



Bibliography on Spirituality and Addictions

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INTRODUCTION

With the rapid growth of the literature on spirituality and addiction, it is important to take stock of research in this area and to begin to describe and understand research trends, gaps in knowledge, areas requiring future and further study, and methodological problems.¹⁻³ As a contribution to this effort we compiled a database library of publications on spirituality and addiction and classified the citations into ten categories that emerged. We describe here the methods and results of this process and offer some preliminary thoughts on the current state of the knowledge base on addiction and spirituality as a resource for other researchers in the field.

METHODS

In 2003 and 2004, a subcommittee of the Spirituality Research Interest Group of the NIDA Clinical Trials Network conducted a systematic and comprehensive search of the literature published in English on spirituality, religion and addiction, building on a prior annotated bibliography on spirituality and substance use, developed at the University of New Mexico Center on Alcoholism, Substance Abuse, and Addiction (CASAA). Searches of three databases were conducted: MEDLINE in PubMed (1950s-current), PsychINFO (1887-current) and ALTA Religion (1949-current) from October-November 2003 using Boolean logic and the following search terms in sequential combination: @substance abuse, substance dependence, addiction AND religion, spirituality@. The Endnote bibliographic program was utilized to compile a database of all search results. Members reviewed each citation and assigned keywords to it according to categories listed below. They also eliminated articles that were considered not relevant on closer inspection. The authors performed a final review of all citations, eliminating duplicates and inconsistencies in keywording.

RESULTS

As of January 2006 the library contains 1353 references and is posted on the CASAA web site accessible at <http://casaa.unm.edu/biblio.html>. Abstracts were available for 1043 of the references. Abstracts were unavailable primarily for many of the older publications and for some of the newer reports in non-indexed journals and other non-indexed sources. Based on review of the abstracts, contents of the ten categories are characterized briefly, with emphasis on quantitative empirical reports. No attempt was made at this stage to assess the methodological quality of the reports beyond the information available in the abstracts, and contents of the references lacking abstracts are not reported. The categories, number of citations, major content elements, and consistent findings are summarized in the box that follows.

1. Attitudes Toward Spirituality, Religion and Substance Use (n = 101)

- Attitudes toward use substances in relation to religious or spiritual characteristics. More negative attitudes toward substance use were found among people who attended church or for whom religion or spirituality was important.
- Attitudes of specific religious, cultural, national, and ethnic groups toward substance use. Those who belonged to more proscriptive religious groups were more likely to view such use critically.

2. Commentary on Spirituality and Addiction (n = 312)

- Case studies, personal experience, essays, and theoretical pieces

3. Spiritual Development and Practices in Recovery (n = 88)

- Spiritual change during recovery from addiction.
- Effects of particular personal spiritual/religious practices

4. Epidemiology of Religion and Substance Use/Abuse (n = 368)

- Large epidemiologic surveys and smaller hypothesis-driven studies. The vast majority of the studies reported a negative correlation between religiousness and drinking, both in the United States and other Western countries.
- Relationship of specific religious traditions to substance use.

5. Drug Use and Spiritual Experience (n = 56)

- The use of psychoactive drugs to induce spiritual experiences

6. Spiritual/Religious Interventions (n = 97)

- Mostly qualitative description or opinion.
- Empirical studies are quite limited.

7. Measurement (n = 22)

- Measurement of spirituality in the context of substance use.

8. Literature Reviews (n = 319)

- The 88 not cross-referenced in other categories were general reviews of issues in spiritual and addictions.

9. Twelve Step Spirituality (n = 308)

- Descriptive studies, opinion, and conceptual/theoretical pieces.
- Empirical studies of relationships between 12-step (usually AA) involvement and various measures of spirituality or religiosity. The majority of these studies demonstrated positive relationships.
- Studies of differences in spirituality among 12-step participants of varying personal characteristics and diagnoses. Significant differences were reported based on gender and psychiatric severity.
- Studies of the role and causative effects of spirituality in the process of 12-step recovery. No one has demonstrated a causal role of spiritual or religious change in the beneficial effects of 12-step participation.

10. Youth and Development (n = 274)

- Cross-sectional, studies reporting correlations between measures of religiousness or religious affiliation and use of various substances. Most studies reported significant inverse relationships between religiousness and use of various substances. The magnitude of these effects was generally small to moderate, and was reduced when other factors such as social control and peer influence were included.
- A few longitudinal studies allowing examination of the role of religion as a predictor of later substance use or change in substance use. These confirmed a protective effect of religion.

DISCUSSION

Although a great deal has been written about spirituality and addiction, most of the work has been concentrated in a few areas. Principal among them are correlational studies examining relationships between substance use and religiosity in youth and adults, studies of 12-step program involvement and 12-step-based interventions, and non-empirical commentaries. The consistently observed inverse relationships between religiousness or spiritual practices and substance use point to the importance of continued research in this area. Very little is known about why these relationships appear so consistently. Studies of “active ingredients” and mechanisms of action of spirituality and religion are few. Psychometrically sound methods are available for measuring spirituality and religiousness, and should be included in future studies of addiction and treatment. In spite of the clinical potential of interventions aiming to effect spiritual change in the prevention and treatment of substance use disorders,

scientific study of spiritually oriented interventions, with the notable exception of the 12-step literature, has been extremely limited, and the number of high quality well controlled trials remains small. The widespread belief that spirituality is important in recovery is consistent with findings to date, but the literature has only begun to explore ways in which spiritual processes or interventions may help to alleviate addiction and related suffering.

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