

Recently I have been to Albanian alcoholics' anonymous meetings to understand the main focus of the alcoholic meeting support groups' consistency. I noticed that during the group session there were various groups of ladies and gentlemen who shared their experiences and encouraged each other to keep away from alcohol. I had the opportunity to read the brochure of the meeting information which explained that the meetings are open for anyone to attend but in some cases, it is a closed meeting only for people recovering from alcoholism.

The anonymous meeting I attended was an open one and took place in our local church The Church of Our Lady of Shkodra. The initials of the participants of the meeting were as follows (the initials are changed for privacy purpose) :

J. Qani
Arlind M.
Anita K.
Gjergj T.
Linda W.
Nik M.
Musli K.
J.M
Harmoni T.
Gani A.

As a Social Worker this was my first time to attend Alcoholics Anonymous meetings and I was unclear of what to expect because I was not an alcoholic and how they will see me when they will know a social worker is next to them. On arrival, in the entrance, I met people outside the meeting room and I decided to take a cup of coffee with them. At the beginning I was told that the meetings started and ended at the designated time. When the chairperson of the community called the initiation of the session, all other conversations stopped. The beginning was interesting for my eyes because it started with a moment of silence followed by members reciting the serenity prayer. Interesting was the fact that the members who attended the meeting for the first, second and third time were then recognized as well those who were visitors in our locality. Each

of the members who were willing to share their experience was given about 10 minutes to talk about alcoholism and the reform journey. After the experience sharing, members who had desire contributed with finance by giving cash or checks to sustain the group while the new members were there to learn about the group. Each experience testimony was very touching and deep, triggering hope to the new members of the group. The old members encouraged the new one to keep pushing on despite the challenges. Hearing all the experiences shared made me feel challenged as a Social Worker in general because many of my preconceived ideas changed despite me being a non-alcoholic.

In the past, I used to think that alcoholic people were just immoral people who don't want to do nothing and always have excuses and they are not willing to change their ways. After the Alcoholic anonymous meeting, I discovered the trauma and agony the participants went through while they tried to quit. For instance, a new member Gani had narrated about his ordeals before he met an anonymous alcoholic group, and they were very emotional and touching. Gani used to live in regrets whenever he became sober after drinking and really wanted to change but could not. Gani defined his alcoholism addiction as a mental disorder that requires both psychological therapy and medicines.

During Gani's speech I started to estimate more the power of consistency in what I do and such views got reinforced altogether after attending that meeting. The former alcoholics participants in that group were very resilient in their mission to stop drinking. Gani explained that even his own friends would not derail him and those who had succeeded in quitting. Linda said that her biggest challenge is when her former colleagues who she used to drink with would offer to buy alcohol for her and in this way making everything harder for her.

As a social worker from the meeting, I understood the importance of service to others, for the community, was clearly instilled in me. The members believed that the best way to quit alcohol was by helping others and social workers can help with that by creating spaces and groups that can invite people to express their concerns and their fears. Another member of the group, Nik, stated that they "would share their personal encounters without the fear of being judged to help their colleagues". However at the end, starting the meeting with the serenity prayer was a clear

indication that those people who might be considered by the community as non-believers actually adored God. The anonymous Alcoholic meetings have achieved a lot in helping alcohol addicts members. Membership has grown to over two thousand around the Upper East Side area during the years. It is a good way of solving a problem by sharing experience and involving the members directly. I would like to conclude with Mother Theresa's quote: one good step at day, can be a lot of good steps at the end of the year.