

# WHETHER, WHEN, AND TO WHOM?: DISCLOSURE COMFORT AMONG PEOPLE IN RECOVERY FROM ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUG USE PROBLEMS

For more details, please read the original paper:  
Earnshaw, V. A., Bergman, B. G., & Kelly, J. F. (2019). Whether, when, and to whom?: An investigation of comfort with disclosing alcohol and other drug histories in a nationally representative sample of recovering persons. *Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment*, 101, 29-37.

## BACKGROUND

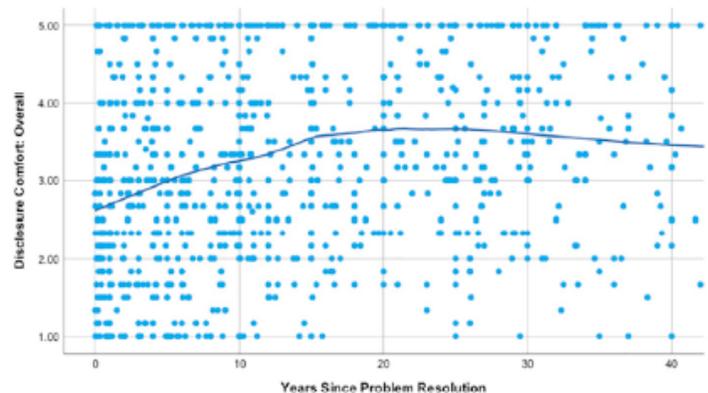
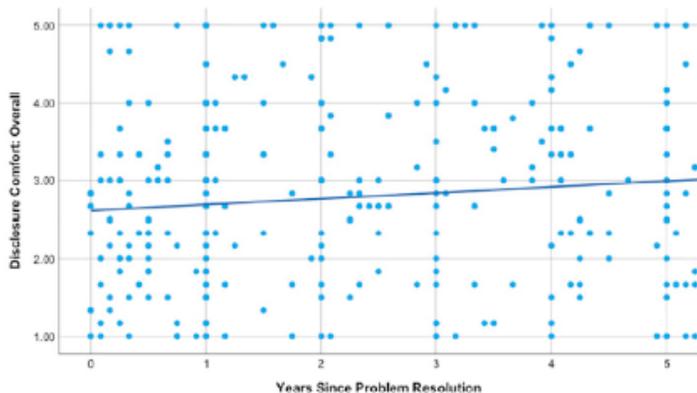
Due to fear of stigma, individuals in recovery from alcohol and other drug (AOD) problems may struggle with whether, when, and to whom they should disclose their AOD history and recovery status. Yet, telling others about their history of AOD problems can help people in recovery access social support and other resources that may help their recovery.

This study included a nationally-representative sample of 1,987 individuals in recovery from an alcohol or other drug use problem in the U.S. The data were collected in 2016. All participants completed an online survey.

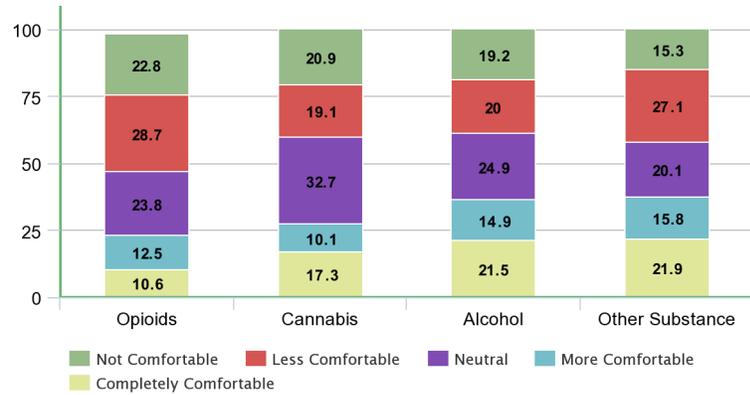
## STUDY AIMS

Investigate how comfortable individuals feel disclosing their AOD history as a function of: time since problem resolution, and to whom they are disclosing (e.g., family, friend, acquaintance), and their primary substance use problem (e.g., alcohol, cannabis, opioid, or other substance).

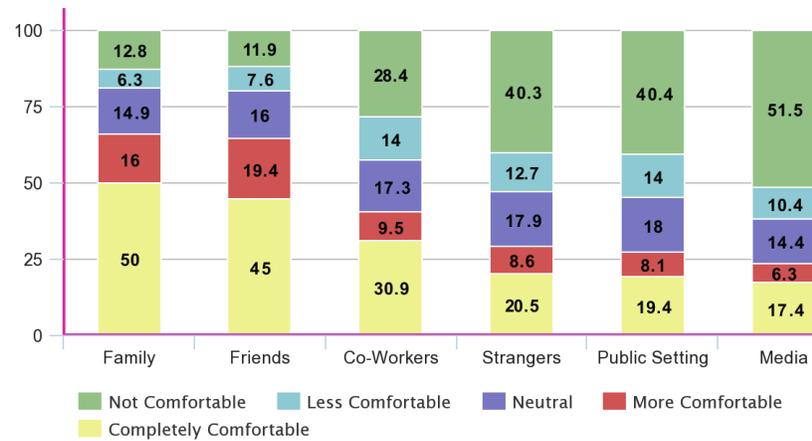
### Association Between Years Since Problem Resolution and Disclosure Comfort



## Percentage of Participants with Varying Levels of Disclosure Comfort by Primary Substance Used



## Percentages of Participants with Varying Levels of Disclosure Comfort to Different Recipients



## FINDINGS

Results of this study indicate that disclosure comfort is related to: time since problem resolution, closeness of relationship to disclosure recipient, and primary substance used.

Disclosure comfort was found to increase over time. Participants starting their recovery had low to moderate disclosure comfort. Over time, many participants became more comfortable with disclosure. People in recovery may become more comfortable if others respond positively to them and/or they begin to internalize less stigma.

Relationship closeness was important for disclosure comfort. Participants reported that they were more comfortable disclosing in intimate relationships, such as to friends and family, and less comfortable disclosing in more distant relationships, such as to co-workers or the media.

Participants who had resolved problems with opioids reported lower disclosure comfort than those who resolved issues with alcohol or drugs other than cannabis. This population may experience and fear more stigma than those who have resolved other AOD problems.

Alcohol and other drug problems are still highly stigmatized in the US.

Many do not feel comfortable disclosing their AOD recovery regardless of how much time has passed since the resolution of their AOD problem.

It may be important to develop interventions to help people make decisions regarding whether, when, and whom they should disclose their recovery.

It is also important to reduce stigma so that no one with a history of AOD problems has to worry about how others will react to their disclosure.