

# Teaching drug subculture in addiction fellowships: the state of the field

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## Introduction

- Despite advances in pharmacology and biology, treatment for substance use disorders (SUD) remains complex and inadequate.<sup>1</sup>
- Biology alone does not explain the course of SUD's.
- Only forty percent of patients find that medication-assisted treatment (MAT) controls addiction.<sup>2</sup>
- Both psychological and physical factors are important. So are social factors.<sup>3, 4</sup>
- Culture affects healthcare outcomes, leading to the concept of "cultural competence" taught in all advanced American medical programs.<sup>5</sup>

The question of this exploratory study is simple:

- **Do leaders of addiction fellowships think drug subculture matters?**
- **Do they teach it? If so, how?**

## Methods

- 41 Addiction Psychiatry (AP) fellowships and 49 Addiction Medicine (AM) in the US were identified.
- All Program Directors (PD's) were contacted with a 12 question survey via REDCap.
- Experimenter was blind as to the identities of respondents.
- 5 point Likert-type questionnaire on the importance of culture and subculture on the course and treatment of SUD's<sup>6</sup>
- PD's queried whether their program taught drug subculture and if so how.
- Additional basic demographic information on their fellowship program
- Responses were de-identified prior to the experimenter seeing them

### Questionnaire for Drug-Subculture Survey

A person's culture affects behavior, including health behavior. This fact leads medical educators to value cultural competency as one of many goals in teaching physicians. People who share use of a drug, whether licit or illicit, often share aspects of a drug sub-culture. The importance of drug sub-culture on the chronic illness of substance use disorder is less well established. This survey is to assess whether addiction fellowships in the United States (either addiction medicine or addiction psychiatry) formally teach about drug sub-culture. The survey should take five to ten minutes to complete. Your responses are confidential and de-identified.

1. How many years has your program been certified? \_\_\_\_\_
2. How many fellows is your program certified to train per year? \_\_\_\_\_
3. How many of your faculty are certified in addiction psychiatry by ACGME? \_\_\_\_\_
4. How many of your faculty are certified in addiction medicine by ACGME? \_\_\_\_\_
5. How many of your faculty are certified in addiction medicine by ABAM? \_\_\_\_\_
6. In general, how important is a person's culture in the natural history of substance use disorders?  

|            |           |            |           |           |
|------------|-----------|------------|-----------|-----------|
| Not at all | Somewhat  | Moderately | Very      | Extremely |
| important  | important | important  | important | important |
7. In general, how important is a person's culture in the treatment of substance use disorders?  

|            |           |            |           |           |
|------------|-----------|------------|-----------|-----------|
| Not at all | Somewhat  | Moderately | Very      | Extremely |
| important  | important | important  | important | important |
8. Does your program teach about the influence of culture on SUD treatment?  
 Yes (go to 9.)  No (go to 10.)
9. How does your program teach cultural competence in SUD treatment?  

|                      |  |
|----------------------|--|
| Readings             | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| Didactics            | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| Direct supervision   | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| Indirect supervision | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| Other                | _____  |
10. In general, how important is drug subculture in the treatment of substance use disorder?  

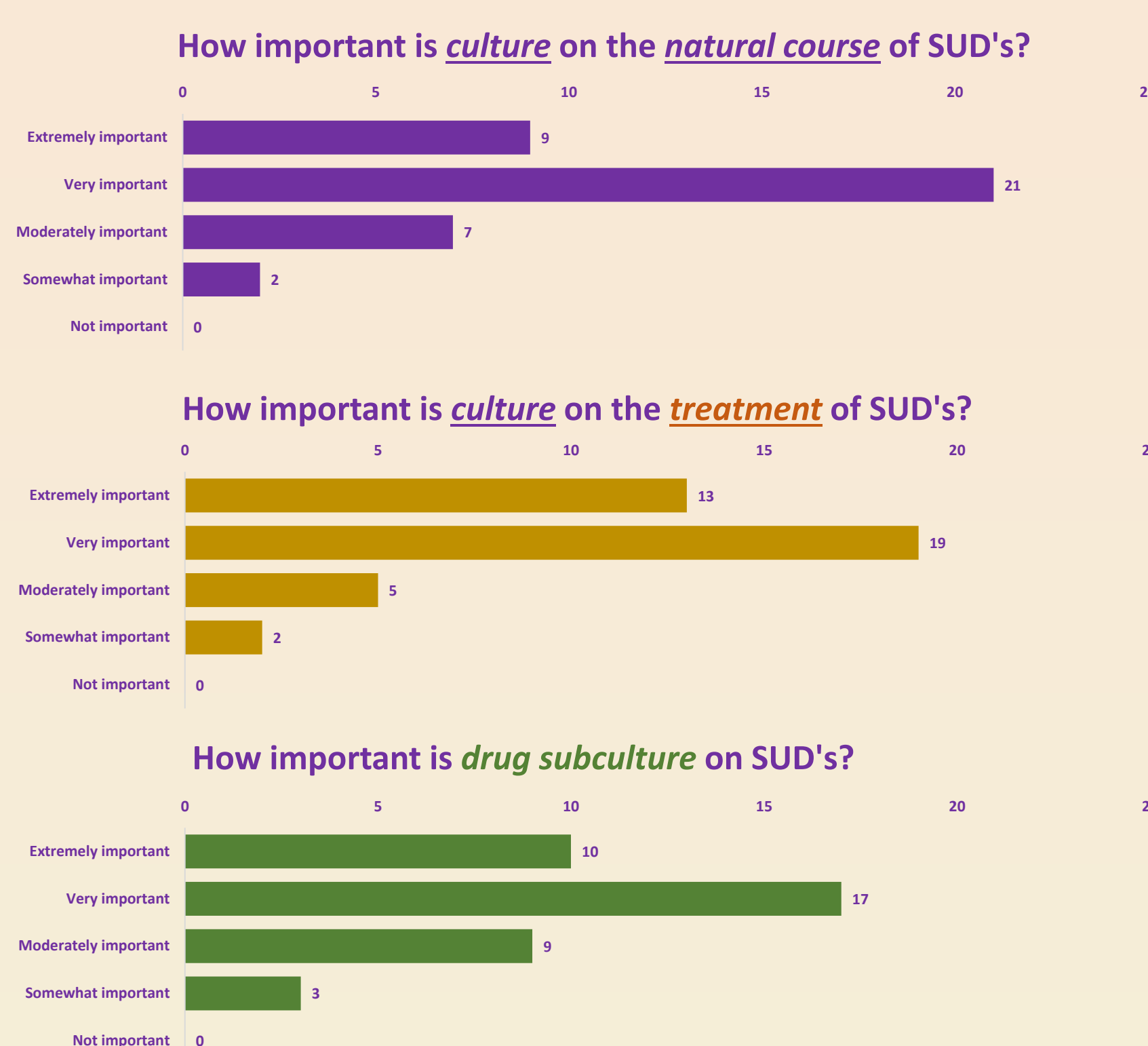
|            |           |            |           |           |
|------------|-----------|------------|-----------|-----------|
| Not at all | Somewhat  | Moderately | Very      | Extremely |
| important  | important | important  | important | important |
11. Does your program teach about drug subculture?  
 Yes (go to 12.)  No (go to 13.)
12. How does your program teach about drug subculture?  

|                      |  |
|----------------------|--|
| Readings             | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| Didactics            | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| Direct supervision   | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| Indirect supervision | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| 12 Step attendance   | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| Other                | _____  |
13. Thank you for your assistance!

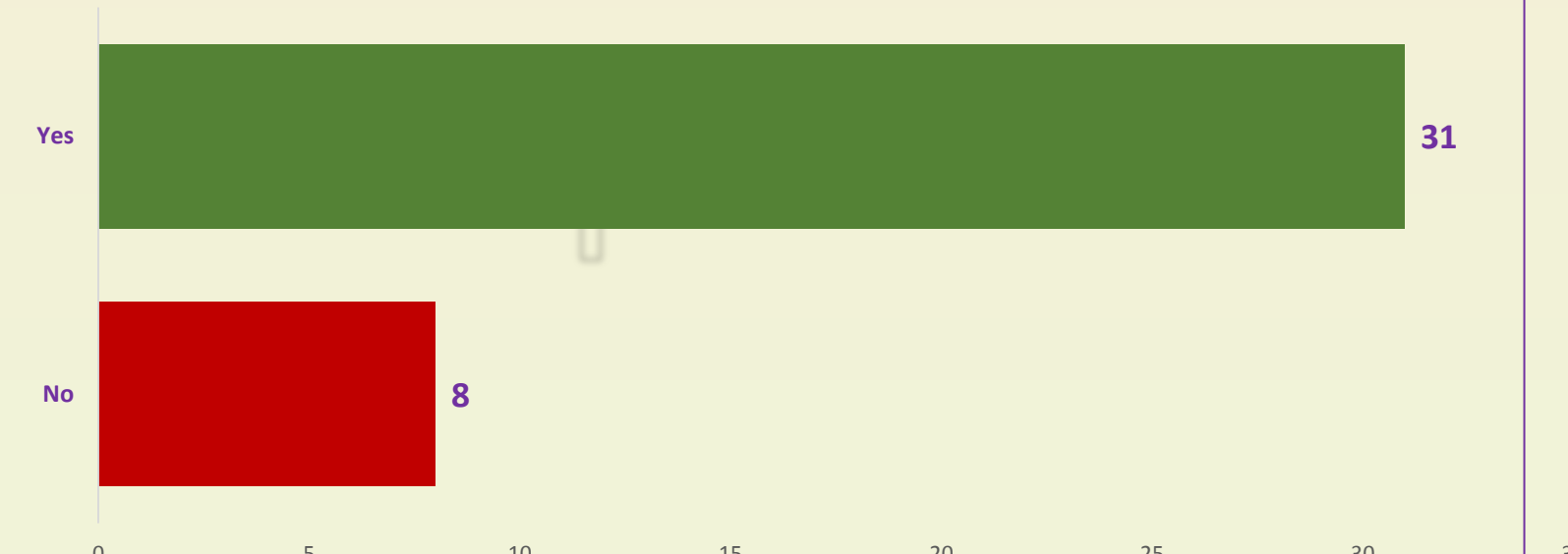
## Results

Addiction Medicine responses 18/41 (43.9%)  
Addiction Psychiatry responses 21/49 (42.9%)

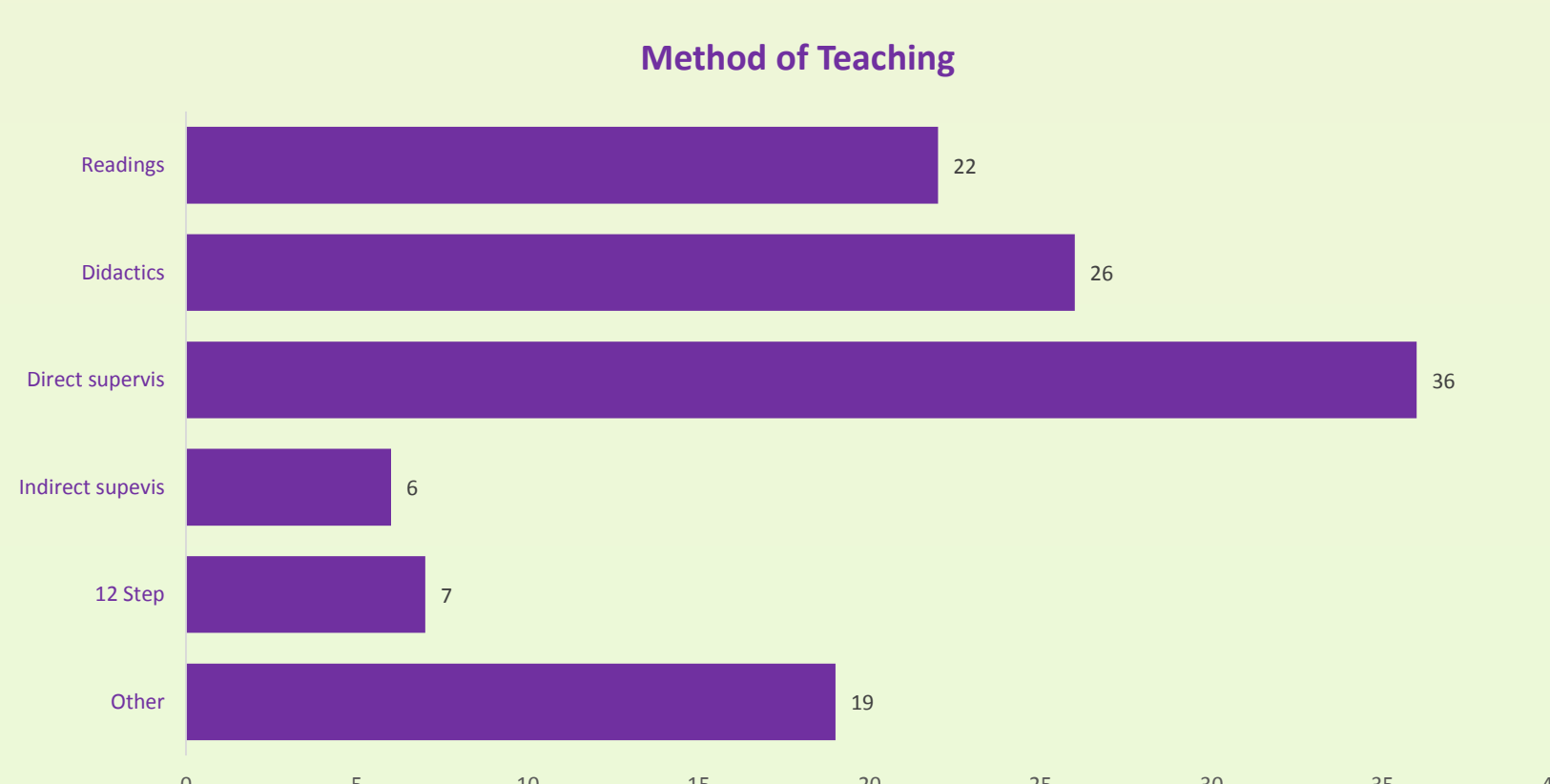
### Culture and Subculture



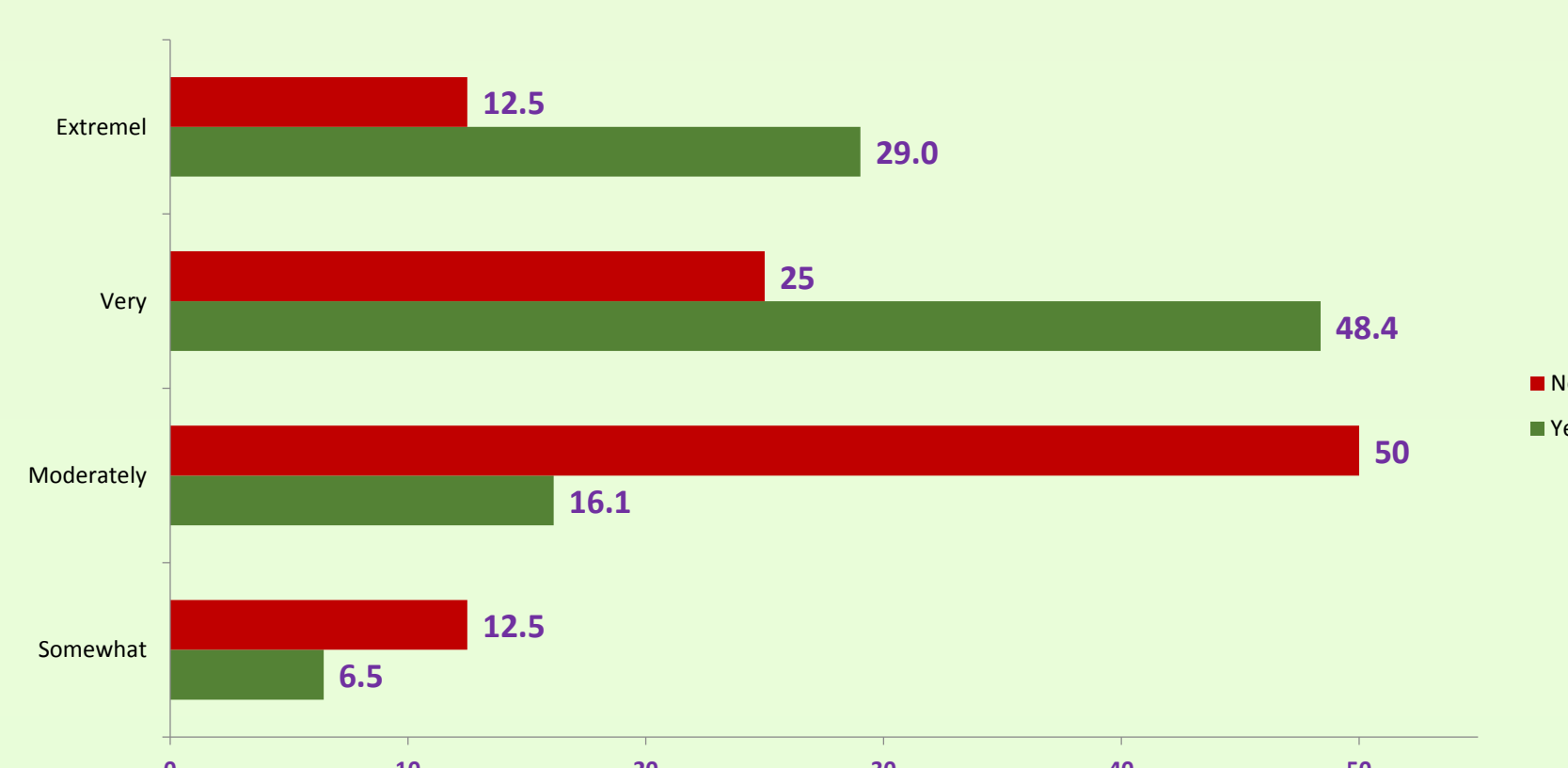
### Does your program teach drug subculture?



### If so, how:



### How important is drug subculture to programs that do and do not teach it:



## Discussion

- Drug subculture can be a significant factor in the course and treatment of substance use disorders.
- This study explored whether leaders of addiction fellowships thought drug subculture was important and whether they taught it.
- 8/39 (20.5%) respondents do *not* teach drug subculture despite rating it as "Somewhat important" (12.5%), "Moderately important" (50%), "Very important" (25%), or "Extremely important" (12.5%)
- Of the 79.5% who responded that they do teach drug subculture, some said that they taught it by readings, didactics, direct supervision, indirect supervision, and "other." Although these responses may be true, that is not certain, so that we know that at least 1/5 of responding addiction fellowships do not teach drug subculture despite considering it to be at least "somewhat important."
- If a fifth of specialized addiction programs do not teach drug subculture, it is possible that non-addiction programs may be equally or more deficient.
- This exploratory, initial survey establishes the need for further research in this area. For example:

- **How is drug subculture defined by addiction professionals? By addicts?**
- **Is teaching drug subculture necessary?**
- **What are effective means of teaching drug subculture?**

## References

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- <sup>3</sup>Bennett, Melanie E.; Bradshaw, Kristen R.; Catalano, Lauren T.. Treatment of substance use disorders in schizophrenia. American Journal of Drug & Alcohol Abuse, Jul2017, Vol. 43 Issue 4, p377-390
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- <sup>5</sup>Gainsbury, Sally M. Cultural Competence in the Treatment of Addictions: Theory, Practice and Evidence. Clinical Psychology & Psychotherapy. Jul/Aug2017, Vol. 24 Issue 4, p987-1001.
- <sup>6</sup>de Winter, J.C.F. and D. Dodou (2010), Five-Point Likert Items: t test versus Mann-Whitney-Wilcoxon, *Practical Assessment, Research and Evaluation*, 15(11)

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