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Kayla Lovett
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Introduction

The purpose of this study is to explore the role of religion in the process of recovery from addiction for individuals experiencing homelessness. There exists an inverse relationship between practicing religion and substance use, suggesting that religion may be a protective factor in reducing problematic substance use (Morjaria & Orford, 2002). Additionally, Moos (2007) found that high religious affiliation was correlated with better recovery outcomes, and suggested that spirituality helps individuals manage life stressors and fosters a greater sense of optimism and hope. Bass (2009) found that social factors of religion such as building relationships with church communities outside of treatment fostered sustained recovery.

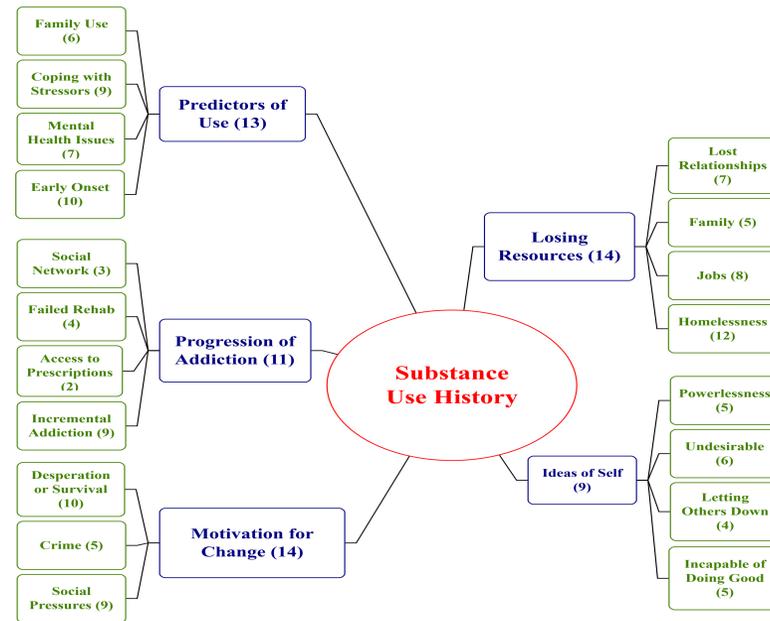
To explore how religion plays into recovery for homeless individuals, I interviewed participants at two residential recovery sites who had been in recovery for at least 30 days and analyzed the qualitative interview data to identify themes about what contributed to their success in recovery.

Participants

- 9 men, 5 women
- 12 White, 1 Pacific Islander, 1 Latino
- Age ranged from 23 to 64 years
- Length of sobriety ranged from 8 weeks to 3 years
- Participants were recruited from 2 residential programs focusing on recovery for individuals experiencing homelessness: one Christian and one non faith-based

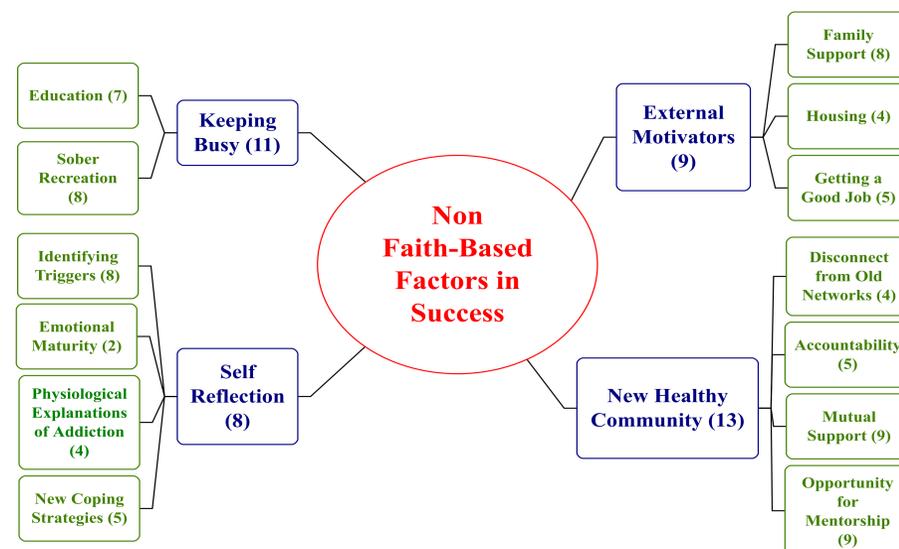
Methods

- 40-60 minute qualitative interviews
- Interview topics included recovery history, religious beliefs, ideas of self, and community
- Interviews were transcribed
- Transcriptions were coded, and emerging frameworks were created (Heydariyan, 2016)
- Interview data was re-coded according to frameworks, and frequencies were recorded



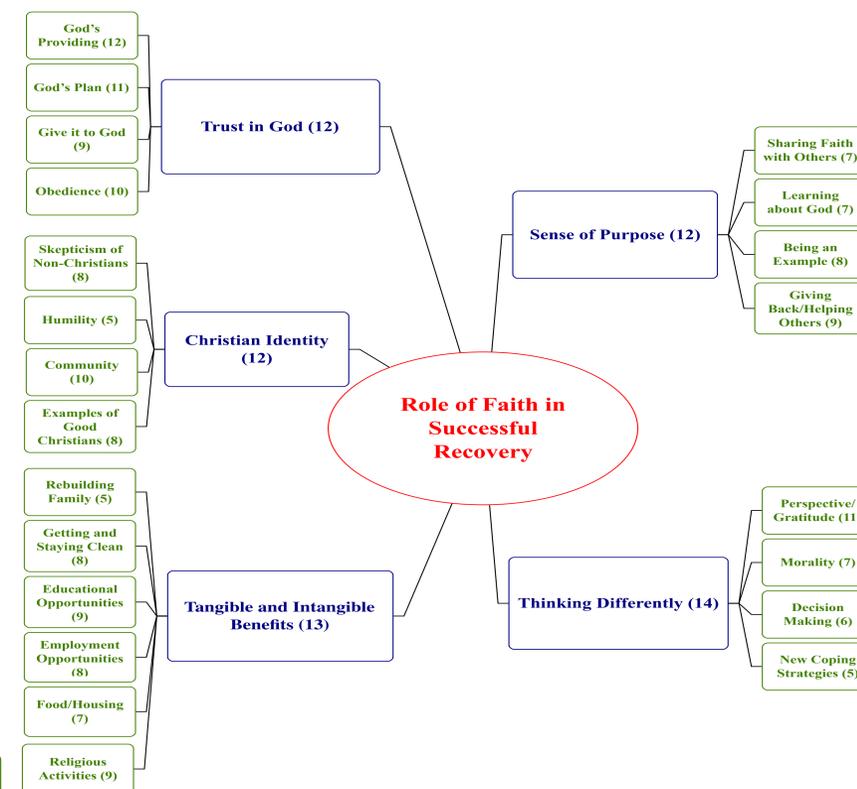
Findings: Participants identified various spiritual, intrapersonal, social, and tangible factors to explain the role of religion in their recovery. Themes included the roles of internal faith, new positive self-views and behavior, and other benefits.

- “So, He forgave me. And I’m not put on this earth just to feel bad about myself. I’m here to help others.” **Sense of Purpose: Giving Back and Helping Others**
- “And so once I learned forgiveness, then it’s like...God was like, “Okay. See, that’s all you had to do. You put it at My feet, and now you can move forward and grow and help other people.” **Trust in God: Give it to God**
- I know they’ve...They just taught me how to trust Him. It’s like, okay I can let go a little bit. And it’s like a sliver every day of, like, feeling better. **Christian Identity: Community**
- But I’m fully, like, okay with myself. I don’t hate myself. There’s not that hate anymore. And I’m sure faith has something to do with that. Cause that’s just the difference that I haven’t had in my recovery before. **Thinking Differently: Perspective or Gratitude**



Findings: Participants discussed many factors contributing to and characterizing their substance use history. Social factors, coping with life stressors, and negative self-views were mentioned frequently.

- “I wanted to stop, y’know, a few times. I did stop a few times. But, uh, eventually it gets to the point where you don’t really care about anything but the drugs, cause they’re what’s regulating you.” **Ideas of Self: Powerlessness**
- “I had 10 million thousand reasons why I was just worthless. And I believed every single one of them wholeheartedly. And drugs helped me believe that, and then also, like, numbed the sting from knowing that.” **Ideas of Self: Worthlessness**
- “Y’know, twice in a row, I had come to a crisis in my life, and what did I yearn for the most in both cases? Peace. And it provided me. Both of the substances provided me a measure of peace for a moment.” **Predictors of Use: Coping with Stressors**



Findings: Participants also identified non-religious factors in recovery including positive activities, self-reflection, and external motivators.

- “And so it teaches you how to capture your thoughts, and also teaches you, like, your own triggers for relapse. And so you can identify it way ahead of time, that you’re on your way to relapse. **Self Reflection: Identifying Triggers**
- “It’s so important. Like I said, better than any drug. Knowing that my daughter loves me, and my grandson...I get to watch him grow up.” **External Motivators: Family Support**
- “I can help navigate the people who are coming through. Let me help you out. I know where this is going. I know what step to take. I’ll give you my opinion and guide you.” **New Healthy Community: Opportunity for Mentorship**

Conclusions

Findings of this study align with existing literature on the role of religion in recovery. In talking about their faith and recovery, participants referred most frequently to their ability to think differently, including developing new ways to cope and an overall new, more optimistic perspective. According to Moos (2007), the stress and coping theory suggests that high religious affiliation fosters optimism. Additionally, the most frequently mentioned method of keeping busy among my participants was participating in religious activities. Morjaria and Orford (2002) suggest the idea that a protective mechanism of religion may be time-occupying activities incompatible with substance use. Community, family support, and a sense of purpose were also commonly referred to as factors in success during recovery. These results suggest that the social and intrapsychic benefits of religion extend to homeless populations.

In considering these results, it is important to note the limitation that the sample was small and was predominantly White, while the greater homeless population contains many more minoritized identities.

References and Acknowledgements

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