

Students' Reactions to Attending 12-Step Meetings: Implications for Counselor Education

Abstract

This study examined students' reactions to attending a 12-Step meeting. Qualitative analysis of the student reactions suggested a personal impact of meeting attendance and increased understanding of the purpose of 12-Step programs.

Participants

Total Population = 247 students
 (5 introductory Alcohol & Drug Abuse classes)
 • 5 students withdrew from the course & 64 students declined to participate
 • N = 178 students
 • 67 - males
 • 111 - females
 • 24 - graduate students
 • 154 - undergraduate students

MEETING TYPES

- 76% attended Alcoholics Anonymous
- 19% attended Narcotics Anonymous
- 3% attended Al-Anon
- 2% other
- 76% attended open-discussion meetings
- 23% attended open-speaker meetings
- 1% attended "drunk drivers" (compulsory) meetings

Reflection Questions

1. What went through your mind as you went to the meeting? Themes:

- 51% nervous / scared
- 6% invading members' privacy / acceptance by members
- 6% curious about the meeting & the people attending the meeting
- 5% expected to see "low life" or "bums"
- 5% didn't know what to expect
- 26% gave no response

2. Did you experience a sense of community, fellowship, & support among the group members? Yes / No. Please describe.

95% - Yes 2% - No 3% - No response

3. Did you find the spiritual aspects of the meeting positive or negative? Please discuss.

92% - Positive 4% - Negative 4% - No response

4. Would you recommend AA, NA or Al-Anon to a family member or loved one with an alcohol or other drug problem? Yes / No. Please explain.

96% - Yes 2% - No 2% - No response

5. Did you find attending an open 12-step meeting to be a learning experience? Yes/No. Please explain.

95% - Yes 4% - No 1% - No response

Themes:

- Change from stereotypical views of alcoholic / addicts
- Importance of support
- How 12-step programs work
- It takes courage to seek help

Overarching Category I

- The impact of 12-step meeting attendance on study participants
 - Feeling anxious & fearful of a new experience
 - Being concerned about their accepted by the group
 - Challenging personal stereotypes of people with addiction
 - Willingness to refer family & friends to 12-step meetings

Overarching Category II

- Increased understanding of the purpose & function of 12-step programs
 - Importance of support system
 - Significance of positive role models
 - Role of spirituality & religion

Implications of Findings

- Plan pre-meeting activities to reduce student anxiety (*recovering guest speakers & contact people for open 12-step meetings*)
- Plan classroom activities which increase student awareness of preconceived notions concerning who's an alcoholic / addict (*visualizing an alcoholic / addict & his or her characteristics*)
- Have classroom discussions concerning spirituality vs. religion

Data Analysis

- **Level One** – Common & uncommon responses to the questions
 - **Level Two** – Themes & reduction
 - **Level Three** – Overarching categories
- Constant Comparative Method** – as themes emerged, data was sorted & resorted into themes & categories



PARTICIPANT VOICE:

"I found my personal anxieties were not necessary & that it must take a tremendous amount of courage for people to make that first step..."



PARTICIPANT VOICE:

"It made me see that providing support is a very effective way to help people..."