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Treatment Staff Attitudes
to Twelve Step Groups in
the UK

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Mutual help organizations

- **Mutual help organizations** are peer-led fellowships of individuals who share a problem or status
- Spiritual and religious mutual help organizations provide assistance to more addicted people than all professional treatments combined
- The 12-step model has a number of therapeutic elements
 - strategies that promote the development of spirituality
 - practical strategies to combat dependence
- Worldwide membership of 12-step organizations is 6 million
- UK has 3000 AA and 300 NA meetings per week

Do 12-Step organizations work?

- Research supporting AA's ability to reduce problem drinking is comparable to that for other ambulatory interventions (Humphreys 2006)
- AA attendance associated with improved functioning and abstinence (Emrick 1993, Tonigan 2003)
- Some research evidence for a positive association between NA attendance and positive drug-using outcomes (Christo & Franey 1995; Fiorentine 1999)

Do 12-Step organizations work?

- Project MATCH – 1726 clients
 - AA-orientated 12-step facilitation therapy (TSF) compared to cognitive-behavioural and motivational enhancement
 - TSF emphasised participating in AA & working the 12 steps
 - TSF outcomes were as positive, and in some cases more positive, than for non-spiritual treatments
 - Outpatients in TSF were significantly more likely to remain continuously abstinent (by a difference of 11%) and this effect persisted 3 years after treatment

What influences AA/NA attendance?

- The level and type of substance use
- The historical development of AA or NA within that society
- The structure, extent and ideology of the professional treatment system

Relationship with professional treatment

- 12-Step principles incorporated within many US treatment programmes (Humphreys 1999)
- Clients treated in 12-step-oriented programmes have significantly greater involvement in self-help groups at follow-up (Humphreys 1999; Humphreys & Moos 2001)
- Enthusiasm for the 12-Step approach is high amongst treatment workers in the US (Forman et al 2001; Humphreys 1997)
- Clinicians are increasingly interested in facilitating patient involvement in self-help groups

Relationship with professional treatment

- Likelihood of treatment staff highlighting the benefits of AA/NA attendance may depend on
 - the chosen treatment goal
 - their level of knowledge about the process
 - their attitude towards the AA/NA Fellowship/12-Step approach

Research questions

- How much do UK substance use treatment staff feel they know about AA or NA?
- What are their their attitudes and beliefs about 12-Step therapy?
- What are the individual factors that are associated with an increased likelihood of referral to AA or NA meetings
 - perceived level of knowledge about the 12 Steps and the AA/NA Fellowship
 - professional group
 - place of work
 - perceived level of spirituality

Results

- **73 agencies identified – 61 participated**
 - 5 declined to take part and 7 no longer in existence
- **487 staff members identified & 346 (71%) replied**
 - 147 (42.5%) drug workers
 - 87 (25.1%) nurses
 - 70 (20.2%) counselors (individuals with at least a basic qualification in counselling employed to offer one-to-one or group therapy)
 - 42 (12.2%) others

Demographics

- 63% female
- working in the substance misuse treatment field for a mean of 70 months (range 2 – 252)

- 48% treated only drug users
- 21% only alcohol users
- 31% a combination of both primary drug or alcohol users

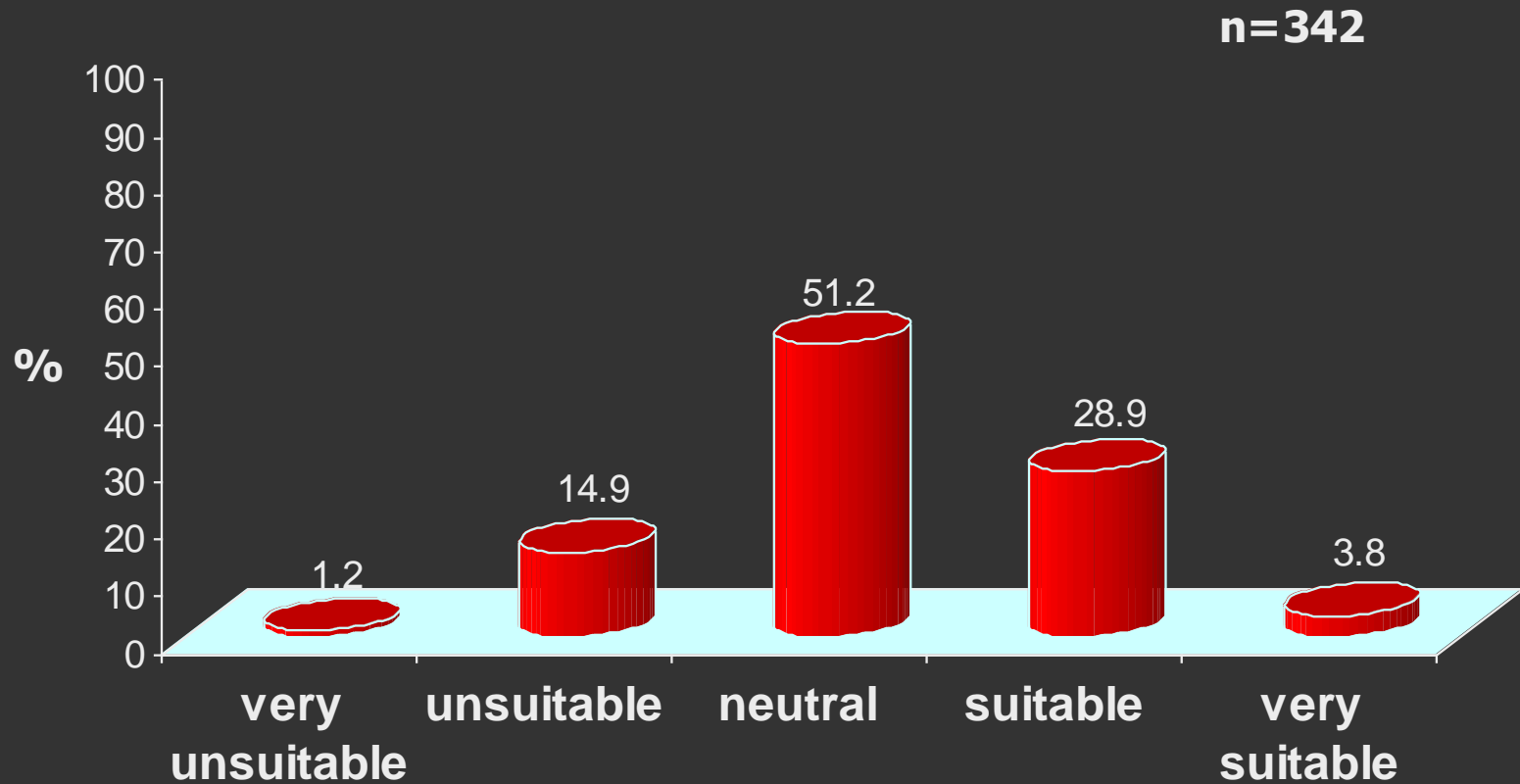
- 58% worked for the NHS

Knowledge and experience of AA/NA

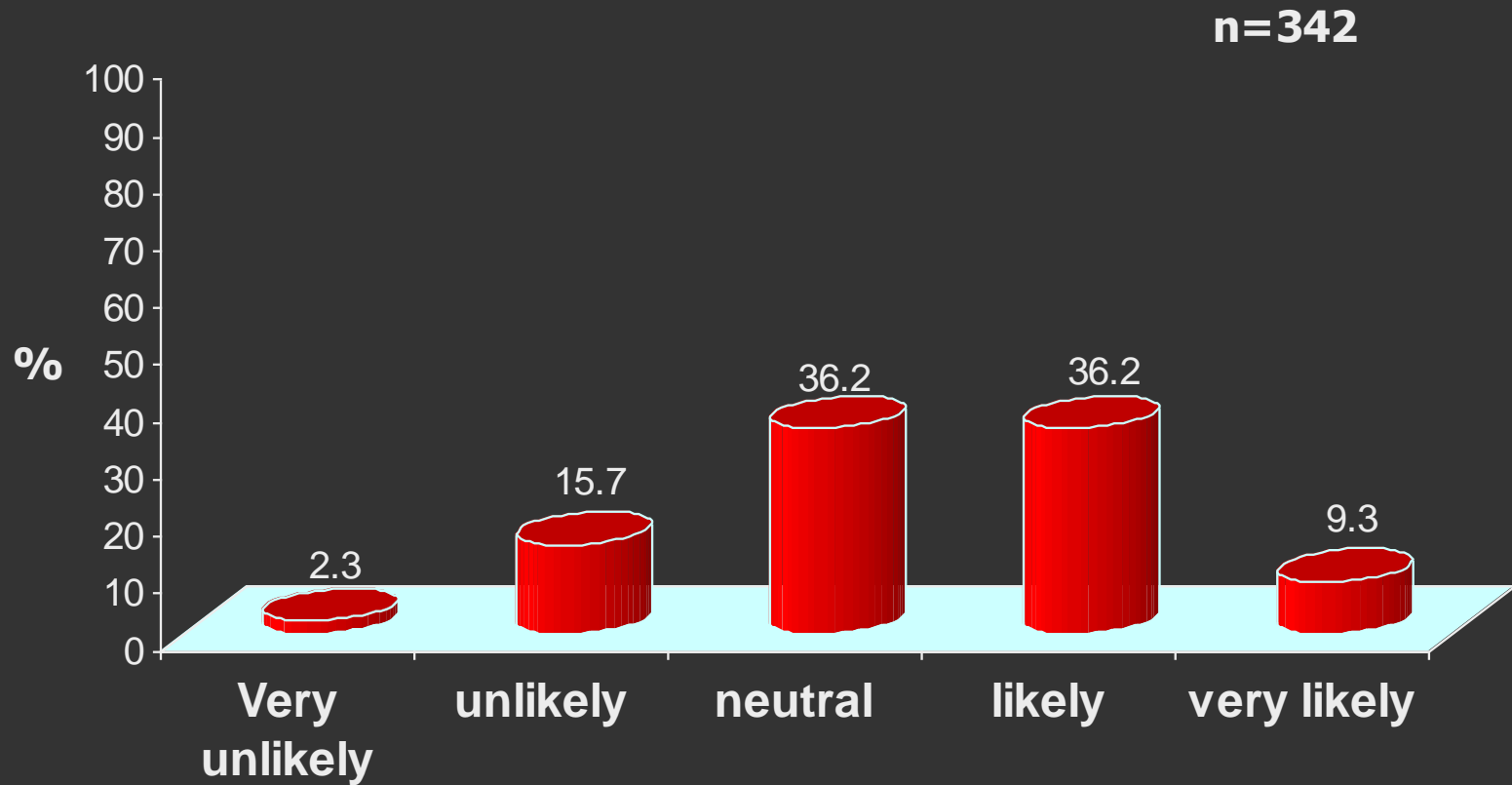
- **113 (32.7%)** rated knowledge as 'high' or 'very high'
 - **Drug workers 25.9%**
 - **Nurses 39.1%**
- **114 (32.9%)** had attended either an AA or NA meeting
- **32 (9.2%)** used the 12 Steps in their treatment work

- **10.6% of clients** were estimated to attend either AA or NA
 - **lowest for workers that only treated drug users (mean = 3.5%)**
 - **higher in those treating just alcohol users (10.4%)**
 - **highest in those treating both sets of clients (19.1%)**

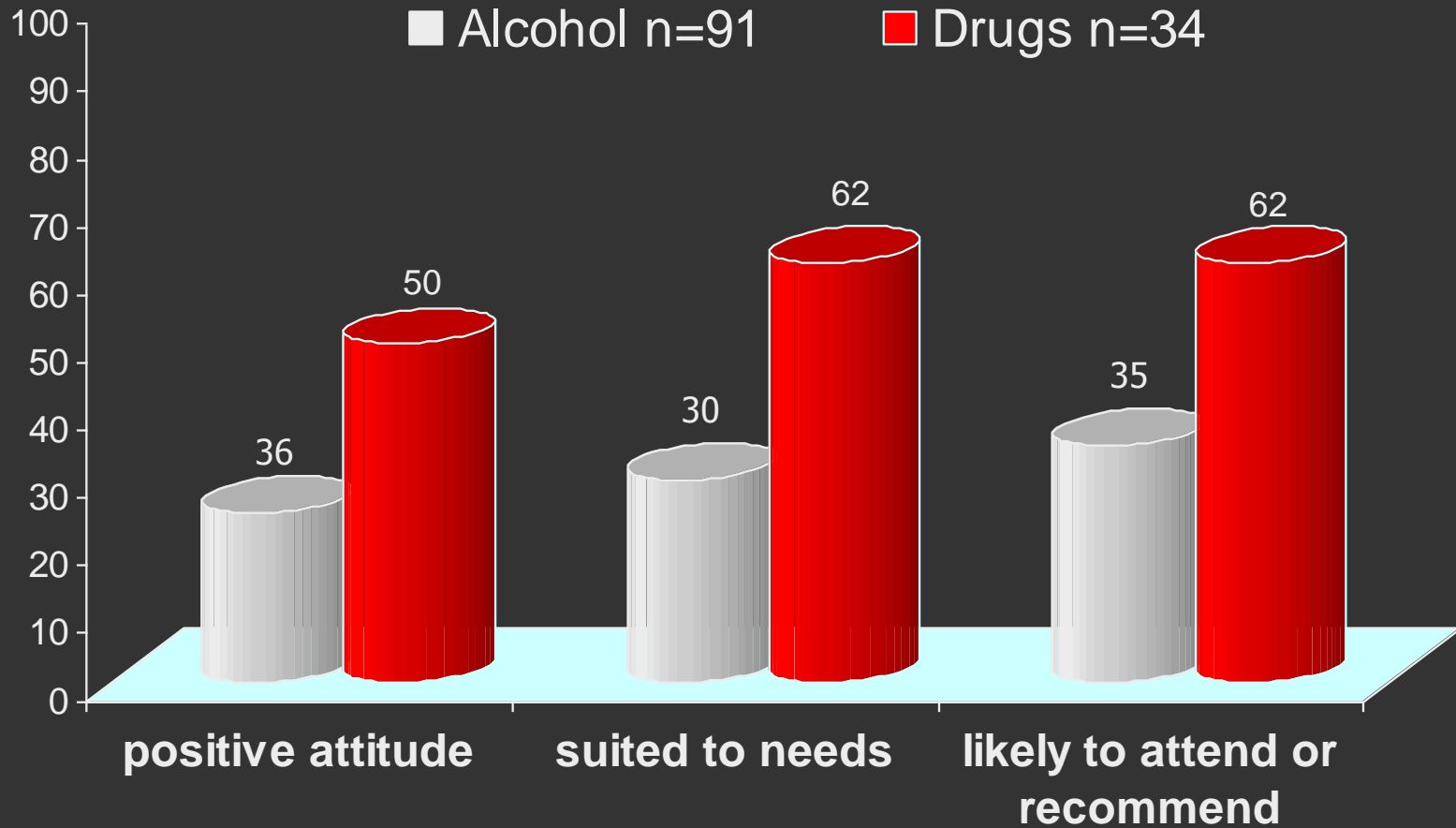
How would you describe your attitude to AA/NA?



How suited are your clients to AA/NA?



How likely are you to recommend AA/NA to your clients?



Spirituality

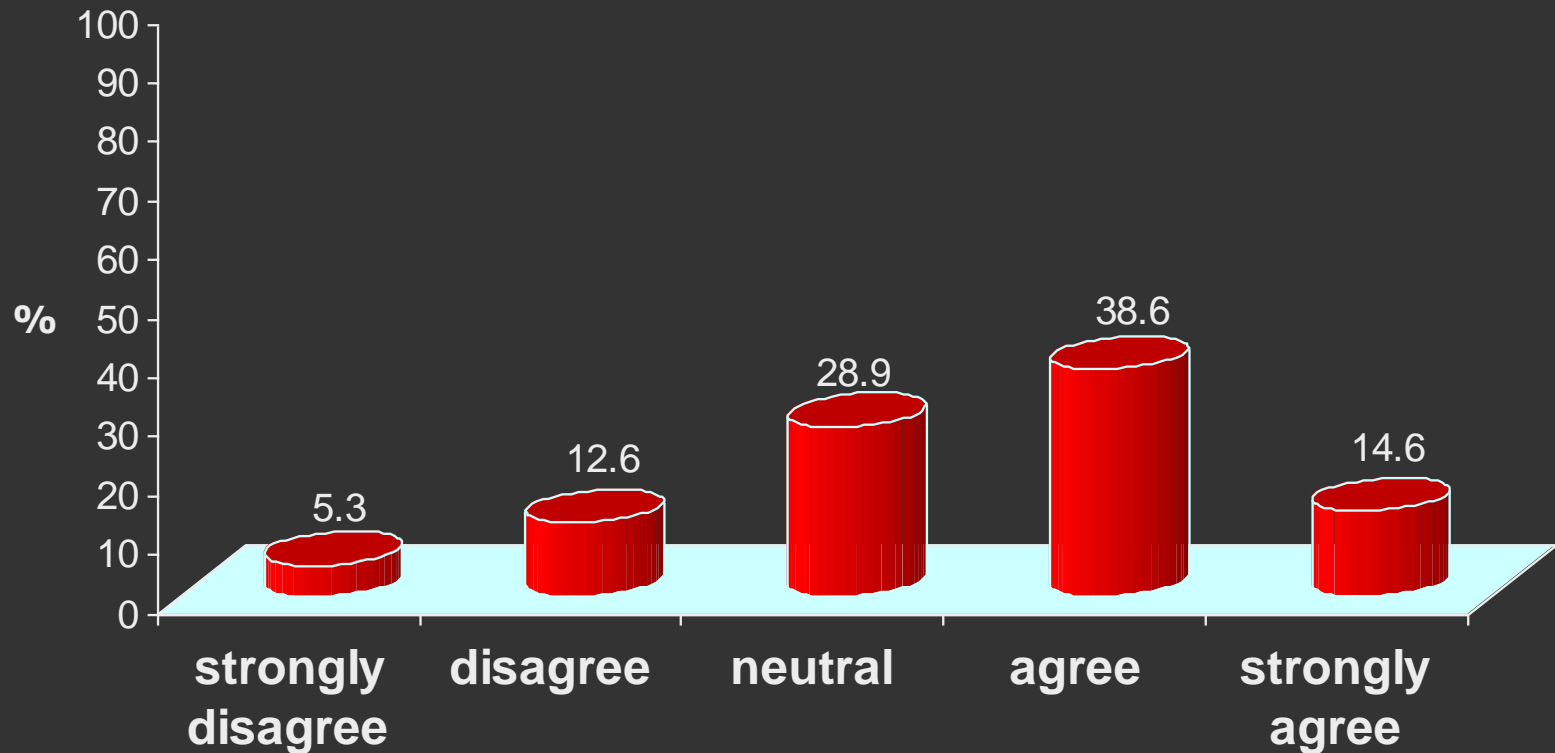
- Spiritual Beliefs Questionnaire
 - 7-items
 - developed for use in a study of UK drug users' spiritual beliefs in relation to NA attendance and outcomes (Christo & Franey 1995)
- SBQ mean = 22.7 (range 7-35)
- Those who were 'positive' or 'very positive' towards AA/NA scored higher (23.7 vs 22.1, $p=0.038$)
- Those 'likely' or 'very likely' to recommend someone to attend AA/NA scored higher (23.5 vs 22.1, $p=0.023$)

	Number partially or strongly agree (%)	Number partially or strongly disagree (%)
Personal Responsibility Steps		
1. We admitted that we were powerless over our addiction, that our lives had become unmanageable	160 (46.6)	152 (44.3)
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves	192 (56.0)	71 (20.7)
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all	187 (54.6)	86 (25.0)
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others	201 (58.8)	57 (16.7)
10. Continued to take a personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it	240 (70.0)	45 (13.1)
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to addicts, and to practice these principles in all our affairs	101 (29.5)	143 (41.7)
Mean total for Personal Responsibility Steps	3.16	

	Number partially or strongly agree (%)	Number partially or strongly disagree (%)
Higher Power-Mediated Steps		
2. Came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity	93 (27.1)	191 (55.7)
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him	88 (25.6)	199 (58.0)
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs	155 (45.2)	121 (35.2)
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character	65 (19.0)	212 (61.8)
7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings	76 (22.3)	208 (60.8)
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out	117(34.2)	152 (44.5)
Mean total for Higher Power-Mediated Steps	1.73	

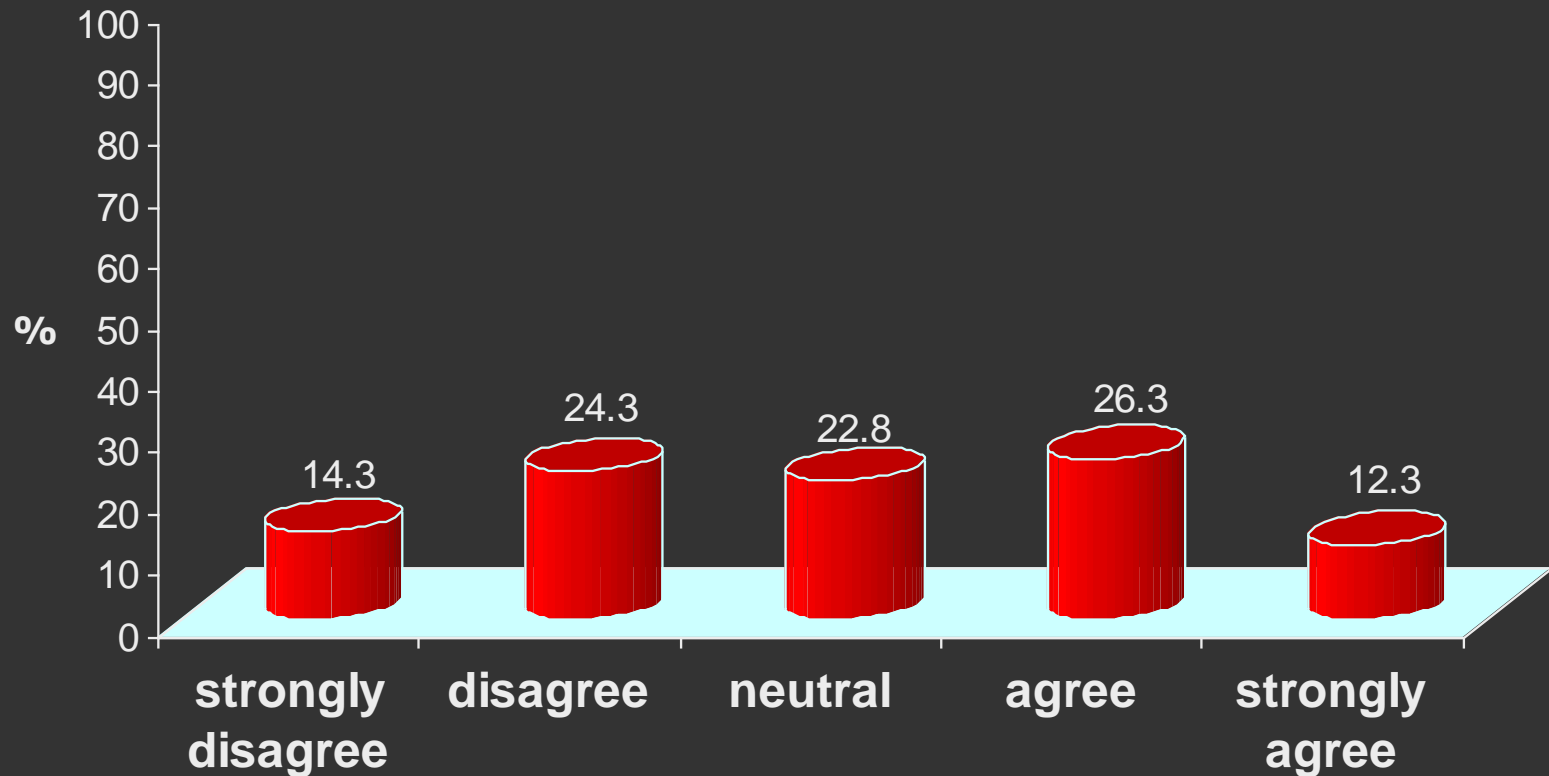
The 12 Steps encourage honesty and self-awareness

n=342



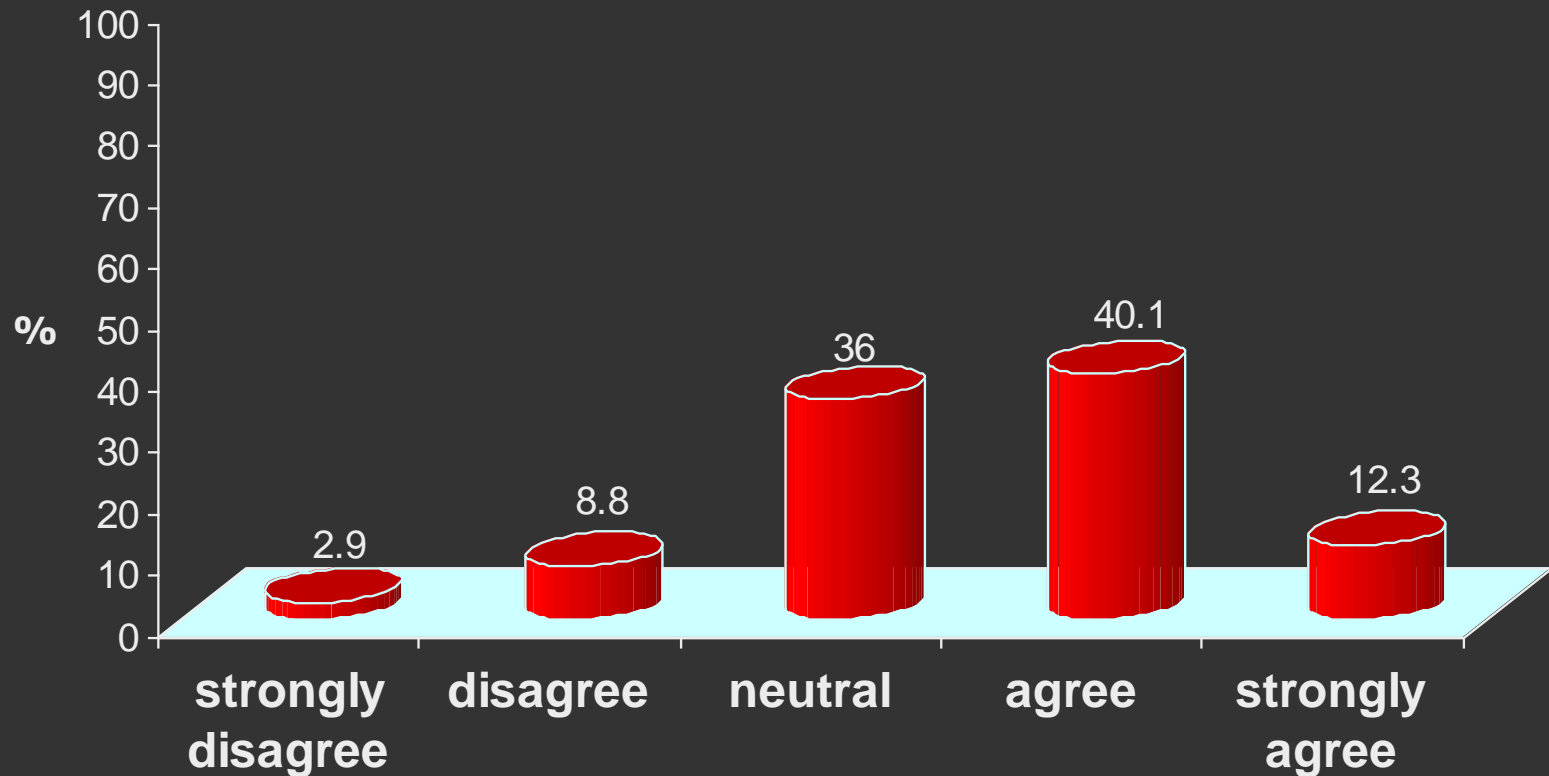
The 12 Steps encourage people to take responsibility

n=343



The 12 Steps put people off attending AA/NA meetings

n=342



Factors associated with referral to AA/NA

- Positive attitudes and an increased likelihood of recommendation associated with
 - professional group
 - treatment emphasis of agency
 - a high perceived level of knowledge about AA/NA
 - regular use of 12-Step principles in practice
 - a history of ever having attended a 12-Step meeting
 - the belief that addiction was a disease as opposed to a bad habit

Summary

- Staff feel that they know enough about 12-Step treatment and the AA/NA Fellowship
- Less than half are likely to recommend their clients to make use of these services
- Overall attitudes to the 12-Step process are mixed (but mildly positive)
- Over half actively disagree with 6 of the 12 Steps
- Contrast with surveys reporting the views of US treatment staff (Forman et al 2001, Humphreys 1997)
- How do we explain this?

Staff in 'recovery'

- 15% of treatment staff in the USA 'in recovery' (Humphreys et al 1996)
- This figure is probably lower in UK services
- The proportion of recovering staff in a treatment program has been found to be correlated with more referrals to AA (Humphreys, 1997)
- Professional organizations that refer a high proportion of their clients to 12-Step groups use a treatment approach that is itself based on the 12 Steps (Humphreys, 1997)

The threat to the treatment 'industry'

- Psychiatrists/psychologists are among the least religious groups in the USA
- 'Guild' issues may exacerbate negative attitudes about religion and mutual help groups

The level of AA activity in society

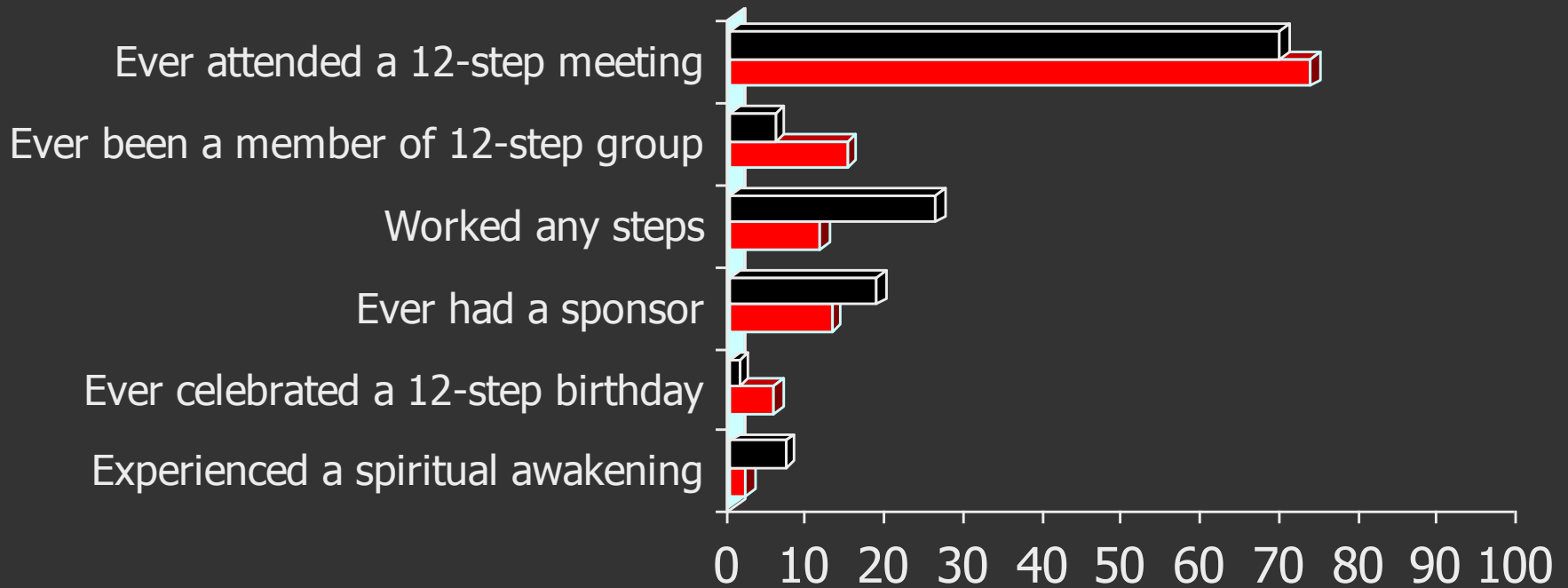
- There are twice as many members in the USA as in all other countries combined
(Alcoholics Anonymous UK, 2005)
- The West Midlands region has a lower level of AA or NA activity than other parts of the UK

Conurbation	No. of meetings	Population	Meetings / million
Weston-super-Mare	10	73,000	136
Bournemouth/Poole	28	383,713	73
Bristol	24	551,066	44
Brighton	20	461,181	43
Greater London	250	8,278,251	30
Edinburgh	13	452,194	29
Plymouth	7	243,795	29
Glasgow	31	1,168,270	27
Portsmouth	8	442,252	18
Nottingham	9	666,358	14
Kingston-upon-Hull	3	301,416	9
Greater Manchester	19	2,244,931	8
Liverpool/Merseyside	10	816,216	8
Middlesborough	3	365,323	8
Newcastle/Tyneside	5	879,996	6
Coventry	2	336,452	6
Cardiff	2	327,706	6
Sheffield	3	640,720	5
Leicester	2	441,213	5
Reading	2	369,804	5
Leeds	6	1,499,465	4
Stoke-on-Trent	1	362,403	4
Greater Birmingham	7	2,284,093	3

AA/NA experience

Birmingham treatment sample

- Ever attended a 12-Step meeting?
 - 71/91 (78%) alcohol
 - 16/34 (47%) drugs ($p=0.001$)
- Number of meetings attended
 - in past 90 days = 1.0 (0-12)
 - in past year = 2.9 (0-70)
 - In lifetime = 22.1 (1-300)



■ London n=200 □ Birmingham n=125

Spirituality and religion

- Workers with higher spirituality ratings were
 - more likely to hold positive attitudes towards AA/NA
 - more likely to recommend them to their clients
- A significantly greater endorsement of the Personal Responsibility versus the Higher Power steps
- Do workers fail to make a distinction between religion and spirituality, interpreting the Steps that refer to a 'Higher Power' as having religious associations?

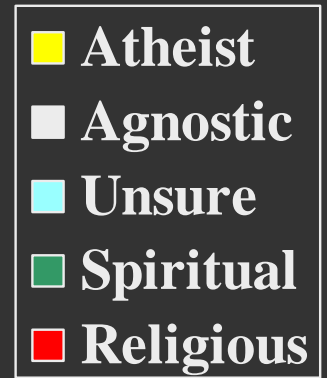
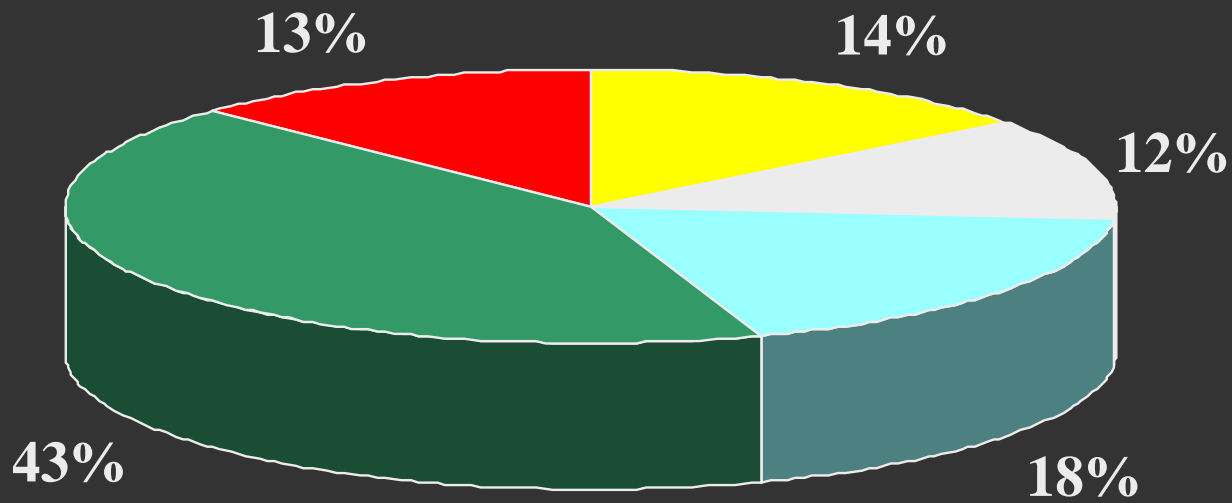
Definitions

- A **religion** is an organization that comprises a set of cumulative traditions (e.g. rituals, scriptures, physical structures) and a set of beliefs about a transcendent reality in which its participants have faith
- **Spirituality** is an individual's personal sense of the sacred and its relationship to ultimate concerns, namely, the meaning of existence, morality, suffering, and death. It may be tied to or independent from a religious tradition

Spirituality and religion

- USA is the most religious country in the developed world
 - 92% adults report an affiliation with a religion
 - 95% believe in God
 - 80% believe that God is still performing miracles today
 - 35% have personally experienced or witnessed a divine miracle
 - 30% report that God speaks to them directly
 - over the past 25 years an average of 40% of the population say that they have been 'born again'

- Measures of religious activity that are rising in the USA (e.g. Christian church attendance) are in decline in the UK



Spirituality and religion

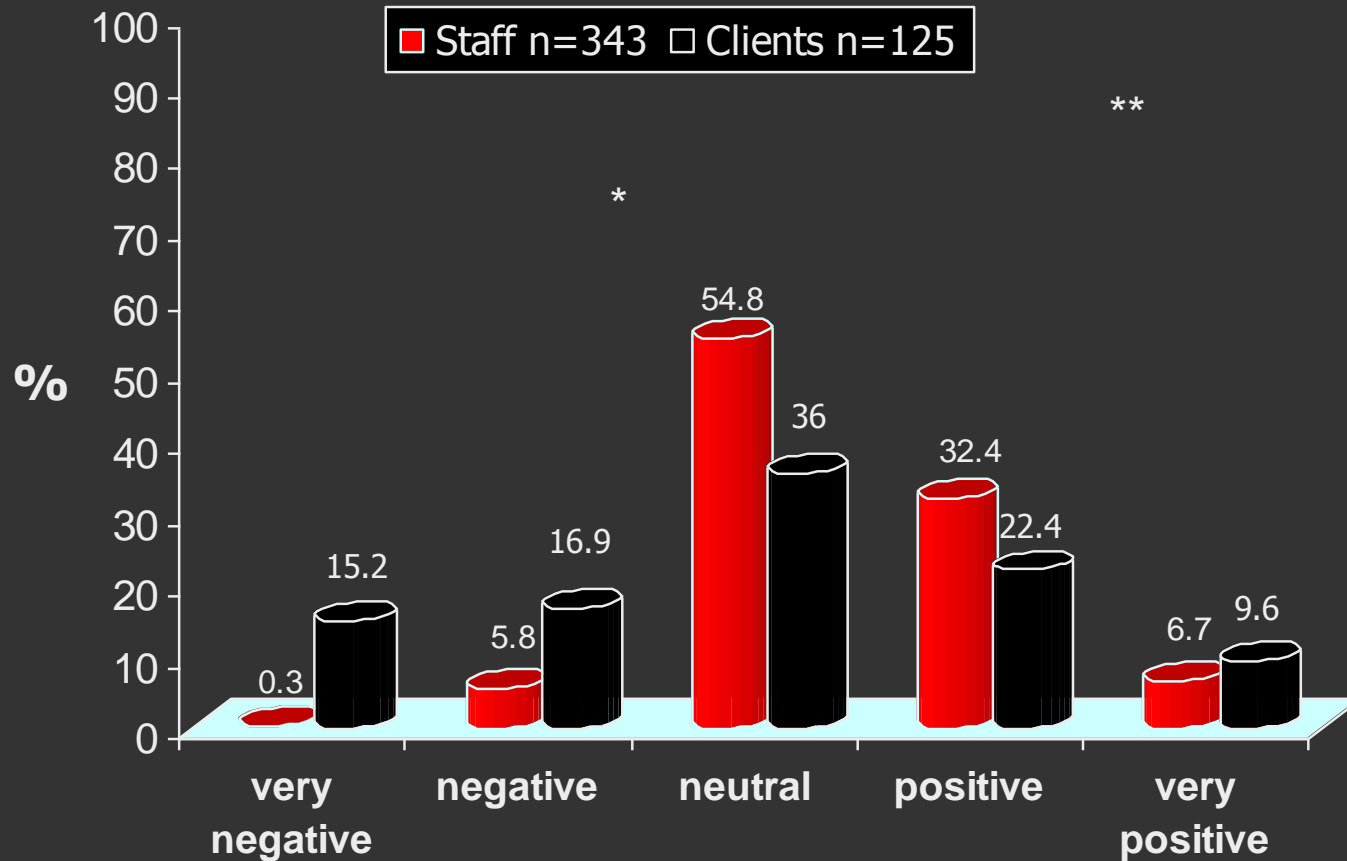
- The idea of getting beyond the 'religious part' and more into spirituality has been shown to be welcomed by substance users (Arnold et al 2002)
- 'Higher Power' should be interpreted in a way that is based upon their own personal understanding of a 'power greater than oneself'
- Professionals who consider themselves experts in the 12-step disease model rate spiritual change as unimportant in treatment (Morgenstern 1997)

Are the Twelve Steps More Acceptable to Drug Users than to Drinkers?

Best D, Harris J, Gossop M, Manning V, Man L, Marshall J, Bearn J, Strang J.

European Addiction Research 2001;7:69-77

- No differences in in history of AA/NA attendance
- Drug users significantly more positive attitudes to AA/NA
- More willingness to attend meetings and greater intention to attend on discharge
- No differences in spiritual/religious orientation
- Drug users reported more positive views of the 12 steps



* p<0.05

** p<0.001

Conclusions

- Mutual Self-help groups occupy a very different position in the UK treatment system than in the USA
- It would be advantageous to boost attendance
- Drug users are possibly more enthusiastic than alcohol dependent clients
- Staff attitudes appear ambivalent, but more positive than client groups

How would you describe your attitude to AA/NA?

Conclusions

- Staff prefer to try to match individual clients to the most appropriate treatment approach
 - religious patients may feel more comfortable in and may stay longer in religiously responsive treatment programs
 - ... but Project MATCH found that, over a 10 year period, participants with sustained AA attendance after treatment showed increased 'God consciousness' and religious practices

Conclusions

- Religion and spirituality are a good thing but you cannot force them on people
- Spiritual change is conceptualised as central to recovery in AA literature
 - ... but 33-80% report no significant changes in spirituality
 - those who engage in the most altruistic behaviours (12th Step work) are the most likely to achieve long-term sobriety in AA
- It may be less spiritual beliefs than the living out of those beliefs in practical action that benefits members

Conclusions

- 12 Step approaches should not be dismissed
- There is probably a role for greater education about 12-Step groups and their potential benefits, possibly emphasising Personal Responsibility elements
- TSF approaches need to be highlighted

UK Substance Misuse Treatment Workers' Attitudes to Twelve-Step Self-Help Groups

Day E, Gaston R, Furlong E, Murali V, Copello A.

Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment 2005 29;321-327