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► [Cross-cultural gateway to recovery: a qualitative study of recovery experiences in international AA online groups.](#)

**Bjerke T.N.** [Request reprint](#)

**International Journal of Self Help and Self Care: 2006–2007, 5(1), p. 73–104.**

Why do AA members join on-line groups which meet 'virtually' over the internet rather than or as well as face-to-face groups? Based on his own experiences and interviews with other members, an AA member supplies some answers, among which are the enrichment provided by international perspectives.

**Adapted abstract** This ethnographic case-study explored people's use of online Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) groups with a global membership. The main objective was to explore AA members' preferences for using online AA groups. Main queries were: Do participants use only online AA groups or both face-to-face and online groups? If they use only online groups, how do they explain their preference? If they use both, how do they view the online alternative? Finally, how do AA members experience the global membership in the online groups? Can they identify with each other?

The empirical basis for the discussion comprises data from participant observation in two international online AA groups for a year, involving content analysis of discussion threads and 11 e-mail interviews, mostly with members who elected to be interviewed. The criteria for selection were that the groups had a long history, global membership, and a large number of participants with long-term sobriety. Memberships were international but mainly from North America. By definition the participants in the study were satisfied with global groups, because they were using online AA every day; others unavailable to the research may have experienced difficulties which led them to leave the groups. By virtue of the limited sample, this study is very explorative and preliminary in nature. The study is distinctive however in that the researcher is an AA member and has experiential knowledge of AA.

The result of the analysis is presented as a summary of what is gained from participation in online v. face-to-face AA groups. The discussion of emerging themes suggests that online AA members can easily identify with each other despite their cultural differences.

They reach common ground because of their view of alcoholism as a global disease. Personal experiences and symptoms of this disease seemed the same, independent of which country they came from. Most AA members in this study seemed to prefer a combination of face-to-face and online AA groups. The plethora of AA resources on the Internet also seems to have given AA members the opportunity to 'customise' their recovery programmes and support networks in a way that suits their particular needs and life situations, and in ways that transcend their native culture. Availability, convenience and ease of access (eg, no transport problems or scheduling conflicts) were common reasons for joining online groups. Some joined because of difficulties with face-to-face social interaction. Many were excited at being part of a global network, experienced as an enrichment in providing different interpretations and suggestions on how to stay sober.

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