

“People who might have liked you to drink less”: changing responses to drinking by U.S. family members and friends, 1979–1990

BY ROBIN ROOM,
THOMAS K. GREENFIELD,
AND CONSTANCE WEISNER

Room is now vice president for research and development, Addiction Research Foundation of Ontario; Greenfield is director of the Alcohol Research Group at the Medical Research Institute of San Francisco (2000 Hearst Ave., Berkeley, CA 94709-2176); and Weisner is scientific director of the National Alcohol Research Center at the Alcohol Research Group. Room's training is in sociology, Greenfield's in psychology, and Weisner's in social welfare and public health; all three have worked extensively on studies of drinking patterns and problems in general and clinical populations.

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This paper is concerned with the patterning of comments and suggestions from family members and friends about drinking less or acting differently when drinking. It draws on data from three national surveys of the U.S. adult household population, in 1979, 1984 and 1990, to examine trends in such comments and suggestions. As Holmila has shown in her analyses (1987, 1988) of efforts by the wives and husbands in young Finnish and Soviet couples to control each other's drinking, comments and suggestions about drinking are quite common in the nuclear family, with the predominant direction of flow of control efforts going from women to men. An analysis of 1984 U.S. national survey data (Room, 1989b) found that such control efforts were quite common not only between spouses, but also more broadly in the family and among friends. In the family, it was suggested, these efforts tended to flow from women to men and from older to younger generations. But the predominant flow from women to men, it seemed, might reflect only the different prevalences by gender of problematic drinking, since it was also found that heavily drinking women were as likely as heavily drinking men to have encountered control efforts.

A later report (Room, 1989c), using data from adult general-population studies in a Northern California county, offered a first glimpse of changes over time in the prevalence of such social control efforts. Compared with respondents in a 1979 survey of the county, respondents in a similar 1987/88 survey reported a 50% increase in instances of others having ever said anything about the respondent's drinking. This suggested that within the U.S., on a local basis at least, during the 1980s there was a major change in the tendency of individuals to comment on each other's drinking behavior. Unlike the 1984 U.S. national data, in the Northern California 1987/88 sample heavily drinking husbands were more likely than heavily drinking wives to have been pressured by their spouse about their drinking.

The present paper offers a first look at trends over the last decade in responses to drinking by family and friends for the U.S. as a whole, comparing results from the 1979, 1984 and 1990 national surveys. The period covered by these surveys includes the peaking in 1980 and 1981 of per-capita alcohol consumption at its highest level since the 1830s, and the first sustained reduction in levels of alcohol consumption since the repeal of Prohibition. The period also witnessed the rise and proliferation of anti-alcohol movements directed against one or another facet of drinking or its consequences. Notable among the citizen-action and self-help movements burgeoning during the decade are Mothers Against Drunk Driving and the Adult Children of Alcoholics movement; there was, simultaneously, a substantial rise in Alcoholics Anonymous membership and in alcohol treatment rates (Room, 1987, 1989a). In the present analysis, we examine the correlatives in the private sphere (transactions between individuals, their family members, and friends) of these more public efforts to reduce the social burden of problematic drinking.

Methods

Samples This report is based on three probability surveys of the adult household population of the 48 conterminous U.S. states. Each survey, although quite different in design, used multi-stage sampling and comparable (though in some instances not identical) measures. In this paper, to provide the reader with "effective *ns*"—those that take account of weighting factors and the sampling inefficiencies—average design effects (n_{Deff}) were estimated using 30 (1989) and 41 (1984, 1990) representative variables and used to derive weighted effective *ns*. The approach used followed one suggested by Kish (1965), specifying an "effective *n*": $n_{Deff} = n/Deff$ (p. 527); details available from the second author). In the 1979 survey, 1,772 interviews were conducted for the Alcohol Research Group by the Response Analysis Corporation; the main

results were reported by Clark et al. (1981). Given the sampling inefficiencies and weighting factors, the average weighted design effect (Deff) was estimated to be 1.583, leading to an effective sample n of 1,120. Fieldwork on the 1984 and 1990 surveys was conducted by the Institute of Survey Research of Temple University. The main results of the 1984 survey, in which 5,221 interviews were conducted, can be found in Clark and Hilton (1991). The 1984 study included a heavy oversampling (see Santos, 1991) of black ($n = 1,947$) and Hispanic ($n = 1,443$) Americans, and its weighted sample size (reflecting population proportions) was 2,167; its effective sample size, taking account of sampling inefficiencies, is estimated to be 1,230. The primary sample in 1990 (i.e., omitting a youth oversample) included 2,058 adults age 18 and over. As in the other surveys, a multistage sample design was used. There were 100 primary sampling units, with one adult randomly chosen for interview in each selected household. Based on a Deff estimated to be 1.723, the effective n in 1990 was estimated to be 1,188. Percentages reported here for each study are based on weighted samples; design parameters, as well as ethnicity and gender/age group combinations, have been used to enhance representativeness with respect to the national adult population. Statistical significance testing is not undertaken in this qualitative analysis. To provide the reader with the basis for judging the strength of relationships, the effective sample sizes are given in the tables, downweighted to reflect the inefficiencies of the specific sample design involved in each instance.

Measures

In each of the three surveys, respondents were told, "Now I'm going to read you a list of some (other) people who might have liked you to drink less or to act differently when you drank. For each one, please tell me if that person ever felt that way." The 1979 procedure differed from this in two ways. Respondents were asked separately about their spouse/partner and about an ex-husband/wife if they had been previously married. (To approximate the responses to the

combined questions in the other years, the 1979 spousal questions were aggregated in the analysis.) This was followed by a filter question, "Was there ever a time when someone (else) would have liked you to drink less or to act differently when you drank?"; those responding "yes" were then told, "Now I'm going to read you a list . . ." (wording as in the other surveys). The interposition of a filter question may conceivably have resulted in fewer positive responses for the non-spouse categories than the procedure of directly asking about a list of relationship categories. In 1979 and 1990, each "yes" response was followed up with "Did this person feel this way in the last 12 months?" In 1984, a further question was interpolated before the 12-month question: "Did that break up your relationship with that person or threaten to break it?" Although the 12-month question was asked of all who answered that a person had ever "felt this way," the interpolation means that those who did report a break in a relationship (much less common than wanting the respondent to drink less—see Table 3 in Room, 1989b) were being asked whether the break in relationship occurred in the last 12 months; this would tend to depress, albeit slightly, the rate of those reporting any pressure in the last 12 months.

The categories of relationships listed varied somewhat between studies (see the following chart). The "any other relative" category for 1984 is not reported in the present analyses, since it would be incommensurate with the 1979 and 1990 categories, which exclude siblings, sons and daughters. An analysis category of "any relative" includes all with a positive response to any of the first six analysis categories, while "anyone" includes all with a positive response to any of the eight categories including, in addition, responses to a final "anyone else" category (1979 and 1984 only).

Response categories in the three samples and their aggregation in the analysis

<u>Analysis category</u>	<u>1979 items</u>	<u>1984 items</u>	<u>1990 items</u>
Spouse or ex-spouse	Spouse/partner (incl. living with) Ex-husband/wife	A spouse or someone you lived with	A spouse or someone you lived with
Mother	Your mother	Your mother	Your mother
Father	Your father	Your father	Your father
Brother/sister	A brother or sister	—	A brother A sister
Son/daughter	A child	—	A son A daughter
Other relative	An in-law Any other relative that you lived with Any relative you didn't live with	(Any other relative)	Any other relative
Other lived with	Anyone else you lived with	Anyone else you lived with	Anyone else you lived with
Friend	Any friend (other than those you lived with)	A girl- or boyfriend Any other friend	A girl- or boyfriend Any other friend

Overall, we can have substantial confidence in the comparability of the studies at the level of the common-denominator categorizations we have chosen for analysis. However, it must be recognized that the variations in categories listed may have introduced some variation in responses.

Both lifetime abstainers and former drinkers (defined as prior to previous 12 months) are excluded from the analyses reported here. This approach was necessary for the trend analyses because the questions on pressures from relatives and friends were asked only of *current* drinkers (respondents reporting having had an alcoholic drink in the last 12 months) in the 1979 survey. This restriction is somewhat illogical, since former drinkers may well have experienced pressures

from others, particularly on a lifetime basis, but the 1979 procedure made this the most reasonable basis for assuring comparability in examining trends over time. The proportion of current drinkers rose from 67.2% in 1979 to 69.4% in 1984 and then fell to 65.0% in 1990.

In the present analyses, we also use a measure of dependence symptoms composed of nine items asked in each of the three studies (see Figure 9.1 in Clark and Hilton, 1991).^{*} Lifetime and current dependence symptom scores were created by summing positive responses, on a lifetime and a 12-month basis, respectively, to the items. A score of 2+ symptoms is used in the present analyses as a criterion of problematic drinking. The dependence symptoms measure was used as an indicator of drinking problems (both lifetime and 12-month bases) in preference to either (a) an amount of drinking measure (because no *lifetime* drinking patterns data are available for 1979) or (b) a tangible consequences measure (because responses by family members to the respondent's drinking are a large contributor to the available tangible consequences measures, which therefore would have introduced spurious associations).

Results

Table 1 shows comparisons of the reported rates of others' reactions to the respondent's drinking in the 1979, 1984, and 1990 U.S. national samples. Qualitatively examining first the lifetime results in the total sample, it can be seen that there was a rise between 1979 and 1990 for every category of relationship in the proportion of respondents reporting pressure to cut down from a relative or friend. In most cases, the 1984 result is intermediate between the others; the change between 1984 and 1990 is greater for all categories except mothers than the change between 1979 and 1984. Drinkers are considerably more likely to have been pressured by relatives than

TABLE 1
Trends in pressures from relatives and friends concerning drinking, lifetime and current, among current drinkers, by gender (U.S. National Surveys, weighted data, *current drinkers only*)

	Total			Male			Female		
	1979	1984	1990	1979	1984	1990	1979	1984	1990
A. Lifetime Pressures:									
(Design Weighted η) ^a	(747)	(855)	(772)	(393)	(441)	(404)	(360)	(236)	(368)
Spouse/ex-spouse	14.9	14.4	18.7	22.7	20.8	26.7	6.5	7.6	9.9
Mother	9.3	16.0	20.0	13.1	21.2	24.2	5.2	10.4	15.4
Father	4.6	6.3	10.8	6.5	8.9	12.4	2.5	3.7	9.0
Brother/sister	4.0	-	8.9	5.7	-	11.5	2.0	-	6.1
Son/daughter	3.4	-	5.5	4.9	-	5.9	2.0	-	5.1
Other relative	4.3	-	4.0	6.7	-	5.2	1.7	-	2.7
Other lived with	1.4	1.4	1.7	2.2	1.4	2.1	0.5	1.3	1.2
Friend	6.5	7.7	9.2	10.2	10.7	10.6	2.6	4.5	7.7
Any relative	21.6	26.4	36.9	30.5	35.9	45.5	11.9	16.4	27.3
Anyone	25.1	28.9	38.5	35.2	38.7	47.3	14.0	18.5	28.8

	Total			Male			Female		
	<u>1979</u>	<u>1984</u>	<u>1990</u>	<u>1979</u>	<u>1984</u>	<u>1990</u>	<u>1979</u>	<u>1984</u>	<u>1990</u>
B. Current Pressures:									
Spouse/ex-spouse	8.2	4.7	7.2	12.3	6.5	10.2	3.8	2.9	3.7
Mother	4.1	4.1	8.1	6.1	5.5	10.4	1.9	2.5	5.6
Father	1.9	1.7	4.1	2.6	2.9	5.2	1.2	0.5	3.0
Brother/sister	2.1	-	5.1	3.2	-	7.0	0.8	-	3.0
Son/daughter	2.1	-	2.9	2.5	-	2.9	1.7	-	3.0
Other relative	2.2	-	2.4	3.6	-	3.2	0.7	-	1.5
Other lived with	0.7	0.5	1.0	1.1	0.3	1.5	0.2	0.7	0.4
Friend	3.8	3.3	4.8	5.8	4.3	5.3	1.6	2.2	4.3
Any relative	12.3	8.3	17.5	16.9	11.2	22.6	7.2	5.2	11.7
Anyone	14.7	10.2	18.5	20.0	13.6	23.1	8.8	6.6	13.3

^a Design weighted *rs* are estimated weighted *rs* (adjusted for inefficiencies introduced by sampling design and poststratification weighting; see Methods).

by friends; indeed, by 1990 over one-third of all current drinkers have been pressured by at least one relative sometime in their life.

Although there was an apparent rise between 1979 and 1990 in pressures from every category of relationship, the biggest increases in absolute terms were in pressures from parents and siblings. The spouse's preeminence as a source of control efforts diminished considerably in the 1980s. While in 1979 two-thirds of those pressured by any relative had been pressured by their spouse, by 1990 this proportion had fallen to one-half. By 1990, in fact, more respondents reported having been pressured by their mother than by their spouse.

These overall trends for pressures from relatives appear replicated in male and in female respondents. Both male and female respondents more often reported pressures from each class of relative in 1990 than in 1979, with particularly marked increases for parents and siblings and lesser increases for spouses and ex-spouses. There is also a substantial increase in pressures from friends on female respondents, but the rate of pressures from friends on male respondents shows little change.

In comparing 1979 and 1990, changes in the rate of current pressures, as we would expect, reflect in a somewhat heightened form the trends found on a lifetime basis. Rates of pressures from parents and siblings have grown most noticeably, while the reported rate of pressures from a spouse in the last 12 months has actually dropped a little. These patterns are replicated in male and in female respondents. The figures for 1984 are consistently somewhat lower than for 1979 and 1990. As noted above, these figures are likely to have been depressed artifactually by the interposition of a question on a breakup or threatened breakup in the relationship.

The left half of Table 2 shows trends in pressures from others among those who report two or more dependence symptoms in the relevant timeframe. It should be noted that there is a slight rise in the proportion of current drinkers who report 2+ current symptoms—8.4% in 1979, 9.4% in 1984 and 10.6% in 1990—and a steeper rise in the proportion reporting 2+ symptoms on a lifetime basis—14.3% in 1979, 20.6% in 1984, and 24.7% in 1990. On a lifetime basis, those reporting two or more dependence symptoms were somewhat more likely to have been pressured by a relative or friend in 1990 than in 1979, but the rise is relatively modest and does not occur for all relationship categories. Indeed, only for mothers is there a sharp rise, while there is a substantial fall in pressures from spouses. Comparing rates by year with rates for the total sample of current drinkers (Table 1), those with dependence symptoms in 1979 were three times as likely as current drinkers as a whole to have been pressured by a family member, whereas in 1990 they were only twice as likely.

Parallel trends are seen in the results for current pressures among those with current dependence symptoms. Only from parents, siblings and friends have rates of pressures on those with two or more dependence symptoms increased, while rates of pressures from the spouse and other relatives have somewhat decreased. The rather dramatic rises in proportions of reported pressures from mothers and from friends, however, mean that the ratio of pressures on those with current dependence to pressures on all current drinkers does not drop off between 1979 and 1990 as much as for lifetime patterns.

The right-hand side of Table 2 shows the distribution of pressures among categories of relationship and friendship, for those pressured by at least one person. The distribution of pressures by relationship category is rather similar for pressures in the last year to pressures on a lifetime basis. The main differences in 1990 were a distribution of pressures more tilted towards spouses and parents for lifetime than for

TABLE 2
Trends in pressures from relatives and friends concerning drinking, lifetime and current, among those with high dependence symptoms, and among those experiencing pressures (U.S. National Surveys, weighted data, current drinkers only)

	Lifetime Dependence 2+				Lifetime Anyone Pressured			
	1979	1984	1990		1979	1984	1990	
A. Lifetime Pressures:								
(Design Weighted η) ^a	(107)	(176)	(191)		(189)	(247)	(297)	
Spouse/ex-spouse	50	45	38		59	50	49	
Mother	30	42	43		37	55	52	
Father	17	20	24		18	22	28	
Brother/sister	17	-	21		16	-	23	
Son/daughter	19	-	12		14	-	14	
Other relative	20	-	11		17	-	11	
Other lived with	7	6	5		6	5	4	
Friend	21	24	26		25	27	24	
Any relative	67	70	71		86	91	96	
Anyone	72	74	75		-	-	-	

	Lifetime Dependence 2+			Lifetime Anyone Pressured		
	1979	1984	1990	1979	1984	1990
B. Current Pressures:						
(Design Weighted η) ^a	(63)	(81)	(82)	(111)	(87)	(143)
Spouse/ex-spouse	39	26	27	56	46	39
Mother	17	30	36	28	40	44
Father	9	14	14	13	17	22
Brother/sister	14	-	20	14	0	27
Son/daughter	16	-	13	15	-	16
Other relative	15	-	11	15	-	13
Other lived with	6	4	6	5	5	5
Friend	17	16	27	26	32	26
Any relative	51	49	59	84	81	95
Anyone	54	53	66	-	-	-

^a Design weighted η s are estimated weighted η s (adjusted for inefficiencies introduced by sampling design and poststratification weighting; see Methods).

TABLE 3
Trends in lifetime pressures from selected relatives and friends concerning drinking, by gender and age, among current drinkers (U.S. National Surveys, weighted data, current drinkers only)

	Age:	Male			Female			Total
		18-39	40-59	60+	18-39	40-59	60+	
(Design Weighted %)*	1979	(210)	(117)	(66)	(201)	(96)	(63)	(360)
	1984	(257)	(110)	(74)	(232)	(112)	(72)	(416)
	1990	(222)	(103)	(79)	(203)	(106)	(58)	(367)
Spouse/ex-spouse	1979	19	31	19	8	7	1	7
	1984	17	30	20	9	8	3	8
	1990	21	37	29	12	8	7	10
Mother	1979	15	14	14	7	4	0	5
	1984	26	19	7	14	8	3	10
	1990	32	16	13	20	12	5	15

	Age:	Male			Female				
		18-39	40-59	60+	Total	18-39	40-59	60+	Total
Father	1979	9	4	2	7	4	2	0	3
	1984	12	5	3	6	6	1	0	4
	1990	16	8	8	12	12	7	1	9
Friend	1979	15	6	4	10	4	1	0	3
	1984	14	7	4	11	6	4	1	5
	1990	14	8	5	11	13	2	1	8
Any relative	1979	30	35	24	31	16	12	1	12
	1984	38	39	24	36	22	12	8	16
	1990	48	45	38	46	34	22	14	27
Anyone	1979	39	35	24	36	19	12	3	14
	1984	42	41	24	39	24	13	9	19
	1990	51	46	38	47	37	22	14	29

a Design weighted *rs* are estimated weighted *rs* (adjusted for inefficiencies introduced by sampling design and poststratification weighting; see Methods).

current pressures. For spouses, this reflects the shifting sources of pressures in 1990 compared with earlier ones, while for parents, where the pattern also existed in 1979, it reflects the particular importance of parents as control agents earlier in a drinking career.

As Table 1 would lead us to expect, between 1979 and 1990 the spouse or ex-spouse lost preeminence as a source of pressure, and parents and siblings became more prominent as sources of pressure. Compared with relatives, friends were in 1979 and remained in 1990 a much less frequent source of pressures. Relatively few respondents, indeed, are pressured by friends or housemates alone, without being pressured by relatives.

Table 3 (pp. 586–587) shows the distribution of lifetime pressures on current drinking respondents, within broad age and gender groups, for the relationship categories asked about in all three samples. In each sample, middle-aged males report the highest rates of pressure from a spouse. The highest rates of pressure from a husband, on the other hand, are reported by the youngest female group, although the reported rates of pressure increased substantially by 1990 from almost nothing in 1979. For both genders, pressures from parents are most often reported in all three samples by the youngest age group, and the rate of pressures has also shown the greatest increase in absolute terms in this age group.

Rates of pressure from friends are also highest in the youngest age group, and these rates have stayed almost the same for the male groups from 1979 to 1990. Younger women, on the other hand, report more pressures from friends in 1990 than in 1979.

Overall, while younger respondents in both genders are more likely to report pressure from any relative or from anyone, the age gradient for women is much steeper than that for

men. Even in 1990, only 14% of current drinkers among older women report ever having been pressured by someone about their drinking.

Table 4 shows the analogous results for current pressures from others. As might be expected, current pressures from parents are particularly concentrated among younger respondents. In general, age gradients are stronger for current than for lifetime pressures, supporting the idea that the trends seen in the lifetime data reflect genuine historical changes, with fewer of the older drinkers ever having been pressured about their drinking, as well as some forgetting on the part of older respondents.

Discussion

The most notable result of these analyses is the substantial rise in the course of the 1980s in Americans' reported efforts to control each other's drinking. The proportion of current drinkers who reported that someone at some time had indicated that they should change their drinking behavior grew by about one-half between 1979 and 1990. There was also a growth, though much less dramatic, in the proportion who had received such an indication in the last 12 months. With some nuances of difference, the increase in control efforts was fairly generally distributed in the culture, among friends as well as relatives, between different generations of relatives, and for men as well as for women. This finding is a striking indication, in a period of falling consumption levels, of the percolation of a "new temperance" consciousness deep into the everyday processes of family life and friendship.

It should be kept in mind that the effective *ns* for these comparisons are small, so findings should be considered suggestive rather than definitive. This is especially true for subgroup analyses; but results from these analyses may be

	Age:	Male			Female				
		18-39	40-59	60+	Total	18-39	40-59	60+	Total
Father	1979	4	1	2	3	2	1	0	1
	1984	5	1	0	3	1	0	0	1
	1990	8	4	0	5	4	2	0	3
Friend	1979	9	3	2	6	2	1	0	2
	1984	7	2	0	4	3	1	0	2
	1990	8	3	2	5	7	1	1	4
Any relative	1979	22	13	10	17	9	8	0	7
	1984	13	11	5	11	7	5	0	5
	1990	30	16	11	23	15	11	3	12
Anyone	1979	27	14	10	20	11	8	3	9
	1984	17	12	5	14	10	5	0	7
	1990	31	17	11	23	17	11	3	13

^a Design weighted *ns* are estimated weighted *ns* (adjusted for inefficiencies introduced by sampling design and poststratification weighting; see Methods).

cautiously and qualitatively examined to see if they are consistent with the overall patterns.

In 1979, the main burden of control efforts within the family fell on wives and husbands. A spouse was twice as likely as any other relative to have said something to the respondent about drinking in the previous 12 months. By 1990, the results suggest, the burden of control efforts had been redistributed to some extent to members of the respondent's family of origin. The proportion of respondents reporting control efforts from this direction doubled, with not only mothers but also fathers and siblings playing an increased role. The trend for the spouse to play a relatively diminished role and the members of the family of origin an increased role showed up not only among drinkers in total but also in the subgroup of problematic drinkers—those who reported two or more dependence symptoms in the relevant time frame.

This shift did not, however, change the predominant directions of the flow of control efforts: from women to men, and from older generations to younger. The tendency of control efforts to flow from an older to a younger generation in fact increased, with both mothers and fathers increasing their share of control efforts. The predominance of women in the control efforts also tended to increase, with mothers and wives now roughly equally likely to try to control men, and mothers taking over from husbands the biggest share of efforts to control women. A faint counter-trend across genders can be discerned in the tendency for the excess of mothers' over fathers' efforts to be greater for male than for female respondents. The small number of women with high dependence symptoms are in fact more likely than high-dependence men to report control efforts by a father (data not shown).

While the fact that more respondents reported pressure from a mother than from a father indicates that controlling drinking

in the family is to a considerable extent "women's work," the fact that men are much more likely to drink heavily than women also makes a major contribution to women's predominance in control efforts. The spouse remains an important source of pressure to cut drinking, and it is mainly because husbands are more likely than wives to be drinking heavily that wives are two or three times as likely as husbands to have been exerting such pressure. But it should be noted, though the numbers are small, that there is also a consistent tendency among those with high dependence symptom scores for more men than women to report pressure from their spouse (five of six comparisons, data not shown).

The data suggest that efforts by family members and friends to express concern about drinking are extremely common in the U.S. general population, and that these efforts have been increasing. By 1990, over one-third of those who are current drinkers had been the object of such concerns at some time in their life, and over one-sixth had felt such pressures in the last year. Among the subpopulations reporting two or more dependence symptoms, about three-quarters had been pressured about their drinking at some time, and almost two-thirds of those with current dependence symptoms had been pressured within the last year. Prevention and intervention programs and policies need to take account of how common are these expressions of concern in American family and friendship relations.

The emphasis in the present analysis has been on charting trends in the 1980s, and for this purpose we have chosen analytical categories and strategies that maximize the comparability of three different population surveys. These categories are not necessarily the most revealing for analyses of family and gender relationships, and future analyses will explore these cross-sectionally with the greater detail available in the 1990 survey. Despite our efforts to maximize comparability, it must be recognized that there are some residual differences

in method, as spelled out above, which may have affected the comparisons in the present analysis. In particular, the results suggest that an interpolated question depressed the reported rates of current pressures in the 1984 survey.

- Note * The nine items are: I have skipped a number of regular meals while drinking; I have often taken a drink the first thing when I got up in the morning; I have taken a strong drink in the morning to get over the effects of last night's drinking; I have awakened the next day not being able to remember some of the things I had done while drinking; my hands shook a lot the morning after drinking; once I started drinking it was difficult for me to stop before I became completely intoxicated; I sometimes kept on drinking after I had promised myself not to; I deliberately tried to cut down or quit drinking but I was unable to do so; I was afraid I might be an alcoholic.

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