

# Qualitative study: Learning from recovery: What do people who have recovered from alcohol dependence have to teach those who are still struggling, including during the time of the Covid-19 pandemic?

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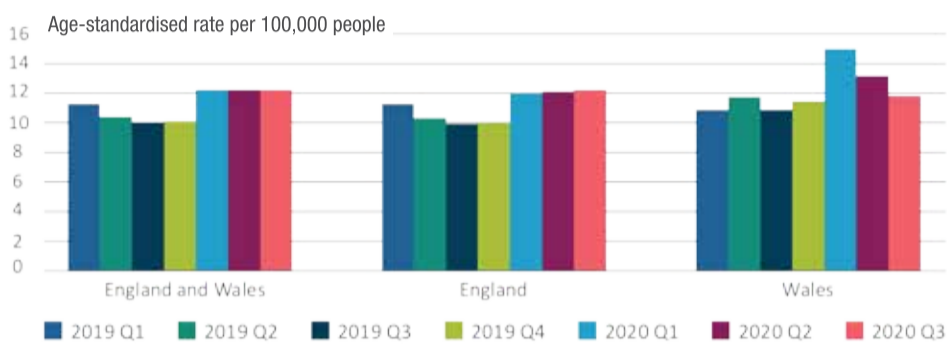
## AIMS AND HYPOTHESIS

The aim was to tap into user experience in the UK and to analyse what lessons can be learnt from those who have recovered from alcohol dependence to help those who are struggling, including to inform the delivery of alcohol services.

## BACKGROUND

Alcohol-related deaths have reached an all-time high during the current Covid pandemic in the UK reaching a peak of 12.8 deaths per 100,000 people in the first three months of 2020 and remained at this level through to September 2020. (Office for National Statistics). This has been attributed to increased alcohol consumption at home and the reduction in the substance misuse services.

Quarterly age-standardised alcohol-specific death rates per 100,000 people, by country; England and Wales, deaths registered between Quarter 1 (Jan to Mar) 2019 and Quarter 3 2020 (July to Sept)



There were 5,460 alcohol-specific deaths registered in England and Wales from January to the end of September 2020, representing a 16.4% increase in the number of registered deaths compared with the same period in 2019 (4,689 deaths). (Office for National Statistics)

Consistent with previous years, rates of male alcohol-specific deaths were twice those of females.

## METHOD

The study was conducted in London, UK. 20 males in the age group 30–45 years were recruited. 10 of these participants had recovered from alcohol dependence and the other 10 were in treatment for alcohol dependency and diagnosed as dependent according to ICD-10 or DSM 5 criteria. In the former group, each participant had at least 2 years of complete sobriety. A semi-structured questionnaire was developed and used to interview all the subjects.

Males 30–45 years were eligible, as alcohol dependence is more common in this age group, and purposive sampling drove the selection (i.e. if early analysis suggests the importance of a particular factor, subjects likely not to show that factor would be sampled for comparison).

Grounded analysis was the qualitative analysis method of choice and constant comparison was used, i.e., data was collected and analysed concurrently.

## RESULTS

The main “families” that arose grouped around relationships in both the recovered alcoholics (RA) and continued alcoholics (CA). A successful shift required a change in the relationship to self, from feeling empty or critical towards acceptance, and this shift was facilitated by being accepted and respected by others.

### Relationship as motivator to stop drinking

24% people had the insight to self-refer to voluntary organisations such as Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) but 76% did so because of fear of losing either their relationship or their job.

Although 80% of recovered alcoholics had been ambivalent about coming off alcohol, the shift happened when they had a nurturing relationship such as a key worker at AA.

### Insight and Perception

Awareness of alcohol as an obstacle rather than a solution was key for change to occur. Although 75% people with insight into their difficulties were more successful in maintaining sobriety, insight alone without action was insufficient. Moreover, action was possible without insight. Fear of death alone was a sufficient motivator.

## CONCLUSIONS

### Implications for support systems

As a result of comparing those patients with alcohol dependence who responded well to treatment with those who were very recalcitrant to treatment important characteristics of an effective service have been identified.

Training sessions for A+E staff about the differences required in management between those with alcohol dependence who are motivated to abstain compared to those who will only be able to reduce consumption should be offered. Mere blanket exhortations to abstain from alcohol consumption should be avoided. The importance of behavioural avoidance of situations where alcohol is excessively consumed is most helpful in terms of eventual outcome.

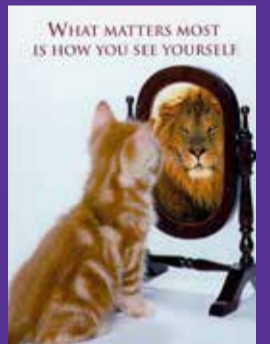
Early involvement with AA greatly improves engagement with treatment programmes subsequently and leads to significantly better outcomes.

During the current Covid19 pandemic, Alcoholics anonymous (AA) have attempted to support individuals virtually and by telephone and such arrangements could be made for them to support A&E staff in their dealing with patients with alcohol problems particularly when all medical services are stretched.

### ALCOHOL – Illusory solution to problems- COMPANION -FUN (Not enduring)



### Incomplete Self Alcohol Dependent Group



### External factors that may impact recovery vs continued alcohol use (initial predictors = isolation, challenging life events)



### Factors influencing the relationship to self (and subsequent recovery vs continued alcohol use)

