

Individuals confess alcohol abuse to clergy

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Persons with alcohol problems are finding comfort in speaking about their situation to clergy, a new study shows.

Among 1,910 people with any alcohol-related problems, 14.7 percent said they used clergy services. The study, from researchers at the University of Michigan Health System and Saint Louis University, also indicates the majority of those who used services from clergy also used professional services at some point; only 0.5 percent used clergy services exclusively for their alcohol use-related problem.

Although professional services are used more commonly, these findings show that clergy services are an important part of the overall system of care for persons with alcohol problems.

Researchers sought to examine the prevalence of use of clergy services among those adults who received help for an alcohol use problem in the United States, as well as characteristics and correlates of individuals with alcohol-related problems who used clergy services compared to individuals who used other types of services. Researchers also examined the degree to which individuals who receive help from the clergy receive other types of services as well.

The factors that were associated with an increased likelihood of clergy service used included being Black, aged 35-54 years, a lifetime history of [alcohol dependence](#), major [depressive disorder](#) and personality disorder, according to the data from the National Epidemiologic Survey on Alcohol and Related Conditions.

Individuals who met criteria for alcohol dependence were more likely to have used clergy services for alcohol use-related problems than individuals who never met criteria or who only met criteria for [alcohol abuse](#).

"This may in part reflect the fact that individuals who meet criteria for [alcohol abuse](#) by definition have experienced legal, occupational, and/or social problems due to their [alcohol consumption](#), and may be more likely to enter treatment through the legal system, employee assistance programs, or social services," says lead author Amy Bohnert, Ph.D., M.H.S., assistant professor of psychiatry at the U-M Medical School and research investigator in the Department of Veterans' Affairs National Serious Mental Illness Treatment Resource and Evaluation Center.

What makes ministers, priests and rabbis ideal are they are involved in their communities, know their congregants well, and see them on a regular basis, researchers say.

"Clergy are in a unique position to notice changes in behavior over time," says Brian Perron, assistant professor of social work at U-M.

"Their roles as senior leaders of churches, their embodiment of important tenants of their faiths, and their formal roles as caregivers of their congregations also lend clergy considerable credibility, particularly within African American communities. Clergy are often seen as being deeply committed to their congregants and willing to honor desires for confidentiality."

More information: The American Journal on Addictions, Volume 19, Issue 4 (p 345-351)

Provided by University of Michigan

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