized with each newcomer that his chances are just as the figures say, provided he will jump into A.A. and is willing and capable of working at it.

There is another angle, too. As you say, an awful lot of these people get hospitalized, attend a few meetings and then disappear. What becomes of them?

Probably you've heard me tell the story about a group of 75 of these people that Lois and I once picked out of old address books from the very early days. Over the years, we located more than 60 of them. The 60 had returned to A.A. and most of them had made the grade. Some had been drunk 3, 5, 7, and 10 years. Finally, they were driven back on the do-or-die basis and really got the pitch. So our over-all claims are not excessive in my judgment.

At the office, they continue to get wonderful reports of the change in feeling in your area about the Third Legacy, General Headquarters, and even about me! It is one of the most comforting and gratifying happenings that I can remember in my long A.A. live. Again, Howard, many thanks to you and to all those who have made this possible.

Devotedly,

Bill

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