



# Selected Papers of William L. White

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## Women and Recovery Support Groups

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Early criticisms (Powell, 1987) that AA/NA and other 12 Step groups were not appropriate for women, ethnic minorities, and other special populations have not held up under subsequent investigation. Here are some of the key findings related to women and recovery support groups, with most of this research coming from studies of women who are members of Alcoholics Anonymous or Women for Sobriety.

- In the latest membership survey of AA, 34% of AA members were women (AA, 2006). Female representation in the membership of other support groups has been reported for Narcotics Anonymous (44% ([http://www.na.org/PR/Information\\_about\\_NA.pdf](http://www.na.org/PR/Information_about_NA.pdf)); LifeRing Secular Recovery (42%; White and Nicolaus, 2005); and Secular Organization for Sobriety (28%; Connors, Dermen & Duerr, 1992).
- Women affiliate with AA/NA at the same rates as white men. (Humphreys, et al, 1994).
- Some studies suggest women may have an easier time affiliating with 12-

- step groups than men (e.g., Denzin, 1987; Del Boca & Mattson, 2001). This may be related to the fact that alcoholic women are more socially isolated (tell fewer individuals about their AOD history) and have less support from their partners for recovery (Bischof, et al., 2000).
- Women for Sobriety, founded in 1975 by Dr. Jean Kirkpatrick, is the only addiction recovery support group organized by and for women, although women's meetings in other recovery support fellowships are growing.
- 29% of WFS members concurrently attend AA meetings (Kaskutas, 1992).
- More than 60% of those using those using Internet-based recovery support services are women (Hall & Tidwell, 2003).
- WFS Online membership grew from 10 women to now more than 5,700 women who post more than 1,000 messages per day. The WFS Online community represented at the annual WFS conference now surpasses 50% of those attending. Online

participation in WFS is the tip of the iceberg of support, as online contact is often followed by personal email exchanges, exchange of phone numbers and direct visits between members (Cross, 2007).

- Women whose drinking is rooted within or complicated by sexuality- and gender-specific experiences (e.g., sexual abuse, rape, abandonment by husbands, multiple role responsibilities, doubts about one's adequacy as a woman and mother) may be particularly appropriate for same-sex recovery support meetings (Kaskutas, 1994).

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