

# Alcoholism growing problem with modern American women

As the modern woman has become more independent, her problems have become more visible, and alcoholism is a growing problem among women, including both the working women and those who remain at home.

Phyllis Grubb, a counselor at the Alcoholic Rehabilitation Center at Butner, says that of the 45,000 people with drinking problems who were treated by the state last year, 18-20% were women.

"Before alcoholism was only associated with men -- the idea that a woman could be an alcoholic was unheard of," she pointed out. "Now that women have become more autonomous they are under more pressure and have many more conflicts that might cause them to abuse alcohol."

Because female alcoholics were considered social outcasts, many women never sought help for their addictions, Grubb said. However, during the movement for independence more women have realized the need for treatment of diseases and problems, including alcoholism.

She said that the difficulty of obtaining treatment for female alcoholics is increased by the differences in treating men and women. Until recently, most of the research and treatment has been centered around men.

Alcoholism in women is also harder to recognize due to varied drinking patterns, social attitudes, and consumption rates, Grubb noted. Women have difficulty seeking treatment because they often have families to care for, whereas men have a greater degree of independence.

## Health Hints

She added that today's profile of a female alcoholic is of a young, divorced parent with two to three children, no skills, and little education. "These women have more to lose than their male counterparts," Grubb emphasized. "If a woman needs help for a long period of time she will need child care, but she probably can't afford it. However, if the problem becomes too serious she risks losing her family altogether."

Grubb said that as women have become independent, society's attitudes towards women and drinking have changed. Now alcohol is much more accessible. Bars have happy hours for female customers, and professional women might have a martini lunch along with their male counterparts.

"Alcohol is no longer a man's drink and therefore the problems that it causes are no longer just men's problems," she said. "However, most of the treatment has been centered around men."

North Carolina is attempting to help alcoholic women by providing space at the state alcohol rehabilitation centers and by providing treatment through its network of 150 alcohol and drug programs across the state.

In addition, more programs are being formed that are geared towards women's needs, including support groups and halfway houses. For example, the Orange/Person/Chatham Residential Treatment Center in Chapel Hill is a halfway house that serves as a transitory facility for women returning from the ARC to

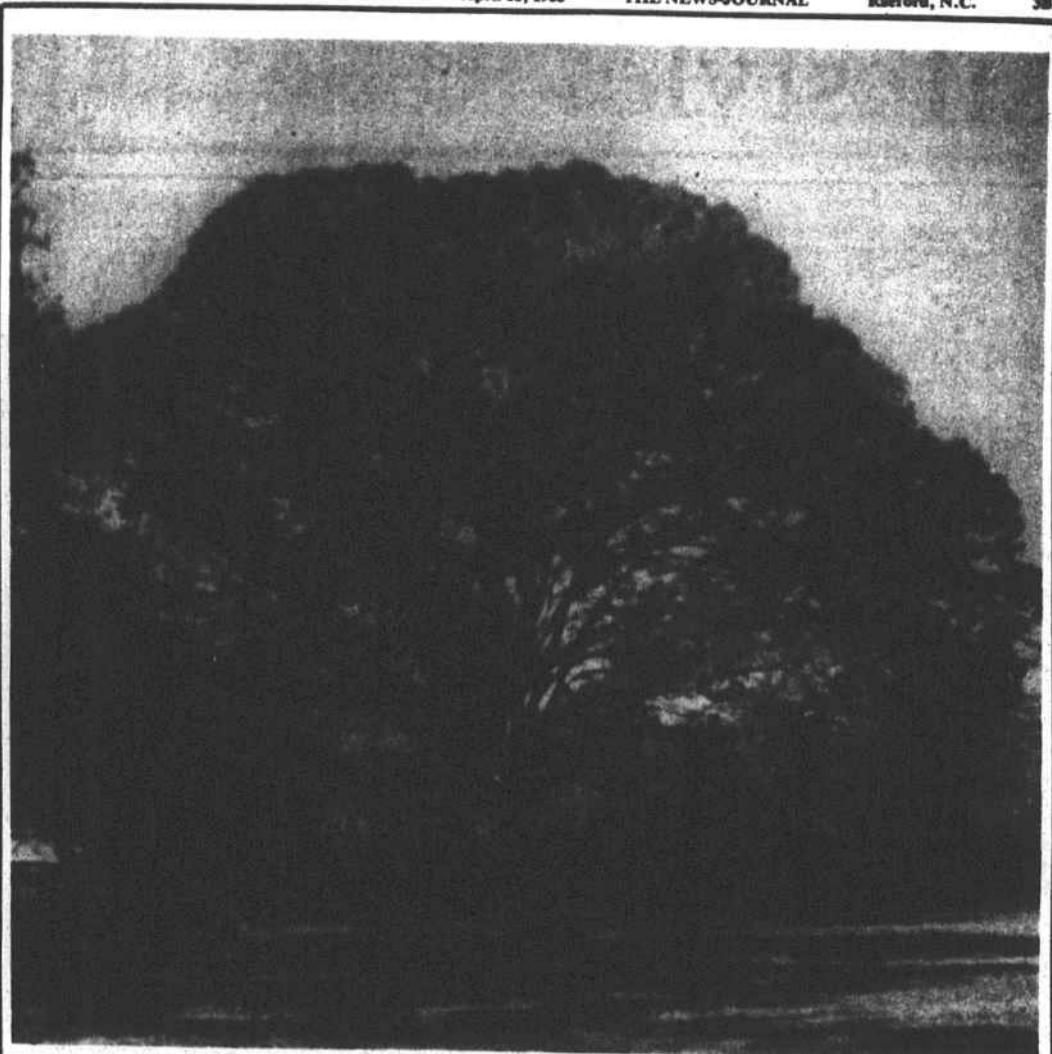
the community. It is a six-month program that is designed to ease the transition of each woman back into society. Dot Sparks is director of the center.

The 56-year-old Sparks is a recovered alcoholic who was treated several times at the ARC in Butner. She took her last drink ten years ago and has remained sober since then. She holds a masters degree in education, swims every day and plays tennis several times a week.

"I started drinking when I was twenty years old and it got progressively worse," she said. "My job involved a lot of traveling and it was then that I started abusing alcohol."

Sparks said that her friends urged her to get help, but as many other alcoholics would agree, one can only be helped when he or she is ready to admit that there is a problem. "I finally realized that the problem did not lie in external factors, but that I was unhappy with myself," she stated. "I realized that I was hooked and I wanted to change. The ARC provided counseling and understanding, and helped me change my old habits."

Sparks said she decided to become involved in the treatment of women alcoholics because she realized the special problems that they faced. "Women have always been the mothers and wives -- the protecting elements -- no one wants to believe that they, too, can be alcoholics," she said. "Because this attitude is changing, more women are coming out of the closets with their problems, but there aren't enough treatment facilities. That's why I got involved."



### Big and old

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