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

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…”

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 (recovery 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