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Abstract

There is an increasing interest in the scientific study of the association between spirituality and recovery from addiction. While most of these studies have provided evidence for a possible relationship, others have explored the underlying mechanisms and mediators in the relationship. However, generally, many studies and reviews have not approached the issue within a specific theoretical framework of mainstream psychology. In an attempt to fill this gap, the review being reported here undertook a Qualitative Systematic Literature Review (QSLR) of addiction-spirituality literature. QSLR is an orderly manner of searching for academic literature, selecting relevant literature following a set of inclusion/exclusion criteria, qualitatively analysing the selected literature, and reporting the findings in such a way as to generate a set of hypotheses. QSLR focusses on literary data, rather than on numerical data as the tradition Systematic Literature Review and Meta-analysis do. Working within the framework of positive psychology, the present review attempted to identify the character strengths relevant to addiction and recovery by carrying out a QSLR on 53 selected peer-reviewed articles. Among the 24 character strengths, the following emerged as salient: wisdom, integrity, vitality, humility, forgiveness, kindness, love, hope and spirituality. On this basis, a hypothetical conclusion is suggested.

Keywords

Qualitative Systematic Literature Review, Character Strengths, Positive Psychology, Addictive Behaviours, Spirituality, Addiction, Spirituality

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Positive Psychology's Character Strengths in Addiction-Spirituality Research: A Qualitative Systematic Literature Review

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There is an increasing interest in the scientific study of the association between spirituality and recovery from addiction. While most of these studies have provided evidence for a possible relationship, others have explored the underlying mechanisms and mediators in the relationship. However, generally, many studies and reviews have not approached the issue within a specific theoretical framework of mainstream psychology. In an attempt to fill this gap, the review being reported here undertook a Qualitative Systematic Literature Review (QSLR) of addiction-spirituality literature. QSLR is an orderly manner of searching for academic literature, selecting relevant literature following a set of inclusion/exclusion criteria, qualitatively analysing the selected literature, and reporting the findings in such a way as to generate a set of hypotheses. QSLR focusses on literary data, rather than on numerical data as the tradition Systematic Literature Review and Meta-analysis do. Working within the framework of positive psychology, the present review attempted to identify the character strengths relevant to addiction and recovery by carrying out a QSLR on 53 selected peer-reviewed articles. Among the 24 character strengths, the following emerged as salient: wisdom, integrity, vitality, humility, forgiveness, kindness, love, hope and spirituality. On this basis, a hypothetical conclusion is suggested. Keywords: Qualitative Systematic Literature Review, Character Strengths, Positive Psychology, Addictive Behaviours, Spirituality, Addiction, Spirituality

In the last decade or so there has been an increase in research within mainstream psychology studying the relationship between addiction and spirituality. For instance, Cook (2004) reviewed 265 books and papers on spirituality and addiction, and Geppert and colleagues (2007) have developed an online bibliography on religion, spirituality and addictions that has over 2000 entries. Some of these reports have studied the effectiveness of and mechanisms underpinning the 12-steps approach of the Alcoholic Anonymous (Bristow-Braitman, 1995; Chi, Kaskutas, Sterling, Campbell, & Weisner, 2009; Davis & Jansen, 1998; Galanter, 2007; Kelly, Magill, & Stout, 2009; Morjaria & Orford, 2002; Polcin, & Zemore, 2004; Weegmann & Piwowoz-Hjort, 2009). Interest in researching the effect of mindfulness on recovery from addiction is also on the increase (Appel & Kim-Appel, 2009). Generally, religiosity is seen to have some protective effect on addictive behaviour (Cook, 2009), and spirituality is said to facilitate maintenance of recovery (Miller & Bogenschutz, 2007).

However, the two cited reviews (Cook, 2004; Geppert et al., 2007) have not explored the addiction-spirituality literature within the framework of a particular theory so as to identify a clear pattern in the claimed relationship among addiction, recovery and spirituality. At another level of research, more recently, there have been some attempts at exploring the processes, mechanisms, and mediators prevalent in the relationship between religion, spirituality and recovery from addiction (Johnson, Sheets, & Kristeller, 2008; Kelly, Magill, & Stout, 2009; Neff & MacMaster, 2005). In line with these developments in research, and in an attempt to elucidate the increasing evidence for the relationship between spirituality and

addiction, the present review aims to explore, from the theoretical framework of positive psychology, the prevalence of character strengths in the research reports on the association between addiction and spirituality.

Since the invitation of the psychologist Seligman (1999) to the American Psychology Association (APA) to focus on wellbeing and happiness as it does on pathology and psychological disorder, Positive Psychology (PP) has become a popular empirical approach within psychology (Csikszentmihalyi & Csikszentmihalyi, 2006; Seligman, 2002; Snyder & Lopez, 2007). Positive psychology is about happiness. Happiness or wellbeing is seen as an outcome of pleasant life - “the pursuit of positive emotions about the present, past and future,” engaged life - “using your strengths and virtues to obtain abundant gratification in the main realms of life,” and meaningful life - using “your strengths and virtues in the service of something much larger than you are” (Seligman, 2003, p. 127).

Strengths-based research and intervention within positive psychology is guided by a consensual classification system. Peterson and Seligman’s (2004) *Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification* is a “manual of the sanities,” or the Values in Action (VIA) as it is also called, that has a list of, “character strengths and virtues.” The list of character strengths has been generated through an academic process of examining religious and cultural institutions in the light of philosophical traditions, while also considering empirical evidence within psychology. There are 24 character strengths which are grouped into six core virtues. The synonyms within brackets in Table 1 are original and purposeful. They are meant to keep the classified strengths to a manageable number, and to minimise subtle connotations that the terms can carry (Park, Peterson, & Seligman, 2004). For the purpose of the present review, the synonyms act as lexical equivalents that facilitate coding of data.

Virtue here is defined as “any psychological process that enables a person to think and act so as to benefit him- or herself and society” (McCullough & Snyder, 2000, p. 1). Peterson and Seligman (2004) explain that virtues “are universal, perhaps grounded in biology through an evolutionary process that selected for these aspects of excellence as means of solving the important tasks necessary for survival of the species” (p. 13). Although one of the criteria used to generate the list of virtues is that “each strength is morally valued in its own right, even in the absence of obvious beneficial outcomes” (p. 19), in positive psychology, “virtue” is not to be understood to carry moral implications in a philosophical or religious sense.

Table 1: Coding template: List of character strengths

Core Virtues	Character Strengths (CS)
I. Wisdom and Knowledge	CS1. Creativity (originality, ingenuity) CS2. Curiosity (interest, novelty-seeking, openness to experience) CS3. Open-mindedness (judgement, critical thinking) CS4. Love of Learning CS5. Perspective (wisdom)
II. Courage	CS6. Bravery (valour) CS7. Persistence (perseverance, industriousness) CS8. Integrity (authenticity, honesty) CS9. Vitality (zest, enthusiasm, vigour, energy)
III. Humanity	CS10. Love CS11. Kindness (generosity, nurturance, care, compassion, altruistic love, “niceness”) CS12. Social Intelligence (emotional intelligence, personal intelligence)
IV. Justice	CS13. Citizenship (social responsibility, loyalty, teamwork) CS14. Fairness

V. Temperance	CS15. Leadership
	CS16. Forgiveness and Mercy
	CS17. Humility (modesty)
	CS18. Prudence
VI. Transcendence	CS19. Self-regulation (self-control)
	CS20. Appreciation of beauty and excellence (awe, wonder, elevation)
	CS21. Gratitude
	CS22. Hope (optimism, future-mindedness, future-orientation)
	CS23. Humour (playfulness)
	CS24. Spirituality (religiousness, faith, purpose)

Virtues are expressed in character strengths. “Character strengths are the psychological ingredients – processes or mechanisms – that define the virtues. Said another way, they are distinguishable routes to displaying one or another of the virtues” (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p. 14). In other words, character strengths are dispositions to desire and act in such a way as to promote human flourishing (Yearley, 1990). Character strengths are trait-like and are measurable in terms of individual’s thoughts, feelings and actions. They are also malleable (Seligman, 2002). The universal occurrence of these virtues and character strengths, especially in cultural and religious traditions of the world, has been sufficiently supported (Dahlsgaard, Peterson, & Seligman, 2005; Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Snyder & Lopez, 2007).

Character Strengths of Positive Psychology

In this section, I present a review of literature that attempt to define and describe character strengths, paying particular attention to alternative terminologies and lexical equivalents. The purpose of this is to identify the coding template for the qualitative systematic literature review that will follow. Therefore, it is not within the scope of this section to review research findings on character strengths, nor to consider the details of their implications. Moreover, the generic category of “virtue” itself is considered tentative and provisional; therefore, the section will focus on the 24 character strengths.

CS1: Creativity. Creativity can be observed in behaviours that exhibit, and ideas that express, great degree of originality and adaptive character (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Creativity may be seen as a mental process, expressed by certain individuals, and can be analysed in terms of tangible products (Simonton, 2005). In line with the central focus of positive psychology on wellbeing, creativity is to be valued not only in arts and sciences, but also in how individuals deal with their daily life. Lexical alternatives to creativity include originality, ingenuity, adaptability, novelty, surprising, unusual, and insight.

CS2: Curiosity. Curiosity represents “one’s intrinsic desire for experience and knowledge” (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p.125). Curiosity is particularly noticed when someone seeks knowledge that goes beyond the principle of “utility of the information” to seeking information for its own sake (Loewenstein, 1994, p.75). Thematic correlates of curiosity include interest, novelty-seeking, and openness to experience. While curiosity and interest are used interchangeably, novelty-seeking involves a propensity for new and exciting experiences, sometimes marked by a willingness to endure risks. In this way, novelty-seeking is also associated with courage.

CS3: Open-mindedness. This character strength consists in the ability to actively seek evidence against one’s own beliefs, plans, or goals. Open-mindedness can also be referred to

as a sense of judgement and critical thinking. In other words, open-mindedness consists in a constant effort towards the elimination of one's own biases and stereotypes.

CS4: Love of Learning. Love of learning describes an individual's interest to acquire information and skill, and the way one engages new information and skills. Thus, it includes aspects of motivation, content, and methodology in engaging knowledge. People acknowledge the presence of a positive affect when engaging in new knowledge. Students, for instance, are said to possess the strength of love of learning when they study not only for extrinsically oriented rewards like higher grades, but also for intrinsic values like the appreciation of, and personal interest in, the subject-matter (see Covington, 1999).

CS5: Perspective. Perspective or wisdom is conceptualised "in terms of wise processes, wise products, or wise people" (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p. 182). It is distinct from intelligence, and represents a higher level of knowledge and judgement. Wisdom is closely related to self-knowledge, meaning of life, and being able to use right judgement in relationships. Thus, this special type of knowledge is used for the well-being of oneself and others. In this way, wisdom has intra- and inter-personal dimensions (Kunzmann & Stange, 2007).

CS6: Bravery. Bravery or valour is seen in a voluntary action, which involves some danger, and which an individual undertakes after due understanding of risks involved. It also includes "speaking up for what is right even if there is opposition; acting on convictions even if unpopular" (Peterson, 2006, p. 32). Certain conditions are considered necessary to courage: freedom, fear, risk, uncertainty, an endangered good and a morally worthy end (Shelp, 1984).

CS7: Persistence. It is defined as a "voluntary continuation of a goal-directed action in spite of obstacles, difficulties, or discouragement" (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p. 229). Continuing to perform something that is fun and rewarding in itself does not entail persistence, though there may be some pleasure at the completion of the demanding task that is marked by persistence. "Persistence" and "perseverance" are used interchangeably, and sometimes, the term, "industriousness" is also used. Industriousness denotes an attitude of consistently working at something (Eisenberger, 1992) even if there will be only a delayed gratification.

CS8: Integrity. Integrity, which is related to authenticity and honesty, consists in being true to oneself, and owning up accurately one's inner states, intentions and commitments (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). While authenticity is perceived in the avoidance of pretence, honesty is refusing to fake reality (Locke, 2005). In a classical literature of humanistic psychology, Rogers (1961) considered integrity as one of the traits of a fully functioning person.

CS9: Vitality. Vitality consists in "approaching life with excitement and energy; not doing things halfway or half-heartedly; living life as an adventure; feeling alive and activated" (Peterson, 2006, p. 32). Other substitute terms for vitality would be zest, enthusiasm, vigour and energy. Vitality presupposes a physiological wellbeing – free from fatigue and illness, and a psychological wellbeing – integration of the self at the intrapersonal and interpersonal levels (See Ryan & Frederick, 1997).

CS10: Love. Peterson and Seligman (2004) attempt to define love in psychological terms:

Love represents a cognitive, behavioural, and emotional stance toward others that takes three prototypical forms. One is love for the individuals who are our primary sources of affection, protection, and care... [like] a child's love for a parent. Another form is love for the individuals who depend on us to make them feel safe and cared for... [for instance,] a parent's love for a child. The third form is love that involves passionate desire for sexual, physical, and emotional closeness with an individual whom we consider special and who makes us feel special. (p. 304)

This is also referred to as intimacy (Peterson, 2006, p. 32), or as attachment (Hazan & Shaver, 2004) and is different from compassion or kindness that is considered here below.

CS11: Kindness. Kindness, generosity, nurturance, care, compassion, altruistic love, and “niceness” are closely related terms that indicate “a common orientation of the self toward the other” (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p. 326). Kindness consists in doing favours or good deeds to others, while compassion is more related to the emotion evoked at the sufferings of others. Compassion becomes significant when the troubles of the other person are serious, and the agent of compassion is able to picture oneself in the same predicament as the one in trouble (Cassell, 2005).

CS12: Social Intelligence. Social intelligence is a concept that is related to emotional intelligence and personal intelligence. Personal intelligence refers to the ability to “assess one’s own performance at a variety of tasks,” including the motives and emotions that accompany them; emotional intelligence refers to the capacity to identify emotional states of others, to understand how these states can influence relationships, and how best to manage emotions; social intelligence is the ability to get people to cooperate, being aware of the dynamics of such interaction, and to respond wisely in these situations (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, pp. 338-339).

CS13: Citizenship. This character strength, which includes social responsibility, loyalty, and teamwork, represents a general commitment to the common good. Without the neglect of the self, it consists in going beyond self-interest, in the fulfilment of duty. It is also expressed in being loyal to friends, being a good team-player, having a strong civic sense, and contributing to social causes.

CS14: Fairness. In simple words, it is “treating all people the same according to notions of fairness and justice; not letting personal feelings bias decisions about others; giving everyone a fair chance” (Peterson, 2006, p. 33). Fairness includes the two psychological traditions in moral reasoning: the awareness that it is wrong to cheat, or to discriminate, or to use people; and acknowledging that it is humane to respect everyone (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

CS15: Leadership. Leadership is a personal quality that fosters the cognitive and temperamental ability to influence and help others. While working in groups, leadership is particularly noticed in the ability to motivate others to move towards the objectives of the group while fostering good relationships among members.

CS16: Forgiveness and Mercy. Forgiveness is a set of prosocial changes that is understood in terms of what happens inside the person who has been hurt - intrapsychic consequence, and between the one hurt and the relationship partner - interpersonal consequence

(Baumeister, Exline, & Sommer, 1998) According to Enright and Coyle (1998, p. 140) forgiveness consists in three steps: the injured person recognises an actual injustice; the injured person chooses willingly to respond with mercy rather than with revenge; and to be concerned with the good of the interaction.

CS17: Humility. Although humility may falsely be equated with a sense of unworthiness and low self-regard, true humility is a rich, multifaceted construct that entails an accurate assessment of one's characteristics, an ability to acknowledge limitations, and a "forgetting of the self" (Tangney, 2000). Modesty, which is related to humility, "refers primarily to the moderate estimation of one's merits or achievements and also extends into other issues relating to propriety in dress and social behaviour" (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p. 463).

CS18: Prudence. Prudence consists in being aware of the consequences of one's choices, and developing strategies in self-management so as to move towards the achievement of one's goals. Prudent individuals also have a moderate and flexible attitude to life, and constantly strive to balance between their ends and means (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Haslam (1991) succinctly summarises the Aristotelian understanding of prudence: "Prudence is essentially concerned with the personal future, in the choice, planning, pursuit, and incontinent betrayal of far-sightedly virtuous ends. It also touches on self-continuity, moderation and flexibility, and the pursuit of self-interest versus social concerns" (p. 151).

CS19: Self-regulation. As one of the character strengths of temperance, self-regulation can also be referred to as self-control or self-discipline. The expressions of self-regulation and its constructs refer to how a person exerts control over his or her impulses and behaviour so as to pursue their goals while maintaining their moral standards. It can also mean a rhythm of life that facilitates self-efficacy (Bandura, 1999). "Delay of gratification constitutes an important paradigm of self-regulation," implying that a person with self-regulation is able to resist the temptation to choose an immediate, small reward in order to obtain a larger delayed benefit (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p. 500).

CS20: Appreciation of beauty and excellence. This character strength consists in "noticing and appreciating beauty, excellence, and/or skilled performance in all domains of life, from nature to art to mathematics to science to everyday experience" (Peterson, 2006, p.33). Awe, wonder, and elation are emotional states that accompany appreciation.

CS21: Gratitude. Gratitude includes an appropriate response to receiving gifts; gift is understood as a reward that was beyond what one worked for. This includes then being aware of, and thankful for, the good things that happen in life. The three components of gratitude proposed by Fitzgerald (1998) have been generally accepted by psychologists: (a) a warm sense of appreciation for somebody or something; (b) a sense of goodwill toward that person or thing, and (c) a disposition to act on what flows from appreciation and goodwill (see also Emmons & McCullough, 2004, p. 5; Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

CS22: Hope. "Hope, optimism, future-mindedness, future-orientation represent a cognitive, emotional, and motivational stance towards the future" (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p. 570). In more precise terms, this stance consists in "expecting the best in the future and working to achieve it; believing that a good future is something that can be brought about" (Peterson, 2006, p. 33).

CS23: Humour. Humour can have at least two possible strands of meaning. First, it refers to the ability to recognise, enjoy and even create “comic.” Comic includes a whole range of harmless incongruent situations – jokes, comedy, teasing, sarcasm, satire, irony, fun, wit and so on. It could emerge out of a use of language, or the body, or arrangement of objects. In this sense, humour is an ability to have wholesome fun, it is related to playfulness, and is one type of aesthetics. The second meaning refers more to an attitude towards situations in life: being able to see the lighter side of things, being composed and cheerful even in the face of adversity, and maintaining a good mood. While in the first sense humour may be related to physical laughter, in the second sense it is more an internal attitude (see Martin, 2004).

CS24: Spirituality (religiousness, faith, purpose). “Spirituality and religiousness refer to beliefs and practices that are grounded in the conviction that there is a transcendental (non-physical) dimension of life” (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p.600). These beliefs and practices may be expressed in having coherent beliefs about the higher purpose and meaning of the universe; knowing where one fits in the larger scheme; having beliefs about meaning of life that shape and provide comfort (Peterson, 2006).

Research Questions

The core mission of positive psychology is to proactively promote research and come up with preventive techniques that will contribute to health, wellbeing and happiness (Seligman, 1998). Health is considered in a comprehensive perspective, inclusive of physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing. And health and wellbeing are perceived as correlates of happiness (Seligman, 2002). The cultivation of the character strengths are said to contribute to wellbeing and happiness. Moreover, these character strengths include spirituality and faith. For these reasons, could it be possible that the relationship between spirituality and addiction (or recovery from addiction) be meaningfully explored within the discourse of positive psychology as suggested by Galanter (2007). Can a systematic review of literature examining the themes that emerge in the addiction-spirituality literature provide some insight on this?

More precisely, the present literature review had the following research questions:

1. Which of the character strengths of positive psychology, or their thematic and lexical equivalents, are prevalent in addiction-and-spirituality literature published in peer- reviewed journals?
2. How are these themes handled within the addiction-spirituality literature?

Method

These research questions will be answered by means of a Qualitative Systematic Literature Review (QSLR). Systematic Literature Reviews (SLR) are common in life- sciences, particularly in medical sciences. The procedure of meta-analysis, which could be a further development on SLR, attempts to analyse data combined from a number of studies statistically, and to identify, appraise and synthesise available evidence. Generally, it is a quantitative procedure. However, QSLRs are also increasingly being published in peer- reviewed journals (Butt, Markle-Reid, & Browne, 2008; Higginson, & Sen-Gupta, 2000). While the quantitative systematic review helps to evaluate the strength of available evidence in terms of numbers, the qualitative procedure facilitates in systematically schematising the constructs used in measures, intervention protocols, and reported results (see for instance, Thomas et al., 2004). QSLR does not deal with primary data from quantitative studies, but focuses on discussions that the authors attempt to make on the basis of their findings; in qualitative studies, though, the findings are

also useful. The present QSLR focuses on the underpinning literal discourse among researchers who examine the relationship between religion, spirituality, character strengths, and addiction-recovery.

Three steps are important in a SLR: selection of the available sources, analysis of the sources and reporting the identified patterns. What makes the present review qualitative in character is that in the analysis and reporting of the patterns in the selected sources, attention is on literary data rather than the numerical data. In this process, the use of a computer- assisted qualitative data analysis software, namely NVivo-8, offered the advantage of being able to handle large data set, to check for consistency in coding, and to digitally transfer coded data to the report (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2011).

Literature Search and Selection

At the beginning of September 2010, the author searched the EBSCOHost digital database using the following Boolean formula: “addiction AND (spiritual* OR religio* OR mindfulness).” The following databases were selected for the search: Academic Search Complete, PsycINFO, MEDLINE, PsycEXTRA, PsycARTICLES. The search targeted the abstracts field. The inclusion criteria were the following:

- a) articles;
- b) published in peer- reviewed journals;
- c) in English language;
- d) using terms “addiction,” “religion,” and “spirituality;”
- e) and with access to full texts.

The initial search yielded a total of 2480 entries. After fine tuning the search for peer reviewed articles with full texts in English language, 622 articles were available. In the second level of selection, the abstracts of the 622 articles were read, and some articles (n=477) were rejected for reasons listed in the inclusion criteria, and as described in the flow chart in Fig. 1. Out of this process 145 articles were selected. In addition, 39 full text articles were identified through cross references and added to the pool. This rendered a total of 184 full text articles.

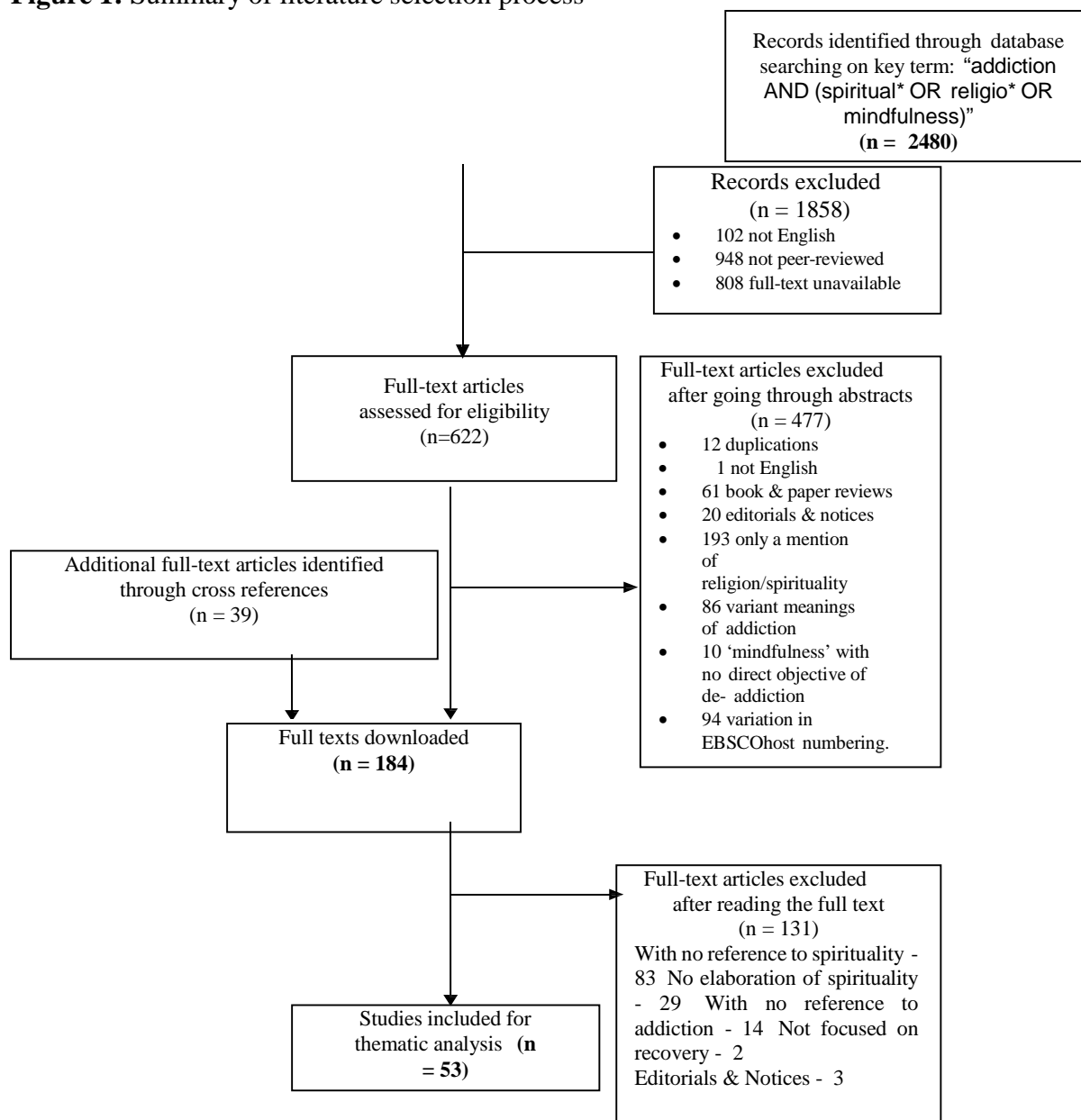
Table 2: Characteristics of studies included for review

Type of Research	No.		Year of Publication			Related to AA		
	No.	%	Years	No.	%	No.	%	
Conceptual	18	34.0	1995-99	7	13.2	Yes	22	41.5
Lit. Review	5	9.4	2000-05	16	30.2	No	31	58.5
Qualitative	8	15.1	2006-10	30	56.6	Total	53	100
Quantitative	21	39.6	Total	53	100			
Mixed Method	1	1.9						
Total	53	100						

At the third stage, the 184 articles were read in full. The articles that were read could be classified under three general categories: literature reviews, conceptual papers, and empirical research reports (see Table 2). The aim of the present literature review was not just to establish the prevalence of the character strengths of positive psychology in terms of number of occurrence, but most of all, to examine how these themes were handled within the addiction-spirituality literature. For this purpose, while whole texts were useful from systematic reviews, meta-analyses and conceptual papers, only the discussion sections were of particular interest

from quantitative research reports. The articles that showed some direct association between the various dimensions of spirituality and recovery, and then attempted to discuss the possible mechanism behind their findings were most useful for this review. Some articles were rejected either because they did not really discuss the psychological nature of addiction or because they used “religion” or “spirituality” in an extended sense. For example, at times “addiction” was used with an unscientific connotation to refer to habits, or “religion” was mentioned without any relation to addiction, or the word “spiritual” was used in a theological sense. The flow chart (Figure 1) describes in further detail the selection criteria, using an adopted model from David Moher (2009).

Figure 1: Summary of literature selection process



Description of the Selected Literature

Table 3 presents the list of 53 peer-reviewed articles that were included in the present systematic literature review. Their full details appear in the References list. The publication

dates of these studies ranged from 1995 to 2010 (see Table 2). It is interesting to note that, though there was no restriction made on the basis of publication date in the search criteria, most of the studies included here were published between 2006 and 2010 (56.6%). This could be an indicator of the growing interest in this area of research. A good number of the reviewed articles were related to the 12-steps of AA (41.5%); 56% of the studies were empirical (n=30), and others were either conceptual papers or systematic reviews (Table 2).

Table 3: List of studies included for review

1. Avants, Marcotte, Arnold, & Margolin, 2003	28. Lambert, Fincham, Marks, & Stillman, 2010
2. Avants, Beitel, & Margolin, 2005	29. Longshore et al., 2009
3. Bell, 2007	30. Lyons, Deane, & Kelly, 2010
4. Best, Ghufran, Day, Ray, & Loaring, 2008	31. Magura, Knight, Vogel, Mahmood, Laudet, & Rosenblum, 2003
5. Blakeney, Blakeney, & Reich, 2005	32. Marcotte, Margolin, & Avants, 2003
6. Bristow-Braitman, 1995	33. Miller, 1998
7. Brown, Whitney, Schneider, & Vega, 2006	34. Morjaria & Orford, 2002
8. Brown, O'Grady, Battjes, & Farrell, 2004	35. Neff & Macmaster, 2005
9. Brown, 2006	36. Piderman, Schneekloth, Pankratz, Maloney, & Altchuler, 2008
10. Chapman, 1996	37. Piedmont, 2004
11. Chi, Kaskutas, Sterling, Campbell, & Weisner, 2009	38. Polcin & Zemore, 2004
12. Cook, 2004	39. Robinson, Cranford, Webb, & Brower, 2007
13. Coyhis & Simonelli, 2008	40. Saunders, Lucas, & Kuras, 2007
14. Davis & Jansen, 1998	41. Swora, 2004
15. Dyslin 2008	42. Toussaint, 2009
16. Earle, Dillon, & Jecmen, 1998	43. Turner, O'Dell, & Weaver, 1999
17. Flynn, Joe, Broome, Simpson, & Brown, 2003	44. Unterrainer, Ladenhauf, Moazedi, Wallner-Liebmann, & Fink, 2010
18. Galanter, 2007	45. Vaillant, 2005
19. Galanter, 2006	46. VonDras, Schmitt, & Marx, 2007
20. Geppert, Bogenschutz, & Miller, 2007	47. Walker, AINETTE, Wills, & Mendoza, 2007
21. Gregoire, 1995	48. Warfield & Goldstein 1996
22. Hazel & Mohatt, 2001	49. Weegmann & Piwowoz-Hjort, 2009
23. Johnson, Sheets, & Kristeller, 2008	50. Wiklund, 2008
24. Kelemen, Erdos, & Madacsy, 2007	51. Wills, 2007
25. Kelly, Magill, & Stout, 2009	52. Wills, Gibbons, Gerrard, Murray, & Brody, 2003
26. Knight, Sherritt, Sion Kim, Holder, Kulig, Shrier, et al., 2007	53. Zemore, 2007
27. Kogan, Luo, Murry, & Brody, 2005	

Qualitative Thematic Analysis

The selected articles ($n = 53$) were then imported into NVivo software for coding. The methodology employed in the data analysis or coding process could be termed as “Qualitative Thematic Analysis” – a method similar to the one employed in the study by Selvam and Collicutt (2013).

“Thematic analysis is a method of identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). Often this approach goes beyond identifying and analysing to interpreting various aspects of the research topic (Boyatzis, 1998). In this way, thematic analysis is very flexible. Though very similar to qualitative content analysis, it is distinct from other methods of qualitative research like narrative or discourse analysis (Eto & Kynäs 2008; Hsieh & Shannon 2005).

Thematic analysis consists of coding the data systematically and finally reporting patterns that are identified in the data. The paradigm of contemporary qualitative research often presupposes that even the template of themes (nodes) is evolved in the process of interpreting the data. This is particularly the case in grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2008). Braun and Clarke (2006), however, are sceptical of the passive role of the researcher in the analysis process. When the themes are said to “emerge” from the data, “it denies the active role the researcher always plays in identifying patterns/themes...” (p. 80). Another hybrid approach is to allow the template to “emerge” from the data based on a theoretical framework (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). This approach presupposes a deductive- inductive interactive process: applying the theoretical framework to the data and identifying themes, and finally to attempt to refine the theoretical framework based on the themes from the data. In a similar attempt, in this study, as said earlier, the theoretical framework came from positive psychology (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). The coding template was the set of 24 character strengths of the VIA, which were described above. The texts extracted from published articles served as the qualitative data.

Analysis and Coding Procedure

The data analysis was carried out following the steps suggested by standard sources on qualitative analysis in psychology (for instance, Lyons & Coyle, 2007), as described here below.

Step 1: Initial coding. The selected documents that were imported from PDF format into the NVivo software, were meticulously read, highlighting words, phrases and sentences that had resemblance in expression or meaning to the 24 character strengths. One of two criteria was used in determining “resemblance”: (a) phrasal resemblance: when the text-unit employed the exact vocabulary, or its equivalent, that is already used in the discourse of Values in Action (as listed in Table 1), or (b) semantic resemblance: when the text-unit expressed meaning that was close to the description of the character strengths in positive psychology (Peterson & Seligman, 2004) as summarised in a previous section above. Obviously some level of interpretation was involved in the second criteria.

The highlighted text-units were selected in such a way that they made complete sense. Their length ranged from one to five sentences. Each highlighted text-unit was assigned a node. When a particular text-unit had reference to more than one theme, it was assigned to more than one node. Nodes are simply themes or names under which text-units are coded. (Being consistent with NVivo, I use the term “node” to refer to themes, and “to code,” as a verb, to refer to the process of assigning a text-unit to a node.) Whenever the title of the character strengths could be assigned as the node for the highlighted text, this was done; if not, a node

was assigned using a phrase or a vocabulary from the text itself (See Table 4 with extract from Walker, Ainette, Wills, and Mendoza (2007) for an example of a coded data). At this stage the assigned themes are called Free Nodes. At the end of the first step, a total of 82 Free Nodes were identified.

Step 2: Axial coding. In the second level of coding the Free Nodes were merged into more generic nodes. This process in NVivo is referred to as creating Tree Nodes. No new nodes were created at this stage, but existing nodes were merged to reduce their number.

Step 3: Thematic identification. At this stage, an attempt was made to merge the second level of Tree Nodes into the predetermined themes from the coding template, i.e., the 24 character strengths (Table 1). NVivo keeps count of the number of extracts that are coded under a particular node. Table 5 reports these numbers according the three steps of coding which includes the coding of Free Nodes, the linking up of Tree Nodes, and the identification of Themes which correspond to character strengths. The coding process was cross-checked on the NVivo by a research supervisor to improve reliability.

Step 4: Report writing. When called for, NVivo also generates lists of texts that were coded under a particular node. These textual extracts were used to write up the report on the salient character strengths in the addiction-spirituality literature.

Table 4: Sample coded data

Part of the Extract	Free Nodes	Tree Nodes	Themes
The research design was based on a comprehensive model of substance use, and the present results were consistent with the tenets of the model and the findings of prior studies. <u>Self-control constructs had paths to proximal factors including academic competence and negative life events, and the results demonstrated multiple pathways for the protective effect of good self-control and the risk-promoting effect of poor self-control. Deviance-prone attitudes constituted another domain of predictive effects, and the data indicated that these operated through similar pathways.</u> Thus, prediction of adolescent problem behavior depends on consideration of both self-regulation and attitudinal factors (Wills et al., 2001; Wills & Dishion, 2004). <u>It should be noted that parental support was prominent as a protective factor for both younger and older adolescents, with indirect effects through both attitudinal and self-control constructs, and the risk-promoting effect of parent-child conflict was mediated through similar paths (with opposite sign) to self-control and deviance-prone attitudes.</u>	Self-control	Self-control	Self-control
	Integrity	Integrity	Integrity
	Parental support	Positive family relationships	Love

Table 5: Summary of themes and their contents

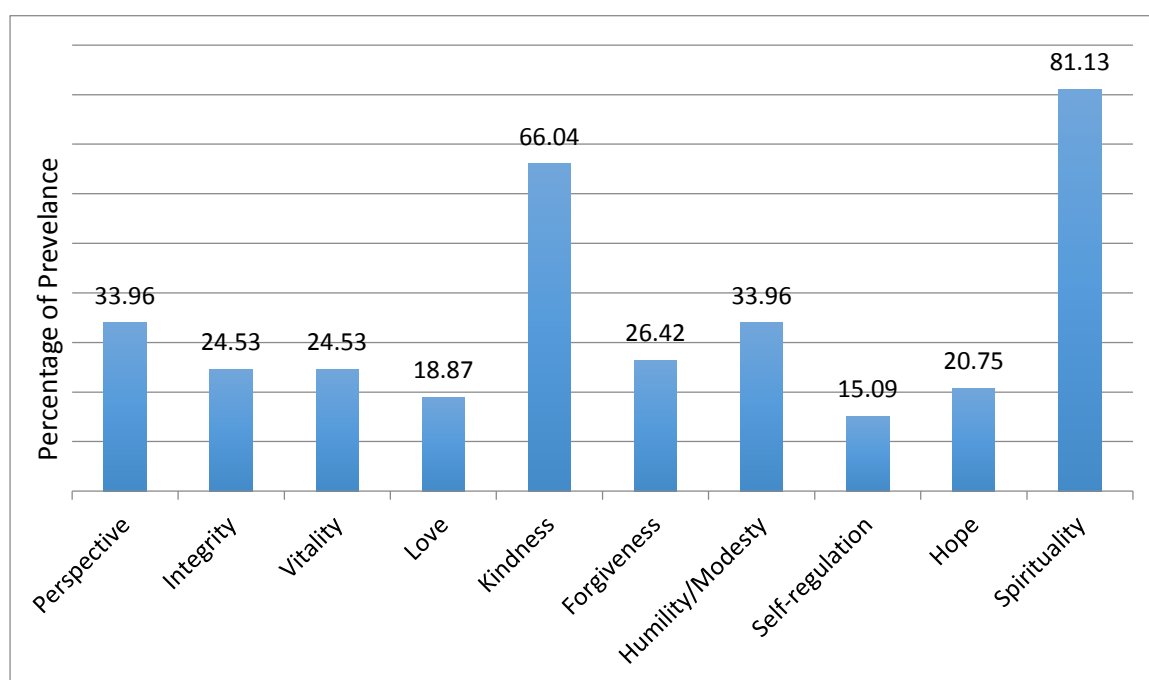
	Themes Tree Nodes Free Nodes	Sources	References	Percent of Sources
CS1	Curiosity	0	0	0.00
CS2	Love of learning	1	1	1.89
CS3	Open-mindedness	0	0	0.00
CS4	Creativity	1	1	1.89
CS5	Social intelligence	1	1	1.89
CS6	Perspective	18	36	33.96
	Equanimity	4	5	7.55
	Being here and now	1	1	1.89
	One day at a time	1	1	1.89
	Meaning & purpose	12	19	22.64
	Purpose in life	2	2	3.77
	Self knowledge	3	6	5.66
	Consciousness	1	1	1.89
	Sense of coherence	4	4	7.55
	Wisdom	2	3	3.77
CS7	Bravery	0	0	0.00
CS8	Persistence	0	0	0.00
CS9	Integrity	13	32	24.53
	Authenticity	7	12	13.21
	Self disclosure	2	2	3.77
	Truth	3	3	5.66
	Values	5	6	9.43
CS10	Kindness	35	64	66.04
	Affiliation	2	5	3.77
	Altruism	7	11	13.21
	Compassion	1	2	1.89
	Helping	2	3	3.77
	Interconnectedness	3	3	5.66
	Relatedness Human	22	31	41.51
	Social network	9	10	16.98
	Rootedness (culture)	1	1	1.89
	Social support	14	19	26.42
CS11	Love	10	20	18.87
	Friendship	3	4	5.66
	Positive family relationships	3	9	5.66
	Parental support	1	1	1.89
	Trust	1	1	1.89
CS12	Citizenship	5	5	9.43
	Responsibility	4	4	7.55
CS13	Fairness	1	1	1.89
	Moral inventory	1	1	1.89
CS14	Leadership	0	0	0.00
CS15	Self-regulation	8	9	15.09
	Freedom to choose	3	3	5.66
CS16	Prudence	0	0	0.00
CS17	Appreciation of beauty	0	0	0.00
CS18	Gratitude	2	2	3.77
CS19	Hope	11	18	20.75
	Future orientation	1	2	1.89
	Optimism	5	8	9.43
	Positive attitude	2	4	3.77
CS20	Spirituality	43	93	81.13
	Connection to larger reality	6	8	11.32
	Contact with the spiritual self	2	3	3.77

	Divine	17	33	32.08
	God	15	28	28.30
	Soul force	1	1	1.89
	Faith in Higher Power	4	5	7.55
	Faith-Religious	4	4	7.55
	Meditation	2	2	3.77
	Non-materiality	1	1	1.89
	Non-religious spirituality	2	3	3.77
	Prayer	5	6	9.43
	Relatedness – Higher Power	4	6	7.55
	Religiousness/Religiosity	5	6	9.44
	Spiritual awakening	1	1	1.89
	Transcendence	5	5	9.43
CS21	Humility	18	37	33.96
	Escape from the burden of the ego	10	14	18.87
		3	3	5.66
	Sense of personal worth	6	8	11.32
	Self esteem	4	7	7.55
	Surrender	2	3	3.77
	Letting go			
CS22	Humour	2	2	3.77
CS23	Vitality	13	24	24.53
	Healing	1	1	1.89
	Open to growth – transformation	3	6	5.66
	Desire to change	3	4	5.66
	Wholeness	10	15	18.87
	Integration of conflicting opposites	2	2	3.77
CS24	Forgiveness	14	31	26.42
	Forgiveness from God	3	7	5.66
	Self-forgiveness	1	2	1.89
	Forgiving others	2	11	3.77
	Reconciliation	3	7	5.66
Notes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sources indicate the number of articles that had reference to the node; References refer to the number of times that theme appeared. 2. Numbers between nodes and tree-nodes are not expected to add up, as the same reference could have been coded under two nodes. 			

Results

The Prevalence of Character Strengths

In the final tally (Table 5), out of the 24 character strengths, 10 of them scored two-digit percentage points (Fig. 2). The percentage points indicate the degree of their prevalence in the coded text. Among the 10 most featured character strengths Spirituality scores the highest percentage, followed by kindness. Out of the other 14 character strengths that scored below the two-digit percentage points, nine of them scored below 2%, while citizenship scored 9.43%, and humour and gratitude 3.77%. The 7 character strengths that had no reference at all (0%) were curiosity, open-mindedness, bravery, persistence, leadership, prudence, and appreciation of beauty. It is interesting to note that a near 10 point score in citizenship was contributed by “responsibility” (7.55%).

Figure 2: Distribution of character strengths in the literature

Character Strengths Identified from the Addiction-Spirituality Literature

As a way of summing up the insights gained from the literature review, it is worthwhile considering how the character strengths that feature in the addiction-spirituality literature are treated and understood. In the present section, therefore, a summary of the coded texts on the ten most prevalent character strengths is presented. The indented quotes are sample coded texts from the selected articles. Particular attention is paid to the tree nodes, because these varied terms and expressions add better conceptual clarity to the character strengths as they are dealt-with within the reviewed literature. I will also consider how these tree nodes interact with each other within the respective character strength.

Perspective (Wisdom). The two terms “perspective” and “wisdom” are used almost synonymously in positive psychology. In the reviewed literature, the other themes that the researcher assigned under the node of perspective were “equanimity,” “self-knowledge,” “meaning and purpose,” and “sense of coherence” (Table 5). These terms were chosen from the texts themselves.

Equanimity (Avants, Beitel, & Margolin, 2005) is one of the dimensions in which recovering addicts are trained in the Spiritual Self Schema (3-S) Therapy that is used to facilitate recovery. Equanimity consists in being aware and focussed. These concepts are also captured in the AA philosophy of “not drinking ‘one day at a time’ instead of forever” (Davis, & Jansen, 1998, p. 176). Self awareness (Marcotte, Margolin, & Avants 2003) and self acceptance (Miller, 1998) were also seen to facilitate transformation and recovery. A case study by Marcotte, Margolin, and Avants (2003) captures this in relation to abstinence from drug use:

By the end of treatment, [Pauline] had significantly increased her self-awareness, had begun the process of resolving past regrets, decided she would live her remaining days with greater honesty, had achieved 4 weeks of

abstinence from cocaine, was more attentive to health-related issues, and was able to focus on the needs of others as well. (p. 173)

Of all the tree-nodes that came up under the theme of perspective, “meaning and purpose” had the highest number of references. There was a dilemma in classifying this node under “perspective,” because “purpose” itself could relate to “hope.” However, “meaning” is considered in positive psychology as an aspect of wisdom. Therefore this node appears under wisdom or perspective. Meaning and purpose were identified as an important dimension (22.64%) in the avoidance of, and recovery from, addiction:

Individuals who endorsed higher levels of search for meaning reported more negative beliefs about alcohol. (Johnson et al., 2000, p. 166)

Meaning and purpose are also seen to be related to a sense of coherence:

This sense of coherence lends meaning, provides a system of rules to govern behavior, and patterns various cognitive functions, such as foresight, appraisal and evaluation of situations, and decision making, (Hazel, & Mohatt, 2001, p. 542)

Again, there appears to be some reciprocity between relationship with others and meaning and purpose, and this reciprocity, in turn, has an effect on recovery. Two typical claims were:

The question of meaning is also a question of one’s own being in relation to others and with the world of which God might be perceived to be a part. (Wilkund, 2008, p. 2431)

Helping people find healthy ways of making contact with others may help them develop meaning in their own lives. (Gregoire, 1995, p .352)

Integrity. Integrity was related to “authenticity,” which also included references to “honesty” (see also Cook, 2004). Some of the dimensions of integrity, even as they are understood within positive psychology could have a degree of moral implication. In this sense, integrity has a bonding with fairness (CS14), which is about justice. However, in the articles reviewed here, there was very little reference to justice as such. Therefore, while integrity was identified as one of the ten prominent character strengths, fairness did not get much treatment. One of the coded sources captures the meaning of integrity, which is consistent with the understanding of positive psychology, and is related to recovery:

Integrity, we argue, is what’s being recovered in recovery. Integrity is a way to understand and operationalize general character. It includes but is not limited to moral judgement development, because integrity demands consistency between judgement and action. It implies a self-consistent moral self, whose feelings, thoughts and behaviour form a mutually informative and transformative regulatory system. A person of integrity, aware of his or her feelings, aware of conflicts, context and what is ultimately at stake, chooses and carries out right action. By integrity we mean more than consistency, wholeness, and general character. (Blakeney, Blakeney, & Reich, 2005, p. 75)

This extract points out the impact of integrity, or the lack of it, on addiction and recovery. It is further supported by other texts. The addictive behaviour exhibits a lack of integrity and authenticity. A person with an addictive problem, due to loss of self-control, is not able to act as he or she wishes. Often this split could be internal:

Here Daniel tells us, from a point of view that stands outside himself, that he recognises the split between his feelings and his thoughts. (Blakeney, Blakeney, & Reich, 2005, p. 71)

However, the recovery process bridges the split, facilitating integrity:

[Rachel] alternates between enmeshment in two contexts: member of society and rebel against society. The split soul, as she describes it, is the inability to reconcile the parts, and thus to recover integrity. Recognition of the split, however, is, in the words of Alcoholics Anonymous' Twelve Steps, the First Step. (Blakeney, Blakeney, & Reich, 2005, p. 71)

Often taking that first step itself demands honesty (Swora, 2004). However, when this step is taken, there emerges a new self, as shown in another case study (Marcotte, Margolin, & Avants, 2003):

As the contact with this newly emerging spiritual self increased, so did the desire for honesty and the strong desire to talk about her experience in a free and open manner. (p. 172)

At the core of her recovery process, Pauline identified the freedom to be honest and the invaluable benefit of having a place to tell her story in a way that felt "authentic" to her. (p. 173)

In this discussion, it is not difficult to discern that integrity is related to integration (wholeness), which has been coded under vitality.

Vitality. There were several references to the integration of the physical, psychological and spiritual aspects of the self, and this integration was said to contribute to general wellbeing and freedom from addiction. These references were coded under "wholeness." While integrity as a character strength of courage has a moral connotation, integration has a direct reference to health and wellbeing, and hence this was classified under the character strength of vitality. Here is a typical example:

Recovery for AA participants began with "hitting rock bottom," through which participants began to spiral through a process of recovery leading to a holistic change to their being, incorporating the physical, emotional and spiritual aspects of life. This reflects the perception of participants of their alcohol problem as a physical, emotional and spiritual illness, which necessitated a re-assessment at all levels...they formed a complex relationship of inter-connected processes that aided recovery of the self. (Morjaria & Orford, 2002, pp. 240-241)

Closely linked to the above understanding of integration were also other references to the integration of opposites and the ability to integrate even conflicting realities, these were coded under a separate node: “Integration of conflicting opposites:”

Native people embrace both the seen world and the unseen world, the head and the heart, for full recovery. It is just that heart-centred processes seem to be the key that opens the lock to recovery and then on to Wellbriety for Native peoples. (Coyhis & Simonelli, 2008, p. 1933)

Another term that was used in relation to sobriety was “harmony,” which was eventually merged with the node of “wholeness.” “Harmony” in relation to sobriety was seen to be related to spirituality and value-based transformations:

All of the participants spoke about the central importance of spiritual or value-based transformations. Such moral changes were invariably linked to medium- and long- term recovery, to concepts such as “acceptance” and, for some, the development of a greater sense of sobriety (inner peace or harmony). (Weegmann & Piwowoz-Hjort, 2009, p. 278)

Kindness. Kindness was identified as the second most prominent node, after spirituality, having 64 references associated with 35 sources (66%). It is impossible to quote them all. A typical statement was that sobriety is associated with,

a strong sense of the need to contribute to family and community. Often central to this process was a desire to help others and contribute to the community by working with others in recovery programs or being a role model for community members. (Hazel & Mohatt, 2001, p. 554)

Persons with addictive behaviour tend to be self-absorbed. In contrast, in a relationship the individual is invited to break the confining boundary of selfhood and go beyond the self. How is kindness understood within the addiction-spirituality discourse? What positive psychology lists as kindness is expressed in a variety of terms within the addiction-spirituality literature. In this analysis they are reported as themes and tree-nodes: affiliation, altruism, compassion, helping, human connectedness, interconnectedness, social support, community support, community network, and fellowship. These terms have their specific connotations. The word, “fellowship” is much used within the discourse of AA (Bristow-Braitman, 1995). Fellowship refers not only to the actual meetings of AA, but also to the aspect of social support offered by the peers in the recovery process. Fellowship challenges recovering addicts to transcend out of their self-centredness:

Both AA and the Emmanuel Movement recognized the importance of engaging alcoholics in group work and mutual support. AA's founders believed that only through involvement with other alcoholics could a person expect to recover. When people connect with each other they transcend the self-centred relationship with alcohol. (Gregoire, 1995, p. 352)

Similarly, affiliation can be understood to be a dimension under kindness, related to social network. Affiliation in the positive sense is an expression and the fulfilment of the sense of belonging (see Kogan, Luo, Murry, & Brody, 2005). Another term that captured the meaning of the character strength of kindness is “altruism.” Altruism was further linked to nodes like

“helping,” “connection to others,” “escape from the burden of ego.” The last term could also be expressed as “escape from self-absorption.” This is best expressed in a work exploring the effect of providing opportunity for people with addictive problems to reach out to others in a helping relationship:

It has been suggested that helping enhances helpers' self-perceptions of independence, competence, usefulness, and/or social status; fosters relationships with others; and diverts helpers from excessive self-absorption. (Zemore, 2007, p. 448)

Love. Positive psychology has a more restrictive understanding of “love” that is distinct from “kindness.” Love is a specific way of relating to individuals with whom there is a long term relationship. This relationship is generally mutual, but always enhancing the growth and humanity (human life and dignity) of those in that relationship. It could be expressed in physical and emotional intimacy (Peterson, 2006, p. 32). Love is associated with recovery from addiction:

New love relationships are important to recovery. It seems important for ex-addicts to bond with people whom they have not hurt in the past and to whom they are not deeply emotionally in debt. Indeed, it helps for them to bond with people whom they can actively help. (Vaillant, 2005, p. 432)

Nevertheless, in more precise terms, love can be understood in terms of familial relationships and friendships. Parent-child relationship seems to have a direct and indirect role in addiction prevention.

It should be noted that parental support was prominent as a protective factor for both younger and older adolescents, with indirect effects through both attitudinal and self-control constructs, and the risk-promoting effect of parent-child conflict was mediated through similar paths (with opposite sign) to self-control and deviance-prone attitudes. (Walker, Ainette, Wills, & Mendoza, 2007, p. 93)

Parent-child relationship is seen to play a role in friendships among adolescents, particularly as understood as peer-relationships. And this in turn plays an important protective role in addictive behaviour.

Youths with positive attachments to parents internalize more conventional norms, which subsequently influence their peer selection. (Kogan, Luo, Murry, & Brody, 2005, p. 388)

Forgiveness. In the coding process “forgiveness” was one of the simpler themes. Many entries were directly coded into this character strength. Sometimes, however, there was a need to make a distinction between at least three types of forgiveness: Self-forgiveness, forgiving others or seeking forgiveness from others (reconciliation), and the experience of being forgiven by God. While speaking about humility, self forgiveness also got mentioned:

For an addicted person, acceptance of self often involves the work of self-forgiveness. (Bristow-Braitman, 1995, p. 417)

Self-forgiveness in turn facilitates recovery:

These findings suggest that forgiveness of self may be more strongly associated with a reduction in substance use, while forgiveness of others and by God may have a stronger relationship with spirituality. (Lyons et al., 2010, p. 534)

Turner and colleagues (1999) further confirm the importance of self-forgiveness in remaining sober:

What did surprise us was that the need for self-forgiveness remained a second most important need after as many as five years of sobriety. (p. 146)

Forgiveness of others, and even reconciliation, is very much encouraged in the 12-steps of the Alcoholics Anonymous. Of particular significance is the ninth step. This is shown to have an effect on recovery (Lyons, Deane, & Kelly, 2010). Opinion on the effect of forgiveness from God is more mixed:

Webb et al. (2009) also explored the construct of feeling forgiven by God. It was found that feeling forgiven by God did not predict mental health among alcohol use disorder outpatients. (cited in Lyons, Deane, & Kelly, 2010, p. 535)

In a similar vein, Neff and MacMaster (2005) point out that a model of recovery based on the forgiveness of God has to be better formalised. Moreover, these different aspects of forgiveness also express certain interaction and have an impact on other character strengths like hope and meaning of life:

These appraisals of self in relation to others and to God (or a higher power) are viewed as providing an important basis for imputing meaning to life experience. Appraisals involving shifts from views of a “punishing” to “forgiving” God are said to be especially important in recovery, as are changes in the direction of forgiveness of self (and increasing self-acceptance of self-worth) and others as well as shifts from negative to positive religious coping strategies. (Neff & MacMaster, 2005, p. 674)

Humility. In the language of AA, humility seems to emerge in a person with an addictive behaviour as a result of an awareness of having hit “rock bottom.” It consists in the admission of their own short-comings (Kelemen, Erdos, & Madacsy, 2007). Consequently, they own up to their sense of powerlessness over their life (Dyslin, 2008). This humility in turn invites the person to turn to a “Higher Power” (Morjaria & Orford, 2002):

Accepting powerlessness is an antecedent for handing over one's will/ control to a Higher Power, through which participants reach a point of finding life more manageable. (p. 235)

This, however, does not imply self-abnegation. On the contrary, it could be an experience of inner exaltation:

In the personal narratives of recovering addicts, the hero's progress, the story of the Prodigal Son can be identified as they are clearly related to humility. (Kelemen, Erdos, & Madacsy, 2007, p. 139)

This humble self-awareness contributes to increase in self-esteem (Marcotte, Margolin, & Avants, 2003), and finally paves a way towards self-growth:

Sobriety, however, is more than just abstinence from drinking, but a special state of being different from both drinking and pre-drinking times. Often, this state of being is described as more humble, serene, and less self-centred way of being in the world, one that is open to change and growth. (Swora, 2004, p. 192)

Self-regulation. Among the ten prominent character strengths that were identified in the literature review, self-regulation had the least score (15% of prevalence). This defies commonsensical assumption that self-regulation, which includes also self-control, would have a higher impact on prevention and recovery. A close examination of the coded texts further reveals that often there is only a mention of the expression “temperance” or “self-control” with no further exploration of these constructs. Wills and colleagues (2003) treat self-regulation within the context of familial relationships:

Thus, parent–child relationship appears to have generalized effects on self-regulation and social perceptions. (p. 321)

Hope. In the coding process, the tree nodes that were identified under hope were optimism and future orientation. These are also used as dimensions of hope in positive psychology. In the context of addiction research, hope is seen as a strong mediator of recovery and positive treatment outcome.

Hope is generally defined as positive expectations for the future, hopelessness as negative expectations... the early installation of hope for the future is a key element to recovery through the 12 steps. (Magura et al., 2003, p. 307)

Hope, as explored in several studies reviewed here, is also linked to spirituality, and sometimes specifically to God (Swora, 2004). Another author defines spirituality itself in terms of hope:

Spirituality is thus defined as an active process engaging hope in the ongoing development of connection to self, to others, and to the universe, and health is understood as a confluence of the physical self, or the body, the mental self, mind, and the spiritual self, or the spirit/soul. (Wills, 2007, pp. 431-432)

The conclusion of Margaret Wills (2007) could serve well as the conclusion to our section on hope pointing to its relevance to recovery. Wills herself is quoting another paper that was also selected for the present review.

Taken together, these studies suggest a significant relationship between hope, defined by Magura et al. as “positive expectations for the future,” (2003, p. 307) and health/healing.

Spirituality. Spirituality and its dimensions have been identified as the most prevalent character strength in the reviewed data with 43, out of the 53 articles (81.13%) having texts that could be coded under this node. These overwhelming numbers cannot be definitive

because “spirituality” was a key word in the literature search criterion. A beneficial discussion here would be to consider the way spirituality is treated and interpreted within the addiction research literature.

The definition of spirituality offered by Cook (2004) is akin to the way this character strength is defined within positive psychology:

Spirituality is a distinctive, potentially creative and universal dimension of human experience arising both within the inner subjective awareness of individuals and within communities, social groups and traditions. It may be experienced as relationship with that which is intimately “inner,” immanent and personal, within the self and others, and/or as relationship with that which is wholly “other,” transcendent and beyond the self. It is experienced as being of fundamental or ultimate importance and is thus concerned with matters of meaning and purpose in life, truth and values. (pp. 548-549)

A salient set of free nodes under spirituality in the present review were nodes that had reference to the concept of “higher power.” Besides faith in higher power or relatedness to higher power, the other nodes included: God (with an understanding of the greater power having a personal nature offering the possibility of relating to “Him” in a personal way), and Divine (a more abstract way of understanding). The sources that use the term “God” more frequently were mostly qualitative studies.

For instance, in an ethnographic study among Afro-American women recovering from cocaine use, the author reports (Brown, 2006):

It is of interest to note that the women did not attribute their sobriety to the support they received from church members, but rather to their personal relationship with God. (p. 37)

In another qualitative study involving focus groups and survey, Hazel and Mohatt (2001) report one of the participant’s expressions about the support she found in spirituality in her recovery process:

I had confidence that Yes! God will listen to little me and yes God did a lot of work in my heart. He helped me to see I was very special and he cared about me. (p. 555)

This finding could indicate that while researchers and therapists, in an attempt to be politically correct might use abstract terms like “Greater Power” and “Divine,” most participants themselves could be at home with the personal expression: “God.” It is in this context then it becomes easy to understand the 11th step of AA that speaks about prayer and meditation: “Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.” This step implies a personal relationship with the Higher Power as Swora (2004) confirms in her study of AA:

Many AA members describe their relationship with their Higher Power in conversational terms, and thus if prayer is talking to God, then meditation is listening to God. (p. 202)

Still more on prayer, Lambert and colleagues (2010) report, from their study that involved randomised experiment design, that prayer frequency was related to decrease in alcohol consumption over a period of three months.

Discussion

The present review began with the questions: Can the mediators of the association between spirituality and recovery from addiction be identified in terms of the character strengths of positive psychology? And how the identified themes handled within the selected literature? The results section has presented a substantial amount of literature-based data in answer to these questions, on the association among spirituality, addiction and recovery. It has also helped to break down the constructs of spirituality, within the context of addiction research, in terms of character strengths. The interesting parallel that is worth pointing out is that there are clear similarities in the list of themes and tree-nodes that featured in this literature review and a list of constructs of spirituality that is provided by Cook (2004, p. 545) in his review of 265 published books and articles on spirituality and addiction, which was reported in the present dissertation in the previous chapter. In this sense, the current study adds data to the work of Chris Cook.

The 12-Steps and the Character Strengths

Out of the 53 articles reviewed for the present project, 22 (41.5%) were on the 12 Steps approach to recovery. Each of the 12-steps can be argued to correspond to one or more character strengths that feature in the list of Values in Action. In fact, Galanter (2007), in one of the articles reviewed here, has proposed that AA can be explored within the framework of positive psychology, particularly focussing on how AA might influence positive affect and how this can facilitate recovery.

Another interesting observation is that the character strengths that have been identified in this analysis seem also to be supported by religious traditions, particularly the indigenous religions. The 12 steps of AA actually render these character strengths in a contemporary parlance. Among the selected articles, there were at least two projects that studied the association between traditional religions and recovery from addiction in connection to the 12 Steps. For instance, in a qualitative study on Native American religious traditions, one of the participants states:

Time and again our Elders have said that the 12 Steps of AA are just the same as the principles that our ancestors lived by, with only one change. When we place the 12 Steps in a circle then they come into alignment with the circle teachings that we know from many of our tribal ways. When we think of them in a circle and use them a little differently, then the words will be more familiar to us. (Coyhis & Simonelli, 2008, p. 1934)

The “Weak” Character Strengths in the Reviewed Literature

As reported in the results section, nine character strengths could be identified with a frequency of below 2%, and humour and gratitude scored a mere 3.77%, and citizenship 9.43%. Among these 14 character strengths, seven of them that had no reference at all (0%) were curiosity, open-mindedness, bravery, persistence, leadership, prudence, and appreciation of beauty.

This suggests that some character strengths are perceived to be less relevant to addiction recovery than others. This could be a hypothesis to be tested in an empirical enquiry. However, from common sense, perhaps prudence could be a relevant character - strength to explore in the context of addiction-spirituality research. Another surprising indicator is the low prevalence of self-control which is grouped under the core virtue of temperance in Values in Action (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). It is possible that self-control or temperance is not yet sufficiently explored in addiction research, particularly among the dimensions of spirituality, or it could be that the way these constructs are defined within addiction research is different from the way positive psychology understands it. In any case, the character strengths that have not featured prominently in the current study might need to be further explored.

Limitations of the Review

The literature search for this review was based on digital databases alone. It did not include chapters from books, for instance. While the use of digital sources has yielded a set of relevant peer-reviewed articles, the presence of some bias in the sampling process cannot be ruled out. On the other hand, given the plethora of publications now available in the field of spirituality and addiction, it would have been impossible to do a sensible literature review without using some delimiting parameters. Additionally, the coding process in the thematic analysis for the present version of the study was carried out mainly by the author (then a research student), with some helpful comments about the coding process from one of the supervisors. A thorough collaborative analysis on the selected literature could improve the reliability of the findings.

Conclusion

During the coding process, on several occasions there was some dilemma about how a particular text could be coded. Often, one piece of text was attached to several nodes. Without denying the subjectivity of the coder, this dilemma also showed that there is a lot of association between the character strengths. For one thing, it has been accepted within positive psychology that though the character strengths are distinct dimensions, they are not isolated entities. Research is still ongoing in attempting to discern the patterns underpinning the interaction between the character strengths. The originators of the classification of the VIA accept that while the selection and listing of the character strengths have been largely supported, their grouping under particular core virtues has been a matter of much discussion (Seligman & Peterson, 2003, p. 306; Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p. 31; Peterson & Park, 2004; Peterson, Park, Pole, D'Andrea, & Seligman, 2008). Only moderate support has been found for the conceptual structure of the six core virtues. Some have suggested for less than six-factor model (Park & Peterson, 2006). There is statistical evidence for a one and four factor solution to the organisation of character strengths (Macdonald, Bore, & Munro, 2008). On a similar vein, Brdar and Kashdan (2010) after investigating the relation between the character strengths through factor analysis on data drawn from a sample of 881 Croatian university students propose a four-factor solution to the grouping of character strengths. Still other results reveal that a three- or four-dimensional model would be more suitable (Shryack, Steger, Kruegger, & Kallie, 2010). In the present qualitative thematic analysis a pattern has emerged: that 10 character strengths are more relevant to addiction and recovery than 14 others. These are wisdom, integrity, vitality, humility, forgiveness, kindness, love, hope and spirituality. The basic question that follows is: can these interrelated character strengths be grouped into a mid-level construct? The pattern that has emerged from the present qualitative analysis could serve as a hypothesised model to be tested in the context of spirituality- addiction research.

Secondly, (a) if these character strengths are relevant in the context of addiction; (b) if these character strengths are malleable (Seligman, 2004) and their use can be marshalled and maximised (Linley, Willar, & Biswas-Diener, 2010), then can it be hypothesised that addiction could be related to a lack in these character strengths, and that recovery could be facilitated by maximising these strengths?

In any case, what the current qualitative systematic literature review has revealed is that these character strengths are salient in the addiction-spirituality literature. It has emerged that addiction research has used these terminologies, often without a unifying theoretical framework. It seems that the language of character strengths of positive psychology could provide a viable theoretical framework for addiction-spirituality research. The method of QSLR itself had made it possible to generate such hypothesised conclusion.

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