**Gender Differences Observed in Beliefs of AA Participants**

**Santa Barbara, Calif.** — Men and women are similarly devoted to long-term participation in Alcoholics Anonymous, paralleling at about equal rates through the 12 steps that define the voluntary, nonprofit program for problem drinkers.

But a study presented at the annual meeting of the Research Society on Alcoholism found intriguing gender differences in two areas of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) participation.

Women just starting out in AA tended to place more emphasis on deferring to a higher power for their recovery than women who had spent more than a year in the program.

For men, the pattern was reversed. Men just starting out were much less likely than women to place a high degree of importance on a higher power’s role in their recovery. But those who had spent more than a year in the program attributed a great deal of importance to a higher power’s role, surpassing women’s ratings on this measure.

**Men, regardless of how long they had participated in AA, were significantly more likely than women to participate in sister AA 12-step programs such as Narcotics Anonymous.**

J. Scott Tonigan, Ph.D., of the center on alcoholism, substance abuse, and addictions at the University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, studied the responses of 99 AA members from five AA groups to a series of questionnaire about the program.

The cohort included 73 men and 26 women. Their average age was 44, and they reported an average of 69 months of abstinence.

Most had attended AA for more than 1 year, but 35 were newcomers, allowing Dr. Tonigan to capture differences in participants’ outlooks based on their longevity in AA.

Regardless of gender, participants who had spent more time in the program were significantly more likely to report that they had attended 12-step programs outside AA: making amends to others, believing in a higher power, practicing AA behaviors, and completing steps in the program.

**Perhaps...they had more time to do so relative to the short-term AA members,** Dr. Tonigan wrote in his poster.

In this study, just 3 of 26 women but 28 of 73 men said they had attended sister AA programs. Women who had been involved with AA longer placed less emphasis on a higher power than did women who had just started AA, while for men the reverse was true.

Dr. Tonigan said it is possible that these unexpected findings could be attributable to the cross-sectional nature of the study, to gender differences in substance abuse (with regard to attendance at sister AA program meetings), or to type 1 error, because the number of subjects in the study was small.

He stressed that men and women tend to similarly complete AA steps, read AA literature, and find sponsors—all key elements in the program’s proven ability to foster abstinence.

However, he said, a better understanding of what keeps men and women attending AA may help clinicians to assist their patients in benefitting from the mutual-help group.