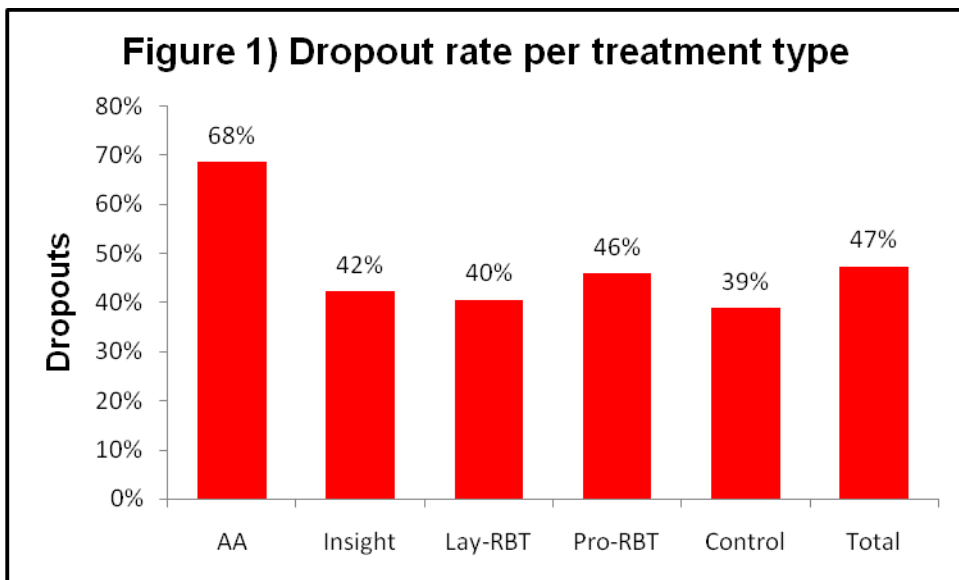


Do You Need A "Higher Power" To Change Your Drinking?

In 1980 Dr. Jeffrey Brandsma and his research team conducted a study which compared AA to 3 other approaches to treating alcohol dependence and a control group. The three other approaches were psychodynamic therapy, lay-led rational therapy, and professionally-led rational therapy. Of the four treatment approaches AA was the only one which emphasized the need for a "Higher Power" in order to overcome alcohol problems.

In terms of retention rate AA fared the worst of all groups including the control group. As we can see from Figure 1 the AA group had a dropout rate of 68% which was significantly worse than the other groups. In terms of reduction in drinking the subjects who completed treatment performed significantly better than the control group. However the members of the AA group completing treatment were not better at abstinence from alcohol or reducing their drinking than the members of the groups which did not require a belief in a higher power.



Of course there are many differences between AA and the other treatment modalities besides belief in a higher power which distinguish them from AA. These include self-labeling as an alcoholic and admission of powerlessness and group confession. Any of these aspects could have contributed to the high dropout rate from the AA group.

In spite of this the Brandsma study gives us good reason to believe that belief in a higher power has no effect on whether or not a subject will be successful at changing his/her drinking. It appears that other factors motivating one to change are far more important than one's personal take on theology.

So the answer is--No, you do not need a "Higher Power" to change your drinking.

REFERENCES:

Brandsma, J.M., Maultsby, M.C., & Welsh, R.J.. (1980). Outpatient treatment of alcoholism: A review and comparative study. Baltimore: University Park Press.