

# Mutual Help Organizations, Recovery from Addiction and the Future of Addiction Research



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## Orienting Terms



- Mutual help organizations (e.g., SMART Recovery, Vie Libre, Abstainer's Clubs, Narcotics Anonymous) are peer-led fellowships of addicted people
- Recovery is a more subjective concept that is not used in a consistent way, but may refer to the lived experience of some addicted individuals, a set of values or a socio-political movement

## Professional views of mutual help organizations' effectiveness 20 years ago



- A few “evangelists”
- A few “friends of the underdog”
- Some clinical partners (especially physicians)
- Mostly, lack of respect and even fear (especially psychologists)
- Doubt that rigorous evaluations were possible.

## Professional views of recovery 20 years ago



- Some sensitive humanistic inquirers and admirers
- Significant fuzziness about meaning
- Minimal hostility or sense of threat
- But little confidence that rigorous research were possible

## Central Conclusion Regarding Change in Professional Knowledge and Views in Past 20 Years



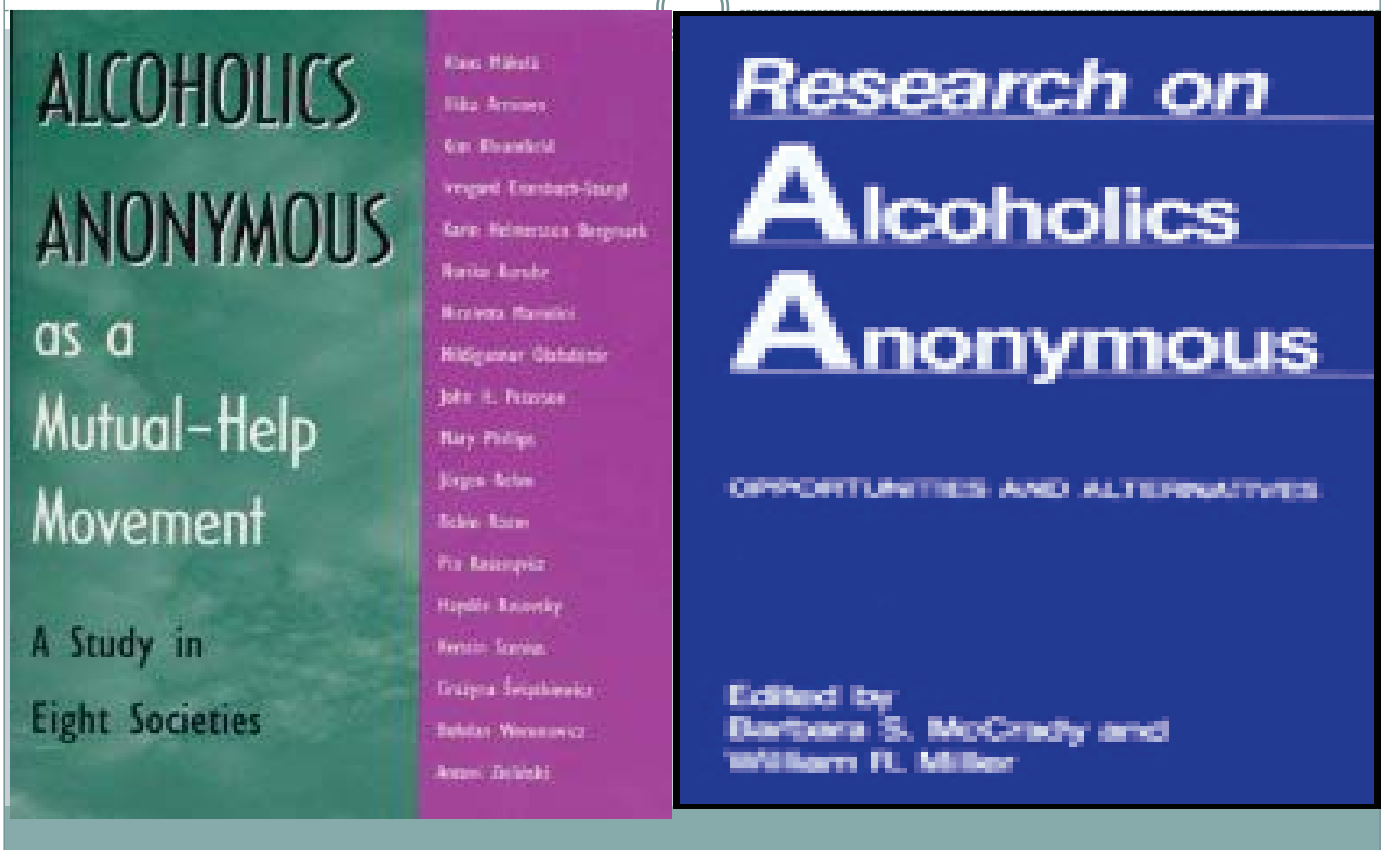
- For mutual help organizations (especially 12-step) the change is dramatic
- For recovery, the change is relatively modest (though perhaps building steam)

## Mutual Help Research



- One boomlet in late 1960s + early 1970s, especially tied to movements (e.g., mental health, women)
- Second boomlet in 1980s around chronic illness (WHO, USG Koop)
- Lasting shift in the 1990s, particularly focused on addiction

## Two Critical Books of the Mid-1990s



## Other 1990s developments

- **Project MATCH**
- **VA Multisite Study**
- **Cocaine Collaborative Treatment Study**
- **NTORS**
- **Publication of Reliable and Valid Affiliation Measures**
- **Quantitative and Research Design Innovations**

Although limited to 12-step mutual help organizations, these and related studies showed that the effects of these groups could be studied rigorously, AND, that when rigor increased the evidence for effectiveness became stronger

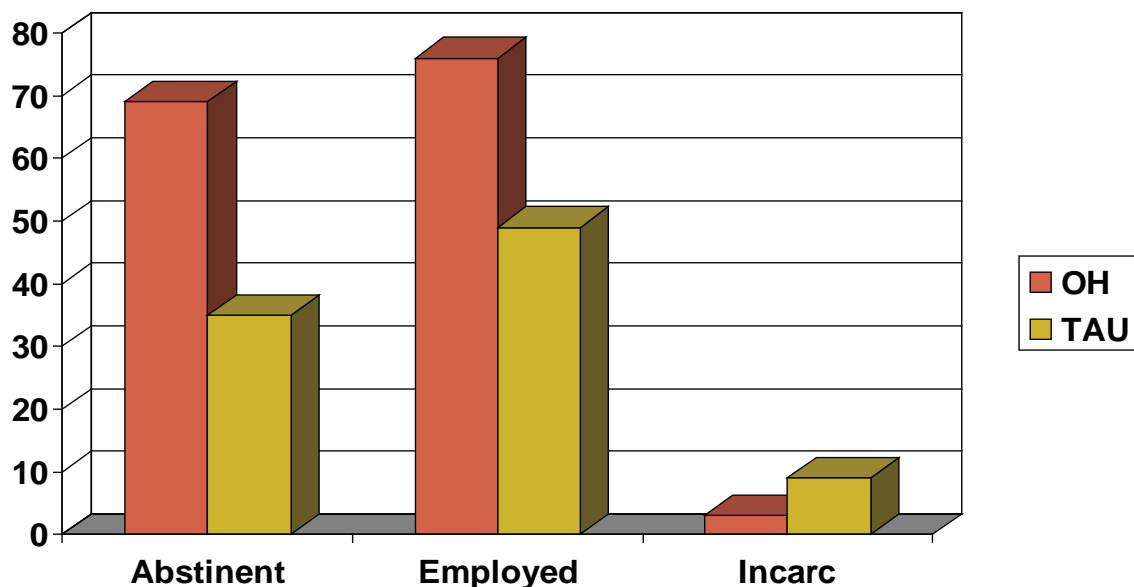
## 12 Step Facilitation Therapy Findings in Project MATCH

- 1726 alcohol dependent patients were randomized to 12-step facilitation, cognitive-behavioral or motivational enhancement therapy
- All three conditions showed substantial and sustained reduction in consumption quantity and frequency
- No main effects for type of therapy were evident by 15 month follow-up
- Among patients with low psychiatric problems, 12 step facilitation therapy had highest percent days abstinent

# Clinical trial of Oxford House

- Oxford House is a 12-step influenced, peer-managed residential setting in which almost all patients attend AA/NA
- 150 Patients randomized after inpatient treatment to Oxford House or TAU
- 77% African American; 62% Female
- Follow-ups every 6 months for 2 years, 90% of subjects re-contacted

At 24-months, Oxford House (OH) produced 1.5 to 2 times better outcomes



# Veterans Affairs RCT on AA/NA referral for outpatients

- 345 VA outpatients randomized to standard or intensive 12-step group referral
- 81.4% FU at 6 months
- Higher rates of 12-step involvement in intensive condition
- Over 60% greater improvement in ASI alcohol and drug composite scores in intensive referral condition

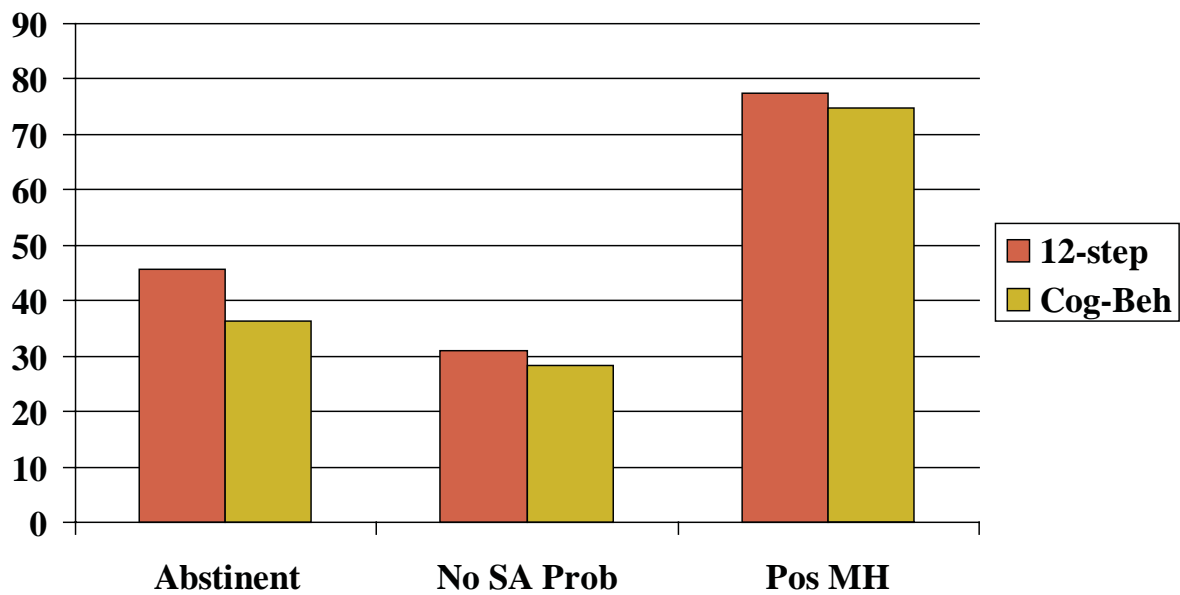
Source: Timko, C. (2006). Intensive referral to 12-step self-help groups and 6-month substance use disorder outcomes. *Addiction*, 101, 678-688.

## Example study of two groups of matched patients

(Humphreys & Moos, 2001, *ACER*, 25, 711-716)

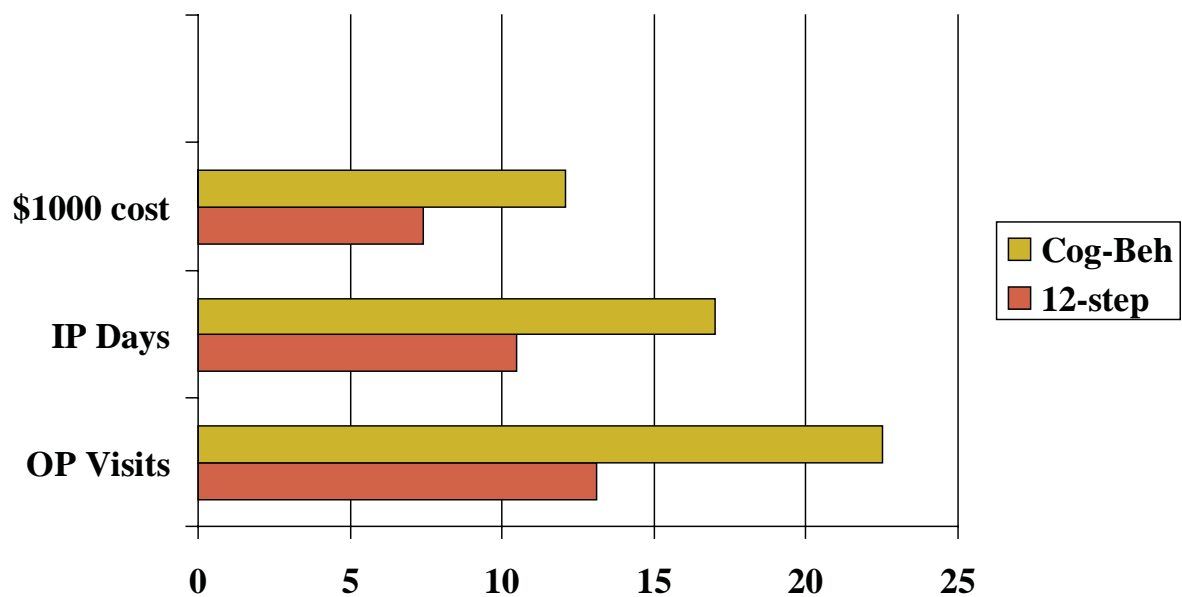
- Follow-up study of over 1700 VA patients (100% male, 46% African-American) receiving one of two types of care:
- 5 programs were based on 12-step principles and placed heavy emphasis on self-help activities
- 5 programs were based on cognitive-behavioral principles and placed little emphasis on self-help activities

# 1-Year Clinical Outcomes (%)



Note: Abstinence higher in 12-step,  $p < .001$

# 1-Year Treatment Costs, Inpatient Days and Outpatient Visits



Note: All differences significant at  $p < .001$



# Conclusions



- “A victory for science”
- Oxford Houses and 12-step facilitation interventions (AA/NA/CA) are effective at reducing AOD consumption, improving psychosocial outcomes
- Other types of mutual help organizations remain to be evaluated, but the road is well-paved

# History of Research on “Recovery” from Addiction



- A number of scholars have done high quality ethnographic/qualitative studies (Cerclé, Denzin, Rudy, Asher, Cain)
- Tend to provide rich and illuminating data
- Yet also local, hard to synthesize
- Very few focused on the movement relative to other areas (e.g., mental health)

# What is Recovery?



A process/outcome for addicted individuals?

A cultural and political movement?

## A Process/Outcome for Addicted Individuals



Betty Ford Institute Consensus Conference:

***“Recovery from substance dependence is a voluntarily maintained lifestyle characterized by sobriety, personal health and citizenship.”***

## A Process/Outcome for Addicted Individuals



UK Drug Policy Commission:

**“Recovery is a process, characterised by *voluntarily maintained control over substance use*, leading towards health and well-being and participation in the responsibilities and benefits of society”**

## A Process/Outcome for Addicted Individuals



Connecticut Community for Addiction Recovery:

**“You are in recovery if you say you are”**

## Definitional Challenge



- Measurement is essential for science, and definitions are essential for measurement
- Shared definitions are necessary for science to be cumulative
- Some progress made, but not enough to for example allow any nation to answer the question “How many people are in recovery?”

## The Internet meets Bleuler?



## Ongoing Work of Note



- **Kaskutas/Alcohol Research Group recovery study**
- **Bickel recovery champions study**

## Other research needs



- **National quantitative survey of various definitions of recovery, their overlap and their consequences**
- **Analysis of the extent to which definitions of recovery are robust to routes to recovery**

# Recovery as a Cultural/Political Movement





## Public Policy Currents



- Recovery embraced as a policy goal in U.S., Scotland, and England & Wales.
- Some efforts to fund/support “recovery support services” in US
- More broadly, political zeitgeist in Western Europe and US is away from stigmatization, endless punishment of addicted people

# Recovery Movement Research Opportunities



- The movement, its ideas and values are a rich subject for ethnographic research and sociological analysis
- History of the movement and its leaders worthy of serious study
- Narrative/phenomenological research on politicization of identity has a strong base upon which to build

## Summary



- Research on the effectiveness of mutual help organizations has advanced enormously in 20 years
- Case is very strong that 12-step groups are an effective intervention, more needed on non-12-step
- “Recovery” research has progressed at least to tentative definitions, but disputes remains
- The recovery movement has been little studied, and should be a major focus of addiction research