

# The elephant outside the room

Thoughts on treatment policy  
from a population perspective

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# The conundrum

- ◆ Most people don't come to treatment
- ◆ 1 in 3 people with a lifetime diagnosis of alcohol abuse or dependence report ever seeking treatment

Cunningham, J. A., & Breslin, F. C. (2004). Only one in three people with alcohol abuse or dependence ever seek treatment. *Addictive Behaviors*, 29 (1), 221-223.

# Addictions Services Used

<b>Treatment</b>	<b>Percent Ever Accessed (n = 1084)</b>
<b>Any service use</b>	<b>35.6</b>
Tell M.D. about substance use	29.7
M.D. ever prescribe medication	3.0
Advise see a mental health specialist	3.9
Refer to alcohol/drug treatment	6.7
Take medication for substance use	3.5
Psychiatrist, Psychologist, Social Worker, Rabbi, Priest, Minister, Counsellor and Others, like Chiropractor	8.1
Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, Other Self-help group	12.3
Inpatient or Outpatient Services	7.3

# Today's talk

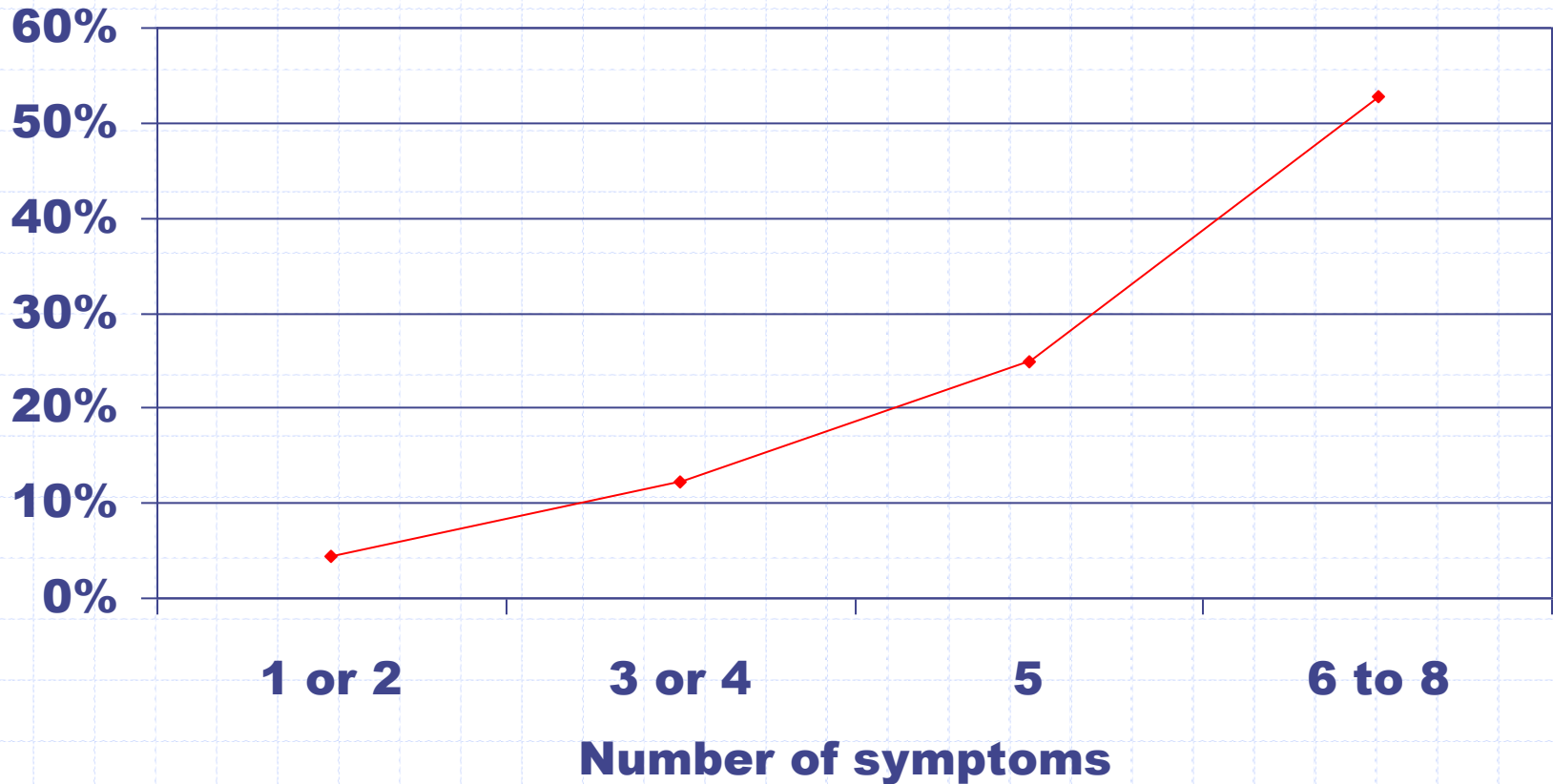
- ◆ Who comes to treatment?
- ◆ Why don't people come to treatment?
- ◆ What happens to people who do not come to treatment?
- ◆ What does the general public think happens?
- ◆ What to do about people who don't seek help?

# Who comes to treatment?

- ◆ Relation to severity of problems
- ◆ Treatment users as active consumers
- ◆ What does it mean when someone says they sought help?
- ◆ Can we show a population impact of treatment?

# Treatment use ever – Canada

**Percent using  
treatment resources**



# Treatment users are active consumers

- ◆ NESARC data – 1484 past year alcohol dependence
  - 12.2% accessed treatment in the last year
    - ◆ 33% accessed one treatment
    - ◆ 22% accessed two different types of treatment
    - ◆ 45% access three or more
  - Extended treatment history
    - ◆ 72% who accessed in the last year also accessed treatment prior to the past year

# Treatment services used by past year alcohol dependent respondents (who accessed treatment in the last year)

Treatment	Percent at least 1 treatment last year (N = 185)	Percent 2 or more treatments last year (N = 123)	Percent 3 or more treatments last year (N = 80)
Alcoholics Anonymous	61	74	86
Private physician, psychiatrist, psychologist, social worker or other professional	55	62	67
Rehabilitation program	<b>36</b>	52	<b>74</b>
Detoxification ward/clinic	<b>31</b>	47	<b>68</b>
Outpatient clinic	26	38	54
Emergency room	22	31	38
Inpatient	21	31	47

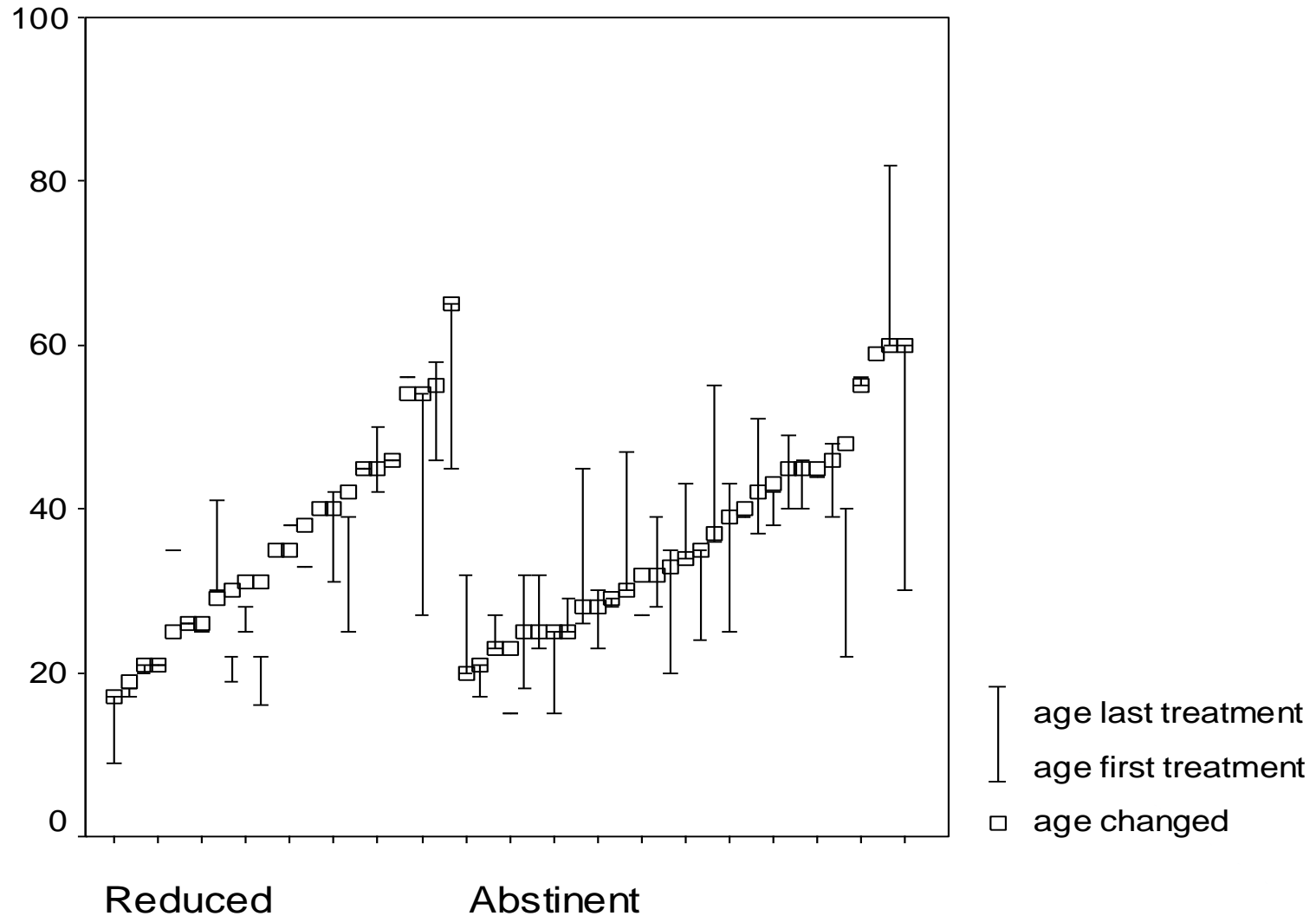


# What does it mean when someone says they sought help?

- ◆ When said that had sought treatment:
  - Had a specific treatment in mind
  - That they completed the treatment program
- ◆ Treatment occurred roughly at the same time as reported successful change from heavy drinking.

Cunningham, J. A., Blomqvist, J., Cordingley, J., & Callaghan, R. (2005). 'Yes, I've received treatment': What does this mean in the context of epidemiological surveys for alcohol problems? *Contemporary Drug Problems*, 32, 457-465.

# Concordance of treatment with age of changing drinking



# Can we show a population level impact of treatment?

- ◆ NHSDUH data, 5370 past year alcohol abuse or dependence
  - 9% had accessed some type of treatment
- ◆ Short term recovery (past month)
  - Abstinent: No treatment = 9%  
Treated = 22%
  - No binge: No treatment = 22%  
Treated = 30%

Cunningham, J. A. (2005). Short-term recovery from alcohol abuse or dependence: any evidence of a relationship with treatment use in a general population sample?  
*Alcohol and Alcoholism*, 40 (5), 419-421.

# Summary so far

- ◆ Most people don't come to treatment
- ◆ Those who do have more severe problems/consequences
- ◆ Treatment users are active consumers
  - Multiple treatment use the norm
- ◆ Change in drinking roughly corresponds with time of treatment use
- ◆ Some evidence of treatment impact at a population level

# But ... Prevention Paradox

- ◆ Most of the harm from alcohol use comes from people with less severe problems
- ◆ What is the goal of a treatment system?
  - Help people who come to treatment or address population level harm?

# Why don't people come to treatment?

- ◆ Stigma and labeling
- ◆ Limited availability
- ◆ Want to handle problem on their own
- ◆ Problem perception
- ◆ From gambling – part of the solution, not just the problem

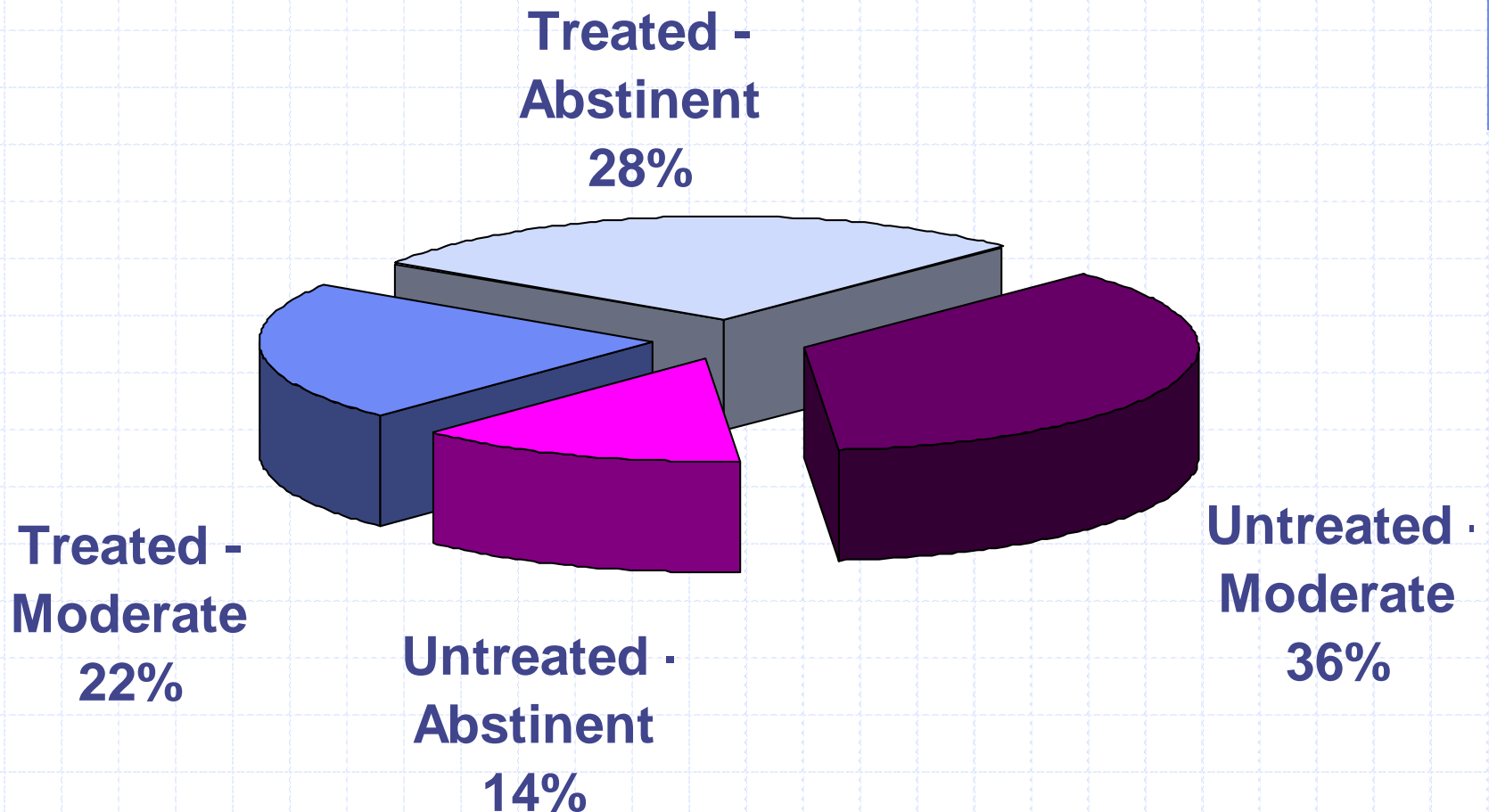
Cunningham, J. A., Sobell, L. C., Sobell, M. B., Agrawal, S., & Toneatto, T. (1993).  
Barriers to treatment: Why alcohol and drug abusers delay or never seek treatment.  
*Addictive Behaviors, 18*, 347-353.

# What happens to people who do not come to treatment?

## ◆ Natural history of alcohol problems

- How common is self-change?
- What factors are associated with untreated recovery?
- Does self-change occur in all addictive behaviours?

# Remitted from Alcohol Abuse or Dependence - OHS



Cunningham, J. A., Lin, E., Ross, H. E., & Walsh, G. W. (2000). Factors associated with untreated remissions from alcohol abuse or dependence. *Addictive Behaviors*, 25 (2), 317-321.



# Varying the severity of prior problems - CADS

Recovery Pathway	Number of Prior Problems Ever Experienced				
	Two or more (n = 569)	Three or more (n = 417)	Four or more (n = 309)	Five or more (n = 211)	All Six (n = 109)
<b>% (n1) Treated</b>	<b>19.3</b>	<b>25.5</b>	<b>29.7</b>	<b>38.6</b>	<b>46.3</b>
% (n1) Abstinent	93.0	92.8	93.3	92.4	93.0
% (n1) Moderate Drinker	--	--	--	--	--
<b>% (n2) Untreated</b>	<b>80.7</b>	<b>74.5</b>	<b>70.3</b>	<b>61.4</b>	<b>53.7</b>
% (n2) Abstinent	53.4	56.8	62.0	73.6	80.5
% (n2) Moderate Drinker	46.6	43.2	38.0	26.4	--

Cunningham, J. A. (1999). Resolving alcohol-related problems with and without treatment: The effects of different problem criteria. *Journal of Studies on Alcohol*, 60, 463-466. 17

# Factors related to self-change

- ◆ The more severe the problem, the more likely treatment was used
- ◆ **Self-change common even when severe definition of problem used**



What about other drugs?

# Service use of prior drug users - CADS

	<b>Cannabis (1531)</b>	<b>Cannabis Regular (783)</b>	<b>Cocaine/ Crack (415)</b>	<b>LSD (555)</b>	<b>Speed (257)</b>	<b>Heroin (64)</b>
<b>% Any treatment</b>	<b>5.8</b>	<b>9.0</b>	<b>16.0</b>	<b>14.1</b>	<b>20.4</b>	<b>34.5</b>
% Drug related	3.1	5.2	10.4	9.5	14.3	--
% Alcohol related	3.9	5.8	10.9	8.4	14.1	--
<b>% Police contact</b>	<b>5.7</b>	<b>9.8</b>	<b>21.9</b>	<b>20.8</b>	<b>24.8</b>	<b>50.6</b>

Cunningham, J. A. (1999). Untreated remissions from drug use: The predominant pathway. *Addictive Behaviors, 24* (2), 267-270.

# Prior drug dependence – treatment use in the NLAES

	<b>Cannabis (600)</b>	<b>Cocaine/ Crack (375)</b>	<b>LSD (98)</b>	<b>Speed (280)</b>	<b>Heroin (42)</b>
<b>% Any treatment</b>	<b>43.1</b>	<b>59.7</b>	<b>65.4</b>	<b>53.6</b>	<b>90.7</b>
% Drug related	27.2	44.5	45.9	38.3	69.8
% Alcohol related	34.5	45.7	61.5	46.2	73.9

Cunningham, J. A. (2000). Remissions from drug dependence: Is treatment a prerequisite?  
*Drug and Alcohol Dependence, 59*, 211-213.

# What does the general public think happens?

- ◆ Never really been asked?
- ◆ But, treatment and abstinence viewed as necessary for recovery

# Beliefs about alcohol problems

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% Possible to <b>fix drinking problems on own</b> , without getting any treatment	41.5
% Former problem drinkers can reduce drinking to that of a <b>social drinker</b>	28.9
% Strongly agree alcohol abuse best seen as a form of:	
<b>disease</b> or illness	46.1
<b>wrongdoing</b>	26.3
<b>habit</b> , not disease	29.2
<b>drug addiction</b>	51.0

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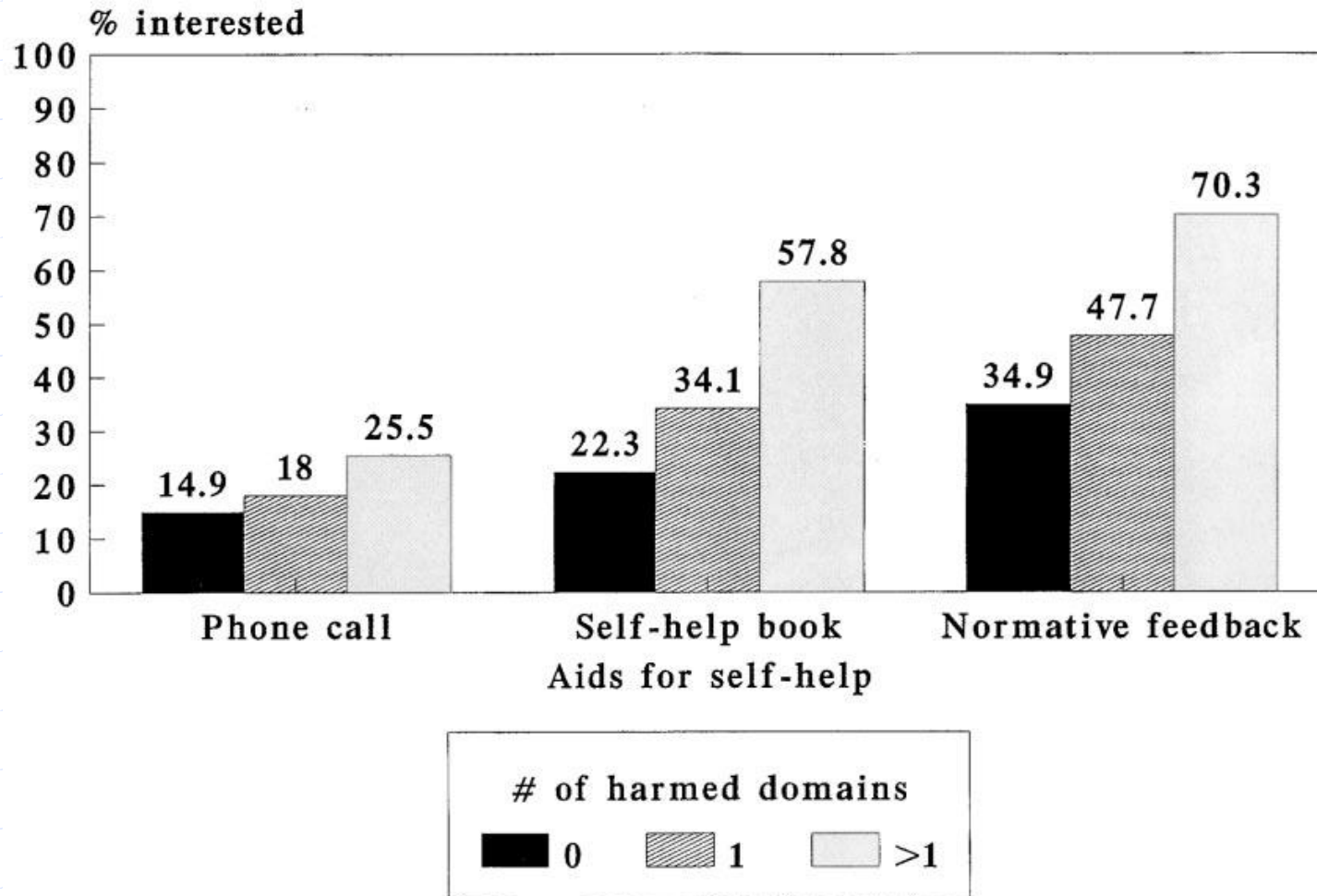
Cunningham, J. A., Blomqvist, J., & Cordingley, J. (2007). Beliefs about drinking problems: results from a general population telephone survey. *Addictive Behaviors, 32* (1), 166-169.

# What to do about people who don't seek help?

- ◆ If people don't seek treatment and most deal with their problems by themselves, is there a problem?
  - Prevention paradox
  - What is our mandate?
  - Most problem drinkers are interested in some type of help



# Interest in different types of self-help by severity of problems



Koski-Jännes, A., & Cunningham, J. A. (2001). Interest in different forms of self-help in a general population sample of drinkers. *Addictive Behaviors, 26*, 91-99.

# One part of the solution

- ◆ Take treatment to people rather than making people come to treatment
  - Brief interventions in other health care and social support settings, helplines, self-help materials, Internet, etc.
- ◆ A grey area between public health (taxes, drinking driving laws, availability) and treatment (individual level help)

# Continuum of intervention strategies

