

Preface

The literature clearly shows that many individuals with addictive behaviors overcome their problems without professional treatment or self-help groups. Research into the self-change process for many years was impeded by the disease concept that has long dominated the addiction field. However, since the mid-1980s there has been a rapid growth of studies examining the self-change process. Several years ago, the first major review of the literature reported that there were 40 studies of alcohol and drug abusers who changed on their own, with the vast majority published in the last decade (Sobell, Ellingstad, & Sobell, 2000). Chapter 5 of this book reviews the same literature from 1999 through 2005 and found that over this 6-year period 22 studies were published that met the same criteria. In addition, the topic of self-change from substance abuse has gained recognition and acceptance as reflected in the statements from three prominent organizations: (a) “Improvement without formal treatment is not a minor or insignificant phenomenon” (Institute of Medicine, 1990, p.152), (b) “Some individuals (perhaps 20% or more) with Alcohol Dependence achieve long-term sobriety even without active treatment” (American Psychiatric Association, 1994, p. 202), and (c) “The track of this disease is not clear-cut—some people appear to recover from alcoholism without formal treatment” (National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, 2006).

In the early 1990s, the study of the self-change process started to be approached differently. For example, recent studies have started using qualitative and quantitative methods to describe how individuals change (e.g., life history/life event approach). Two factors have emerged from these newer studies that appear to be strongly associated with the self-change process—motivation for change and a cognitive appraisal process. These findings have important implications for the design of new interventions. In addition, several recent and better designed surveys have provided a basis for more precise estimates of the prevalence of self-change from different addictions. The phenomenon of recoveries from different addictive behaviors (e.g., smoking, alcohol and drug use, gambling) and the macro-societal conditions that may promote recoveries have also been examined. Such research, however, has been scattered around the globe, and the need for a systematic integration of this research and its clinical implications as well as the identification of future research directions has become a priority in the field.

In March 1999, the first international conference on “Natural history of addiction: Recovery from alcohol/tobacco and other drug problems without treatment” was held in Les Diablerets, Switzerland. The conference, which occurred under the umbrella of the Kettil Bruun Society for Social and Epidemiological Research on Alcohol, was sponsored by the Swiss Federal Office of Public Health, and hosted and organized by the Swiss Institute for the Prevention of Alcohol and Other Drug Problems. The conference brought together 29 researchers from more than 10 countries who shared a common interest in self-change/natural recovery. Sociologists, psychologists, health care practitioners, anthropologists, economists, and government policy analysts formed a truly interdisciplinary research group. What made this meeting different from many others was the explicit objective to start a dialogue between researchers, treatment providers, and policymakers and to gain a clearer vision of the treatment implications based on the recent research. The meeting led to several scientific publications including two miniseries in two journals (Klingemann & Sobell, 2001; Sobell et al., 2000). The state-of-the-art scientific review on the study of self-change from the perspective of various disciplines and the rich outcome of the conference’s interdisciplinary panel discussions provided the framework for the first book published on self-change from substance abuse (Klingemann et al., 2001). In the subsequent years, the broad positive response to the English book encouraged the Swiss Federal Office of Health to support a German version of the book (Klingemann & Sobell, 2006).

Three years after the Les Diablerets conference in Switzerland, a related conference, “Addiction in the Life Course Perspective,” was held in Stockholm in 2002 as part of the thematic meeting of the Kettil Bruun Society for Social and Epidemiological Research on Alcohol and was sponsored by the Nordic Council for Alcohol and Drug Research. The conference attracted 43 participants from 12 countries, representing a diversity of disciplines, and resulted in the book *Addiction and the Life Course* published by the Nordic Council for Alcohol and Drug Research (Rosenqvist, Blomqvist, Koski-Jännes, & Öjesjö, 2004). This entire publication is available at <<http://www.nad.fi/index.php?lang=se&id=pub/44>>.

We felt that those who have made this book possible, our interview partners, should have a say in the book. Therefore, using original interview transcripts, we had the unique opportunity to mirror our scientific statements with the words, sentiments, and feelings of our respondents about how they recovered on their own. Throughout the book, selected excerpts from such individuals are juxtaposed and matched to various discussions about the self-change process.

Chapter 1 in this volume starts with a historical overview of the phenomenon of self-change. It reviews conceptual and methodological issues, presents a state-of-the-art review of the field of self-change, and discusses barriers to treatment as well as the major models of change. Chapter 2 provides a comprehensive review of the often-cited classic alcohol and drug studies of self-change, many of which were not designed to study self-change explicitly, but nevertheless have provided the early base for documenting the existence of the

phenomenon. Chapter 3 looks at what we know about self-change from substance abuse from large-scale population surveys and community studies as well as from smaller samples obtained by advertising and other avenues. The advantages and disadvantages of using various methods are discussed as well as questions that are still unanswered about self-change in large populations. Chapter 4 discusses the more recent natural recovery studies and presents new directions in research in this area. Chapter 5 provides a review of 22 self-change studies with alcohol and drug abusers published over the past 6 years, and compares these findings with an earlier review (Sobell et al., 2000), pointing out methodological shortcomings and priorities for future research.

Because this book has a heavy emphasis on the self-change process with substance abusers, we felt that chapters demonstrating the occurrence and application of the self-change process with other populations would expand the discussion and understanding of the self-change process. Therefore, Chapter 6 presents reviews of the self-change process with five different participant groups: cigarette smokers (6.1), gamblers (6.2), individuals with eating disorders or obesity (6.3), juvenile delinquents (6.4), and stutterers (6.5).

Chapter 7 suggests that although the traditional model would have us believe that there is only one way to resolve an addictive behavior, treatment is, in fact, only “one way to leave your lover” or, put differently, multiple pathways to change exist. This chapter talks about the role of treatment in changing addictive behaviors and concludes with the suggestion that one way of providing services efficiently would be for health care practitioners in the substance abuse field to embrace a stepped-care model of service provision. Based on state-of-the-art research, this chapter offers real and practical suggestions about how health care practitioners can expedite or nurture what might be seen as a time-delayed “natural” process. Chapter 8, in discussing the fact that the majority of substance abusers will never enter treatment, offers alternative nontraditional ways to motivate substance abusers to change (e.g., Internet, self-change materials available other than through traditional avenues).

Chapter 9 expands the discussion of self-change from addiction through an examination of the broader environmental factors that play an important role in substance abusers’ recoveries. Too often, decisional processes of self-change are seen as occurring solely within the individual or from interactions between individuals rather than from societal forces. This chapter sets out to show links between the individual clinical view and social factors (e.g., public images of addiction and their changeability, treatment systems, the role of the media and policy measures) as macro-societal aspects. In doing so, it argues that environmental factors are amenable to manipulation to reduce problem use and to promote recovery. An essential request addressed to policymakers is to provide favorable conditions for self-change and to promote maintenance. Chapter 10 presents information about alcohol and drug use from a broad range of cultural settings and then provides a rich discussion of self-change issues across different cultures. This chapter raises questions about specific group needs and cultural variations in the perception of time and ideas on the basic trajectory of life and

its goals. For example, the topic of how to assist and treat migrants from various cultural backgrounds has gained increasing importance, particularly in Europe.

Chapter 11, the Self-Change Toolbox, is intended as a reference source for readers by supplying tools, tips, websites, and other informational resources for assessing and promoting self-change. Our hope is that this book and the toolbox will be used as a reference by researchers, health care practitioners, public health specialists, and alcohol and drug policy makers to further understand and promote the self-change process. Although the last decade has witnessed an increased interest in and understanding of the study of self-change, our understanding is by no means complete. Thus, the often-heard phrase that “more research is needed” is relevant. It is hoped that this book will better inform funding agencies and scientists about where the research “Euro” is likely to get its best value.

Lastly, it seems fitting to close with the words of two of the early natural recovery researchers:

The identification of natural recoverers is not anomalous and should not be dismissed casually. These groups have much to teach those who are willing to learn. In order to learn, however, one must first believe that groups such as these exist. (Shaffer & Jones, 1989, p. 5)

Harald Klingemann and Linda Carter Sobell
Zurich and Fort Lauderdale

References

- American Psychiatric Association. (1994). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (4th ed). Washington, DC: Author.
- Institute of Medicine. (1990). Broadening the base of treatment for alcohol problems. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.
- Klingemann, H., & Sobell, L. C. (2001). Introduction: Natural recovery research across substance use. *Substance Use & Misuse*, 36, 1409–1416.
- Klingemann, H., & Sobell, L. C. (Eds.). (2006). *Selbstheilung von der Sucht [Addiction and self-healing]*. Wiesbaden, Germany: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.
- Klingemann, H., Sobell, L. C., Barker, J., Blomqvist, J., Cloud, W., Ellingstad, T. P., et al. (2001). *Promoting self-change from problem substance use: Practical implications for policy, prevention, and treatment*. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. (2006). National epidemiologic survey on alcohol and related conditions. *Alcohol Alert*, 70, 1–5.
- Rosenqvist, J., Blomqvist, A., Koski-Jännes, & Öjesjö, L. (2004). *Addiction and the life course* (Vol. 44). Helsinki, Finland: Nordiska Nämnden för Alkohol- OchDrogforskning (Nordic Council for Alcohol and Drug Research).
- Shaffer, H. J., & Jones, S. B. (1989). *Quitting cocaine: The struggle against impulse*. Lexington, MA: Lexington Books.
- Sobell, L. C., Ellingstad, T. P., & Sobell, M. B. (2000). Natural recovery from alcohol and drug problems: Methodological review of the research with suggestions for future directions. *Addiction*, 95(5), 749–764.

<http://www.springer.com/978-0-387-71286-4>

Promoting Self-Change From Addictive Behaviors
Practical Implications for Policy, Prevention, and
Treatment

Klingemann, H.; Carter-Sobell, L. (Eds.)

2007, XXIV, 260 p., Hardcover

ISBN: 978-0-387-71286-4