

Comparison of Alcohol Abusers Who Seek Traditional Treatment Versus Those Who Use An Online Program

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Problem: Access to treatment for substance abuse disorders is limited, and practical strategies are needed to expand opportunities for individuals to receive effective interventions.

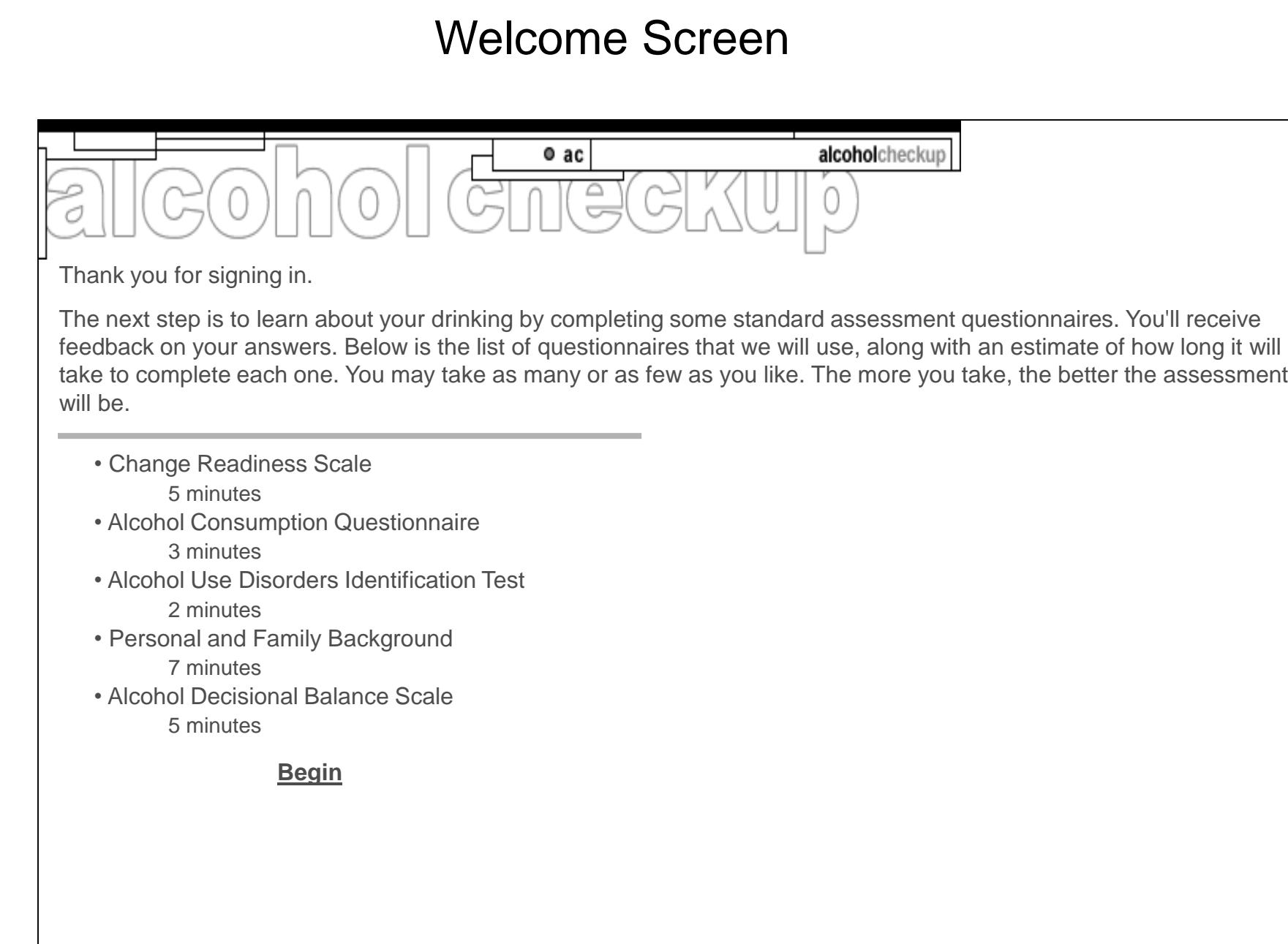
Approach: Can an automated, online program reach a hidden population of alcohol abusers who are not served by currently available treatment programs?

Abstract

The majority of individuals with alcohol use disorders do not receive treatment. Practical strategies are needed to expand opportunities for individuals to receive effective interventions. An online program was designed to increase users' motivation for change, and users of this program were compared to a traditional help-seeking population. Data was collected from 1,297 individuals with an alcohol use disorder. Compared to traditional help-seeking alcohol abusers, users of the internet program had less severe pathology, were younger, and more likely to be employed. The internet group included a larger percentage of women. Most importantly, the internet group scored lower on measures of motivation for change compared to the group in traditional treatment. Utilization of the strengths of the internet allowed a hidden population of alcohol abusers to be reached.

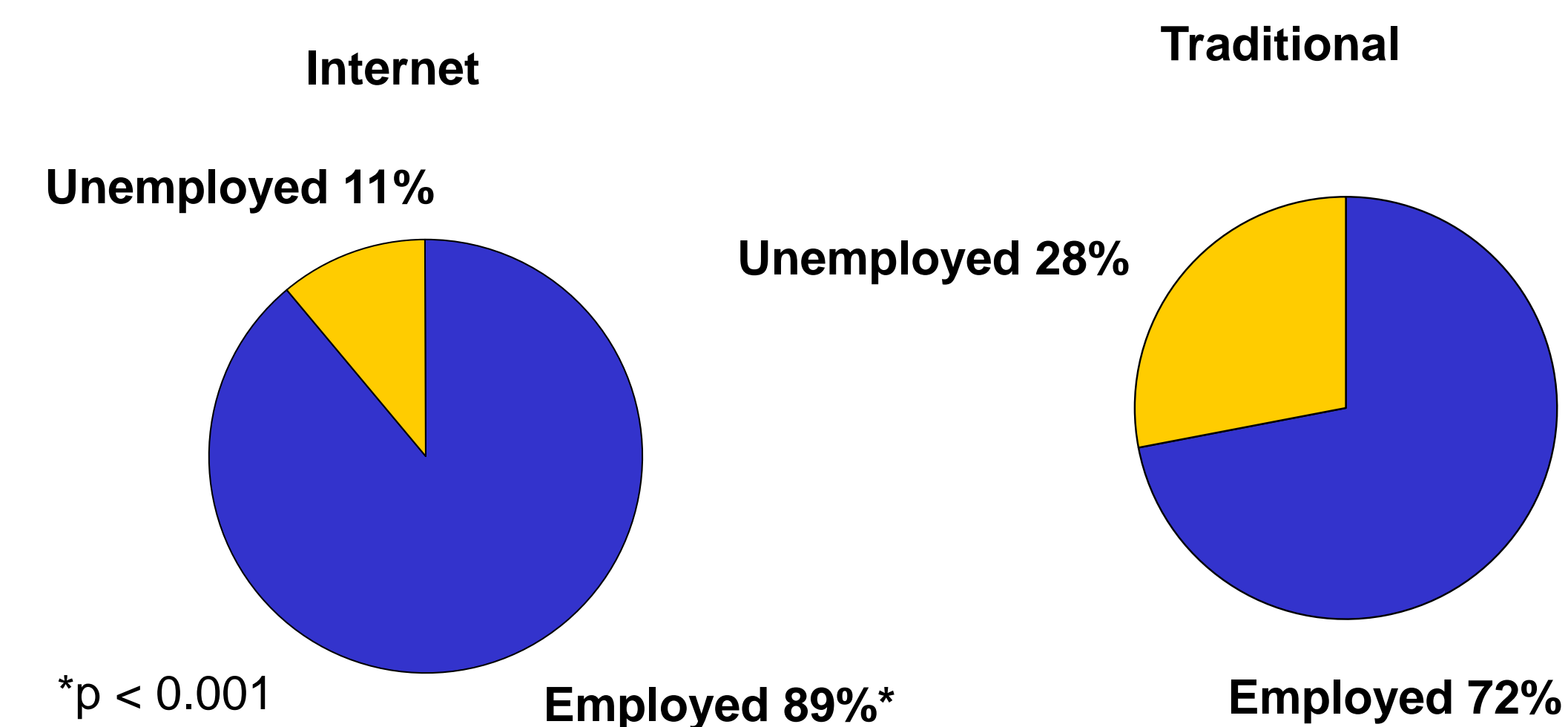
Background

- While alcoholism is a major public health problem, one of the greatest challenges of alcohol abuse treatment is engaging patients in treatment.
- Better ways of facilitating patient enrollment in treatment programs are needed.
- Obstacles to treatment engagement include:
 - Lack insight into the problem.
 - Desire to continue drinking despite adverse consequences.
 - Stigma associated with alcohol treatment.
 - Fear of criticism or condemnation.
- Individuals with alcohol use problems who do not access currently available treatment represent a hidden, untreated population.
- Can the easy accessibility of an internet program help reach this population, thereby lowering the barrier to treatment?

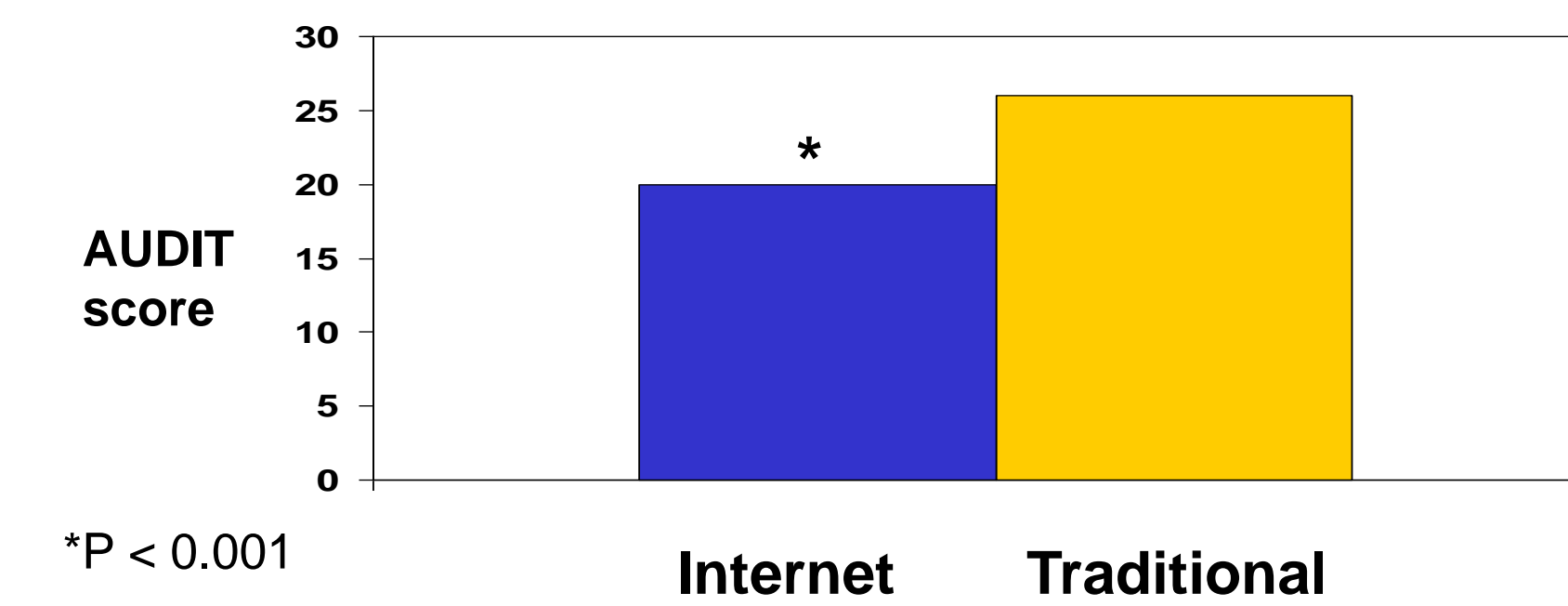


Results

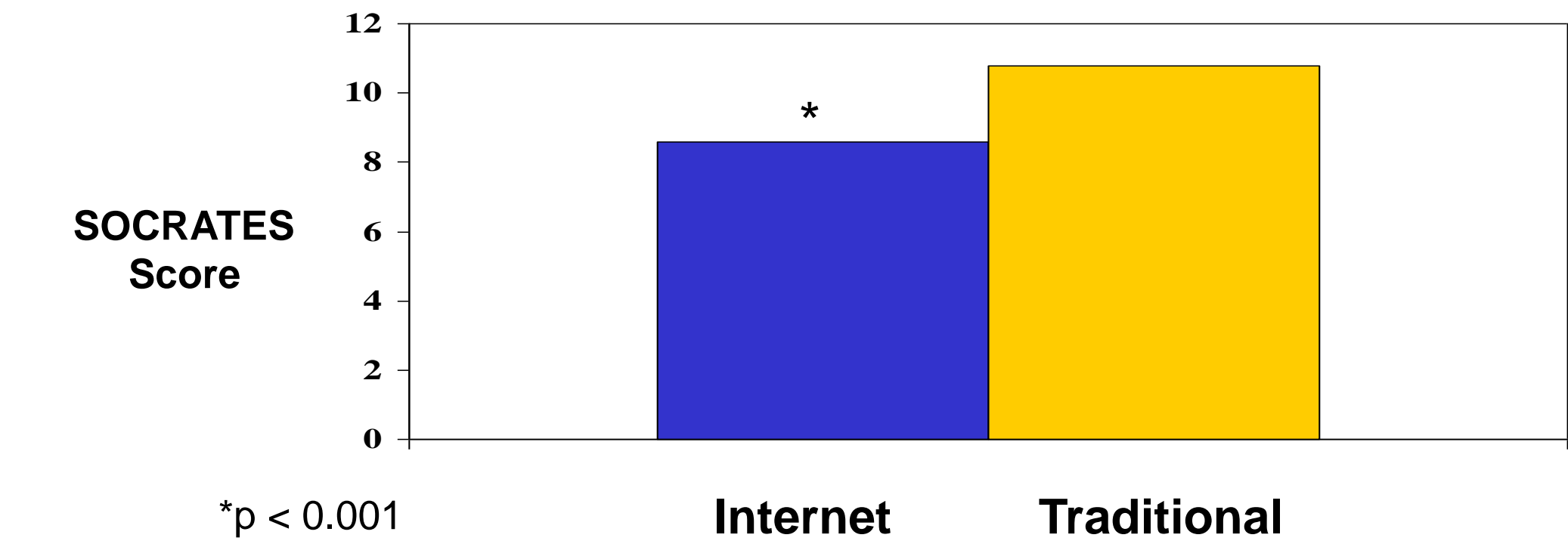
Internet is used by more employed individuals



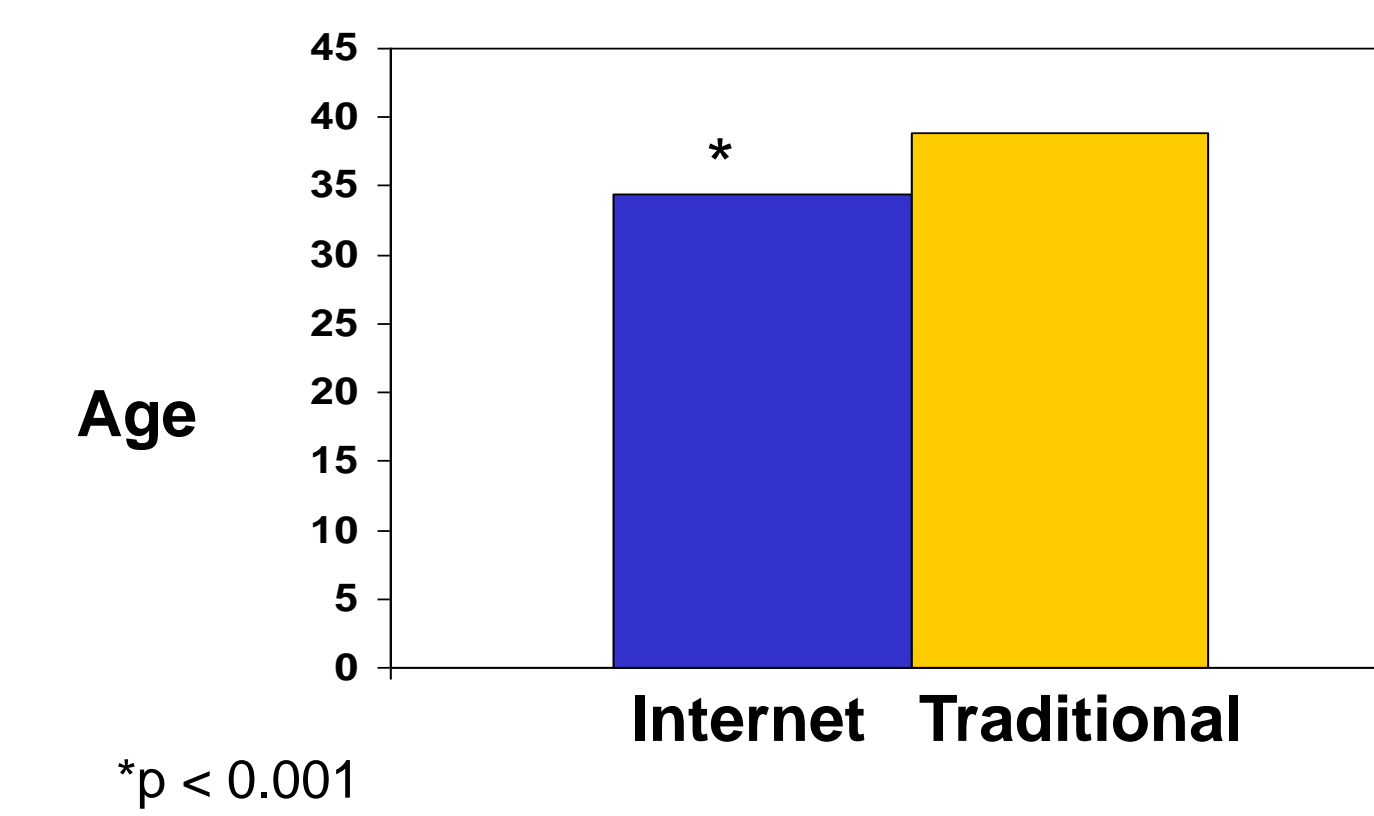
People are more likely to seek help on the internet at an earlier stage of disease



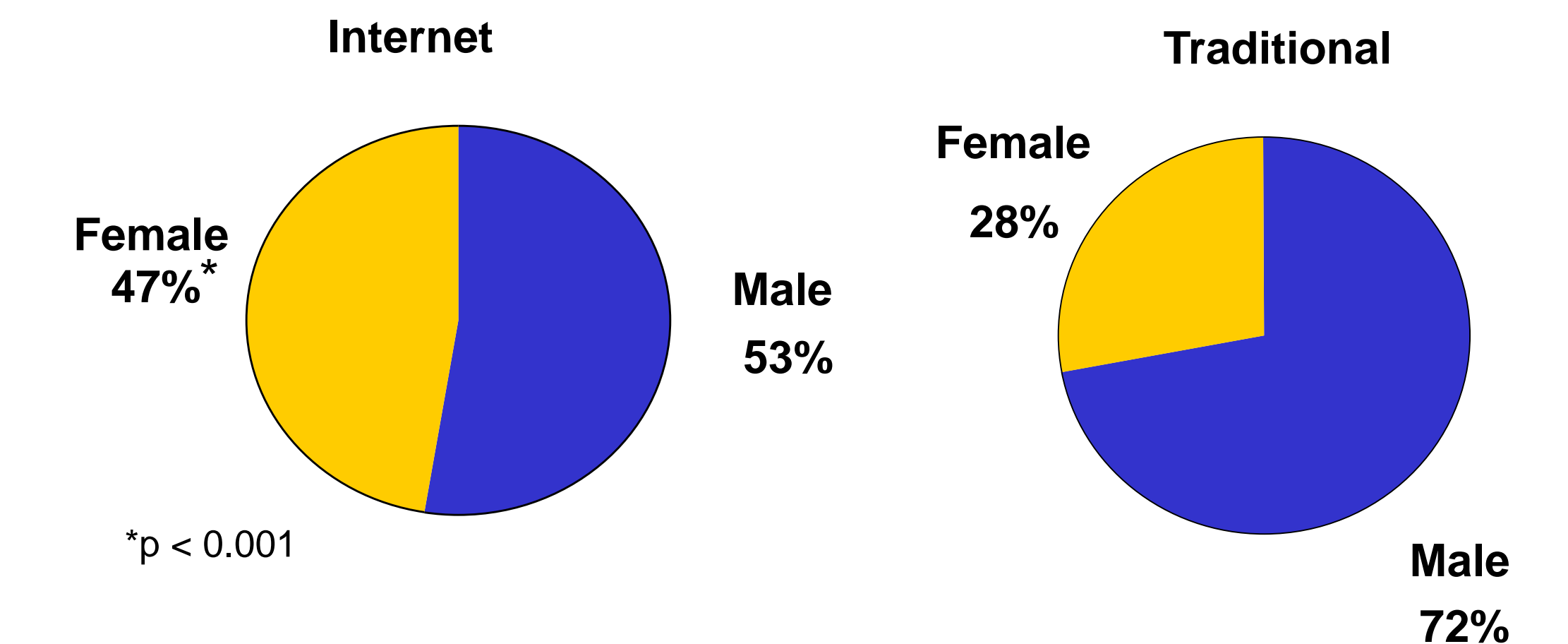
Those less ready to quit are more likely to use the internet



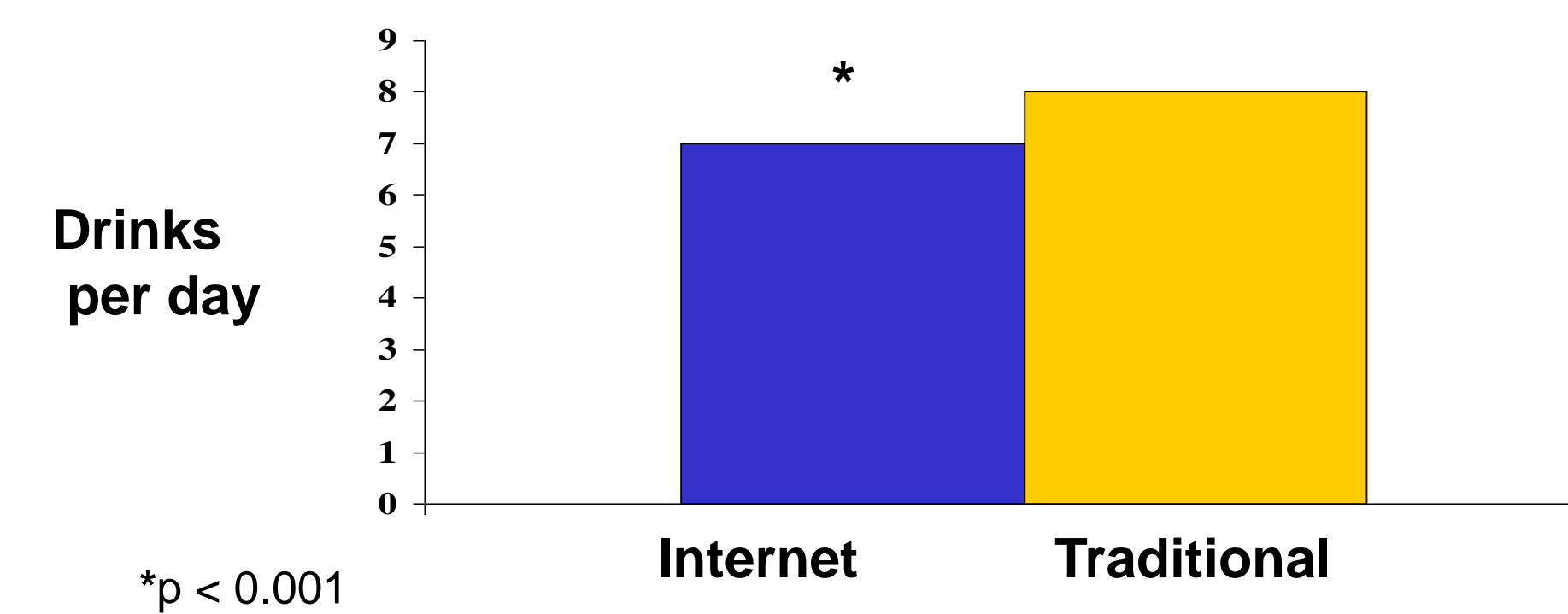
Internet help-seekers are younger



The internet attracts more women



Internet help-seekers drink less



Conclusions

- Alcoholcheckup.com was able to reach a hidden population with serious alcohol problems that was significantly different from the population served by traditional programs. Most significantly:
- Alcoholcheckup.com reached users at an earlier stage of their illness, raising the possibility of that excess morbidity can be prevented.
- Less motivated users were reached, potentially allowing the program to serve as a stepping stone for individuals who are not yet ready to engage in traditional treatment.