

New National Poll Reveals Public Attitudes on Substance Abuse, Treatment and the Prospects of Recovery

Finds some significant differences in perceptions among various population groups.

Nearly half of American adults report knowing someone in recovery from the use or abuse of alcohol or drugs, according to survey results announced today by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).

A large majority of Americans believe that people in recovery from substance addictions can live productive lives and contribute to their community, the report also said.

SAMHSA's announcement came during National Alcohol and Drug Addiction Recovery Month, an annual observance of efforts aimed at helping people with substance abuse problems restore their lives.

SAMHSA sponsored the nationwide survey to gain insight into public attitudes toward substance abuse, and the effectiveness of prevention, treatment and recovery programs. The survey showed that most Americans are supportive of people in recovery, and that the public overwhelmingly believes that prevention and treatment efforts can work.

"These results are encouraging and offer hope to everyone affected by substance abuse problems," said SAMHSA Acting Administrator Eric Broderick. "The survey shows that the American people believe that prevention and treatment efforts make a real difference in addressing this public health challenge and improving lives."

Among the survey's more notable findings:

- Less than one-fifth of Americans (18 percent) would think less of a friend or relative who is in recovery from addiction.
- Nearly two-thirds of the public (66 percent) believe that addiction to illicit drugs can be prevented.
- Most Americans report that they would feel comfortable being friends (66 percent) or working (63 percent) with someone in recovery for a substance abuse problem.

Although the report found widespread agreement on many issues, it also found some significant differences in how various segments of the public view certain substance abuse-related issues.

For example, younger Americans aged 25 to 34 are more likely than those age 65 and older to believe that people in recovery from illicit drugs can go on to live productive lives (70 percent compared to 51 percent).

Differences were also found between the sexes on some issues. Females were more likely than males to believe that people with illicit drug addictions posed a danger to society (80 percent compared to 73 percent). Women were also more inclined than men to believe that people in recovery from illicit drug addictions can live productive lives (65 percent compared to 56 percent).

In addition, the survey revealed differences in the way the general public views various types of substance use and abuse. For example, more Americans felt comfortable living next door to someone in recovery for alcohol abuse than for drug abuse (57 percent compared to 46 percent).

The complete survey findings are available on the SAMHSA website at www.samhsa.gov/attitudes.

The survey was conducted on SAMHSA's behalf by Opinion Research Corporation and Macro International Inc., and involved phone interviews with 1,010 adults across the country. The survey has a margin of error of plus or minus 3 percent.

SAMHSA is a public health agency within the Department of Health and Human Services. The agency is responsible for improving the accountability, capacity and effectiveness of the nation's substance abuse prevention, addictions treatment, and mental health services delivery system.

Americans Believe in Prevention and Recovery from Addictions Highlights

- Half of all adults 18+ know someone in recovery from addiction to alcohol, illicit drugs, or prescription drugs.
- Fewer than one-fifth of Americans would think less of a friend or relative who is in recovery from addiction.
- Nearly two-thirds of Americans believe that addiction to marijuana and other illicit drugs, prescription drugs, and alcohol can be prevented.
- The majority of Americans believe that treatment programs can help people with substance addictions and that people can recover and live productive lives.
- Young adults age 25-34 are the most positive about prevention and recovery from addiction.
- A majority of Americans (80%) have positive feelings about prevention and recovery from substance addictions, according to a study released by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).

A new SAMHSA report, *Summary Report:*

Caravan® Survey for SAMHSA on Addictions and Recovery, provides data on public perceptions about prevention, recovery, and stigma related to substance addictions. The findings presented in this short report are extracted from the larger *Summary Report*, which is based on replies to a nationally representative Caravan® telephone survey conducted from August 29 to September 1, 2008. The target audience was a national probability sample of 1,010 adults, 18 years of age and older living in private

households in the continental United States. *SAMHSA is an agency of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) that supports programs to improve the lives of people with or at risk for mental illness and substance use disorders, including the promotion of society's acceptance of persons in recovery.*

Key Findings about Prevention and Recovery from Substance Addictions

One out of two people knows someone who is in recovery from addiction to alcohol, prescription drugs, or illicit drugs, including marijuana, cocaine, heroin, or methamphetamines. Of these, many more people know someone in recovery from alcohol addiction. Younger adults, age 18-34, were more likely than older adults to know someone in recovery from marijuana addiction. *1For some questions, marijuana was polled and reported separately from the other illicit drugs.*

Stigma

Fewer than 20 percent of Americans say they would think less of a friend or relative if they discovered that person is in recovery from addiction to drugs or alcohol. Considerably more, 30 percent, said they would think less of a person with a current addiction.

Americans Who Would Think Less of a Friend Upon Discovering... Substance Addictions That Can be Prevented

Prevention

Younger adults age 25-34 are the most positive that substance addictions can be prevented. Americans in households with children are more likely than those in households without children to believe that all substance addictions can be prevented.

Recovery

Approximately three-quarters of the population believe that recovery is possible from addiction to alcohol, prescription drugs, and marijuana. However, only 58 percent believe that a person can fully recover from addiction to other illicit drugs such as cocaine, heroin, or methamphetamines.

Women (62%) are more likely than men (54%) to believe a person can fully recover from addiction to illicit drugs such as cocaine, heroin, or methamphetamines. *2 1*

More than 75 percent of Americans feel more positive about people in recovery from addictions to alcohol, prescription drugs, and marijuana, than those in recovery from addiction to other illicit drugs such as cocaine, heroin, or methamphetamines.

The percentage of Americans who believe that treatment programs can help people with substance addictions is slightly higher than the percentage who believe that people in recovery can live a productive life.

Programs to help people with addictions to alcohol, marijuana, and prescription drugs are looked on more favorably than treatment programs designed to help people with addictions to other illicit drugs such as cocaine, heroin, or methamphetamines.

In general, Americans age 65 and older are least likely to feel that recovery from substance addiction is possible.

Age

Americans age 65 and older are less likely to state they know someone in recovery from addiction. This group also states that they feel least comfortable being friends with, working with, and living next door to someone in recovery from alcohol addiction. In general, the older a person is, the more likely he or she is to think less of someone who is in recovery from addiction to alcohol or drugs, and the less likely he or she is to feel comfortable with someone in recovery from addiction to alcohol or drugs.

Americans Who Would Feel Comfortable With Someone in Recovery From Alcohol Addiction

People age 65 and older are less likely than younger Americans to believe that substance addictions can be prevented. However, more than half of Americans age 65 and older do believe addictions can be prevented. Younger Americans age 25-34 are the most positive that a person in recovery from addiction could go on to live a productive life. Those age 65 and above are the least so.

A Person in Recovery From Addiction Can Live a Productive Life Gender

Females feel more strongly than males that individuals who are addicted to any of the substances mentioned in the survey are dangers to society. This is particularly true in relation to alcohol addiction. Women feel more positive than men that a person in recovery from an addiction to illicit or prescription drugs can live a productive life.

AmericansBelieve in Prevention and RecoveryFromAddictions³

Marijuana

Fewer than one-fifth of Americans say they know anyone in recovery from addiction to marijuana, compared to twice that for addiction to alcohol. In the list of substances that pose a danger to society, marijuana ranked last among all demographic groups (age, race, gender, ethnicity, and income).

Drugs vs. Alcohol

People tend to view addiction to drugs differently than addiction to alcohol. In general, respondents are more comfortable with someone in recovery from addiction to alcohol than addiction to drugs.

Substance Addictions That Are a Danger to Society

Overall, Americans feel that persons who are addicted to certain illicit drugs—cocaine and heroin—are much more of a danger to society than those addicted to marijuana, alcohol, or prescription drugs.

***Summary Report: Caravan® Survey for SAMHSA on Addictions and Recovery** is based on 11 global questions about prevention, recovery, and stigma related to substance addictions. The questions were part of a nationally representative 2008 Caravan® Survey conducted by Opinion Research Corporation and Macro International Inc. All results are weighted by four variables (age, sex, geographic region, and race) to ensure reliable and accurate representation of the total population, 18 years of age and older. The margin of error for this data is +/- 3%.*

What recovery from addiction means to the American public...

- “Capable of living a normal life”**
- “Freedom from addiction”**
- “Complete deliverance”**
- “Trying to turn life around”**
- “Getting help and not doing it anymore”**
- “Returning to a normal lifestyle”**
- “You’re getting better”**
- “To get back into life”**

Verbatim comments taken from the Caravan® telephone survey conducted from August 29 to September 1, 2008. The full Summary Report is available online at www.samhsa.gov/attitudes <http://www.samhsa.gov/shin>, E-mail: SHIN@samhsa.hhs.gov, 1-877-SAMHSA-7(1-877-726-4727)