Soberistas – Understanding a new form of Mutual Aid (SUMA), preliminary findings

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Background

Soberistas is a social network website aimed primarily at women who are seeking help with alcohol dependency. It has been in operation since November 2012 and currently has 31,262 registered members from all around the world.

The peer support provided through Soberistas shares common elements of that supplied through other forms of mutual aid.

Mutual aid groups are self-organising groups that provide a source of structure and continuing social, emotional and informational support for patients seeking recovery from alcohol or drug dependence. The evidence base demonstrates that active participation leads to increased likelihood of sustaining recovery.

Much research has shown the effectiveness of mutual aid, but there is relatively little concerning the mechanisms behind its success.

Aim:
This study aims to understand and describe the ‘Soberistas’ entity, both its constituent members and what it offers them.

Methods

Soberistas members and browsers were invited to complete an online questionnaire including: demographics; previous attempts to cut down alcohol; current alcohol use and goals; how participants became aware of Soberistas; why they continue to use the site.

Results

438 Soberistas completed the questionnaire.

The most popular elements of Soberistas were ‘Blogs’ (41% of participants using it frequently) and ‘Personal Stories’ (39% of participants using it frequently and 54% using it sometimes).

When did you last have a drink containing alcohol?

Almost 2/3rd participants described alcohol having been a problem for over 10 years. The majority were in some kind of employment. 47% of survey participants have never tried any other forms of support before. Many cited ‘anonymous support’ as the reason for their continued membership.

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