



2024 Secular Overeaters Community Survey

Executive Summary

The Secular Overeaters Board conducted an online survey in late 2023 through early 2024. The goal was to better understand, and anticipate, the needs and experiences of the Secular Overeaters (SO) community. We hoped to discover which resources help with secular recovery and where we may need to focus on bolstering skills (e.g., to better prepare people for service) with online resources and workshops. This report reflects the responses of 203 survey takers, and the results are summarized below (click here, <https://bit.ly/SO-SurveyResults2024>, for the full report).

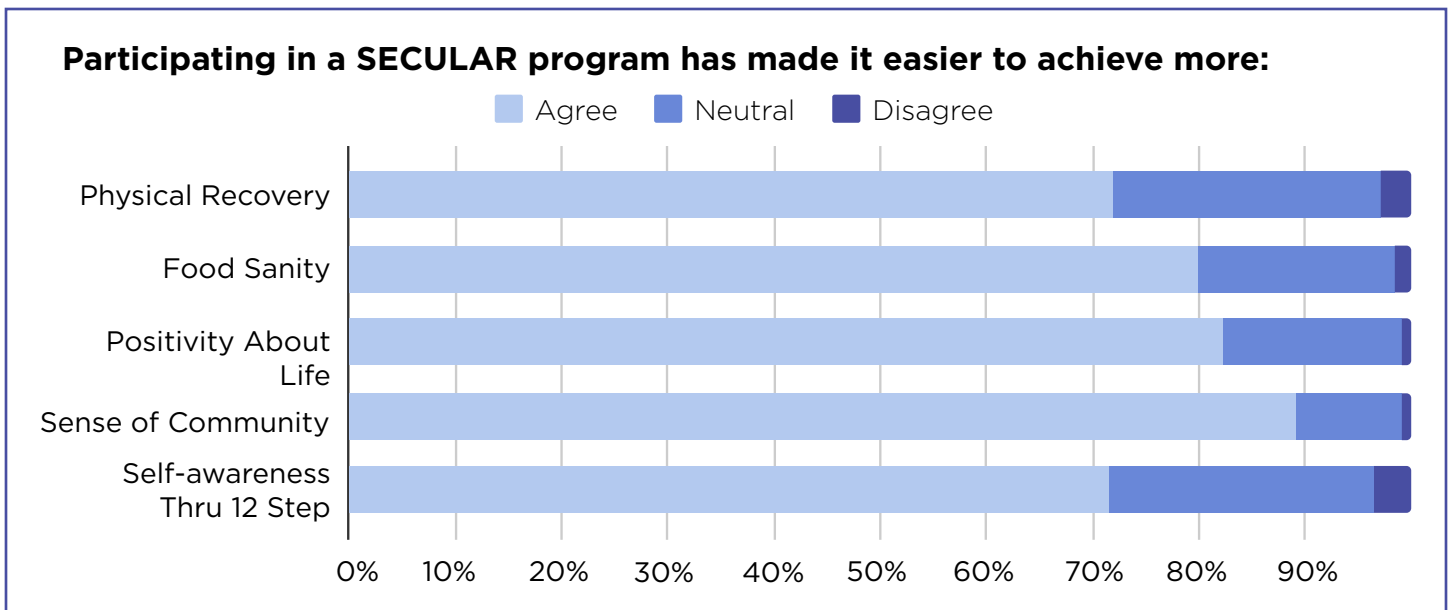
Secular Overeaters and the 12-Step Program

Until this survey was conducted, we were uncertain the extent to which people in the SO Community were using the 12 Steps in their recovery from compulsive food behaviors. It turned out that people responding to this survey are working the 12 Steps and feel they're an important part of their recovery; 94% were either working the Steps, had worked the Steps, or planned to!

Eighty-nine percent (89%) of our survey takers work their 12-Step program without a deity, highlighting the secular orientation of the SO community. Many in the SO Community remain active in traditional OA, but they've struggled to internalize and understand a recovery program that requires the incorporation and reliance on deity concepts.

Secular Overeaters' Community and Resources Bridge the Gap

For those survey takers trying to work a secular 12-Step program, the SO Community and resources help bridge the gap between a traditional Overeaters Anonymous (OA) program and the increased recovery that came with access to secular meetings and resources. Secular meeting spaces and recovery materials were so critical to those surveyed, they said they couldn't have worked a 12-Step recovery program without the SO Community. In fact, between 71% and 89% of our survey takers agreed that working a secular program made it easier to achieve physical recovery, food sanity, positive feelings about life, a sense of community, and increased self-awareness. See bar chart below.



Strength in SO Resources

Both secular and traditional OA resources are widely used and valued by the respondents. Key resources such as meetings, websites, literature, podcasts, worksheets, and newsletters were reported as helpful by over 50% of participants. Notably, meetings and websites emerged as the most utilized resources, reflecting their central role in recovery support.

Suggestions for future resource development include creating more accessible and diverse materials, enhancing outreach efforts, and improving community support systems. Specifically, there is a call for more secular literature, workshops focused on traveling with abstinence, and increased accessibility for neurodiverse individuals. The need for greater community building and support, including more meetings and mentorship opportunities, was also emphasized.

The survey clearly demonstrates that secular resources are crucial to the recovery process for the majority of respondents (see chart below), with 93% acknowledging their importance. This strong endorsement highlights the need for continued investment in and development of secular resources to support recovery from compulsive eating behaviors effectively.

Having SECULAR resources available is a key factor in my recovery and/or ability to work the OA program.

Answer	#	%
Strongly Agree	138	68%
Agree	51	25%
Neutral	11	5%
Disagree	2	1%
Strongly Disagree	1	1%
Total	203	100%

Imperfect Recovery

Recovery isn't perfect. The variation in abstinence found in this survey suggests that abstinence is often experienced as an ongoing process rather than an absolute state. Self-reported abstinence levels revealed that while

23% of respondents considered themselves abstinent, a significant proportion (63%) reported being abstinent most or some of the time.

Predictors of a strong sense of abstinence were two-fold; those who either were actively sponsoring others or who belonged to a recovery circle reported higher levels of abstinence. We in the SO Community often hear that we lack an abundance of available secular sponsors, which seemed to be born out in this survey as well; half of our survey respondents don't have a sponsor.

Based on the findings of this survey, finding, joining, or creating a small peer-group of people in recovery (i.e., Recovery Circles) could be critical to successful recovery and could lessen the impact of not having a sponsor. Surprisingly, the relationship between abstinence and time spent in the SO community or OA did not show strong predictive patterns, suggesting that while longer tenure might contribute to greater abstinence, individual experiences vary widely.

Future Focus for the SO Community

Overall, these survey results reflect a vibrant and evolving community that values a range of resources and approaches in its recovery journey. Their feedback provides a solid foundation for enhancing current offerings and addressing gaps in support to better serve the needs of all members.

Through the survey we learned there's interest in:

1. Zoom host/moderator training(s); to provide SO community members with more opportunities to provide service in this critical area.
2. Creating a meeting "hygiene" checklist. Several members echo this one respondent, "I've not yet found a secular meeting that is run smoothly. The lack of organization that I have found has been disappointing and keeps me from returning to the meetings."
3. Encouraging service, especially at meetings and workshops.

To all who participated, the Secular Overeaters' Board thanks you!!!