

## Editorial

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# Spirituality and Substance Abuse – the connections

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## INTRODUCTION

Scientific literature has always looked at the relationship between spirituality, religion and psychiatric disorders. A large number of religious beliefs and spiritual practices play a role in the recovery process from psychiatric disorders. Religious beliefs and spirituality have also been used to enhance recovery from substance abuse and in substance abuse rehabilitation. It has been widely suggested that religion and spirituality may be protective factors against a person indulging in substance abuse. There is no doubt that spiritual practices and religiosity are associated with a decreased risk of alcohol and drug dependence problems as well as abuse and criminal behaviour. The present chapter looks at the various facets where spirituality and substance abuse meet along with how they complement each other and the relationships between the two.

It is only recently that literature has moved from religion and religious practices to a new paradigm in socio - religious research called spirituality. Spirituality is defined as an individual's beliefs and practices related to God or a higher power in the universe although these beliefs may be secular and cannot be equated with religion. Today all over the world spirituality is being divorced from religion and all spiritual practice is secular, eclectic and personal. The purpose of this chapter is to see if religion and spirituality affect substance abuse. There has been extensive research in the realm of religion, spirituality and substance abuse but the findings are scattered and not validated across large studies. Also theories on how religion and spiritual practice may influence substance abuse are diverse and not uniform. The conceptual overlap between religion and spirituality also confounds research findings when done on this topic as many subjects unite both as being the same. Many religious texts all over the world abolish drug and alcohol use and hence we assume following religious texts and belief must protect against substance abuse.

## THE CONCEPT OF SPIRITUALITY& RELIGION

Religiosity is a complex, multidimensional construct and refers to the degree to which a person is religious from a primarily social and doctrinal perspective. Religiosity involves religious affiliation, participation, and association. Spirituality, on the other hand, is viewed from the perspective of the individual and his or her relationship to, connection with, and feelings about God or some higher power, and how this connection is related to an individual's search for self and meaning. Religiosity is defined as a social phenomenon with an organized structure; however one purpose of most religions is to cultivate spirituality in its members, which causes an overlap between the concepts of spirituality and religiosity. For example, individual prayer is typically defined as a measure of spirituality; however individual prayer occurs within the context of religious services and in the private practices of individuals as part of the irreligious beliefs. In sum, it is impossible to create two distinct groups of people defined as either religious or spiritual; most people are characterized by elements of both, to varying degrees. It is reasonable to expect that people may be religious and spiritual or that they may be spiritual but not religious or that they may be neither. It is not expected that people will be religious but not spiritual, since spirituality is incorporated into religions and is manifested in practices such as prayer and worship. Some of the more common measures of religiosity are denominational identification, frequency of participation in religious services, the meaningfulness of religion to an individual, and closeness to others in a religious group. Measures of spirituality typically

include one's belief in God or a higher power, individual prayer or meditation, the feeling of the presence or guidance of God in the midst of daily activities, and experiencing a connection to life.

### RESEARCH FINDINGS ON SPIRITUALITY AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE

Studies that have examined religiosity and substance abuse found a significant relationship between individuals with alcohol and drug problems and a current lack of religious affiliation or participation. A similar relationship between church attendance and drug and alcohol use in juveniles has been demonstrated. In a study that explored the relationship between religion and drinking behaviours via a secondary analysis of the 2000 National Alcohol Survey and found that drinking behavior especially total abstinence, were significantly correlated to measures of religiosity. Authors have found that religiously involved individuals are consistently less likely to use alcohol and other drugs, and when they do so are less likely to engage in heavy use and suffer its adverse consequences.

Researchers hypothesized that bonding variables such as school attachment and commitment and parental control are the means by which higher levels of religiosity are related to lower levels of delinquent behavior and substance abuse. Researchers have claimed that religious bonds, formed through belief systems, would deter adult substance abuse. Personal religiosity was a much better predictor of drug using outcomes than church attendance. Yet it is the social element of religiosity (like church attendance), rather than the individual element (termed spirituality in our research), that was suggested in the present research to bear significance in reducing drug use. They also found that religiosity was only relevant in contexts where religion was culturally common. There have clearly been mixed results in the effects of religiosity on deviant and especially substance abusing behaviours.

There is no consensus on the best way to conceptualize the theoretical framework in which religiosity is related to substance abusing behaviours. There is theoretical and quantitative support for arguing that religiosity may operate through and even enhance broader social bonds that result in the individual decision to avoid abusing drugs and alcohol, and these bonds may be religious or secular.

As discussed previously, spirituality refers to an individual's connection to God or however they define a higher power in the universe, and also the individual beliefs and practices that accompany this connection. These may or may not be affiliated with any particular religious doctrine and may be entirely non-religious. The distance between religiosity and spirituality is especially apparent in the Baby Boomer generation, where a "spirituality of seeking," rather than a spirituality of dwelling, is predominant. A spirituality of dwelling refers to a person finding God or the sacred within the context of doctrine and the religious institution. Conversely, a spirituality of seeking refers to an individual searching for the divine, meaning in life, and themselves through constantly seeking out information that can help them with immediate needs and problems. Although these individuals may or may not do this in the context of a group, they feel marginalized from groups. Spirituality, is related to self-growth, self-reliance, and the individual interpretation of right and wrong. He argued that a focus on "self-growth, self-healing, and self-actualization" and irreligious conceptualizations of God defeat the purpose of spirituality and liken it to a "therapeutic crutch". The purpose of this new spirituality then, is not a focus on God or the divine, but on the self.

Spirituality then is a much more loosely defined concept that tends to focus on the role of the self in seeking out truth in the universe, and these beliefs and practices have less and may even have nothing to do with traditional religious views on substance abuse and likely do not involve the same mechanism leading to deviance. New spiritualities focus less on moral doctrine and encourage personal freedom and the self-definition of truth and morality. They argued that the ability of Christianity to represent and sustain one's spirituality has been declining and there is an upsurge of other spiritualities in the wake of this. These new spiritualities focus on the individual search for meaning and self, and the means by which they accomplish this are up to themselves.

Lastly, some research has discovered that certain aspects of spirituality might increase the likelihood of substance abuse and even child abuse. There is research that supported the claim that more wrathful and fearful views of God or unstable and disappointing relationships with God may be related to higher

likelihoods of substance and child abuse. It is likely that as individuals establish more and more distance from socially organized religions, their relationship with God will become more unstable and subject to change. In the new spiritualities, individuals create God and morality, and are left to themselves to decide which path to choose, and that may be one of pleasure and individual fulfilment.

### **NEED FOR SPIRITUALITY IN SUBSTANCE ABUSE TREATMENT PROGRAMMES**

A cure for addiction has yet to be achieved by medicine or pharmacology. Social environmental approaches focusing on drug prevention education have yet to curb epidemic levels of substance abuse. Current rehabilitation programs need to be complemented with traditional ethno-medical approaches that meet these physiological, psychological and social needs. Spirituality and alternative medicine practices have been increasingly recognized as a central means for effectively addressing substance dependence, but little has been done to effectively integrate these insights. A lack of a spiritual emphasis in the emerging biopsychosocial paradigm reflects the general lack of religious beliefs and values among health professionals. This lack of involvement and experience, compounded by a lack of consideration of spiritual issues in their education, leaves health professionals poorly prepared to assess spiritual constructs. Professional and scientific responsibility demands these contributions to the addiction recovery process be assessed. Comprehensive addiction research should include not only biomedical, psychological and socio-cultural factors but spiritual factors of the individual as well. The traditions that utilize these practices also provide the supportive social contexts which reduce the personal alienation and need for such substances, and address the multifactorial social and personal nature of addiction. Given the epidemic nature of drug abuse and the safe and established effects of these procedures, their development, implementation and evaluation as community treatment resources is highly desirable.

### **FURTHER READING**

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