



Spirituality, mindfulness and substance abuse

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Abstract

A growing body of research suggests that mindfulness-based therapies may be effective in treating a variety of disorders including stress, chronic pain, depression and anxiety. However, there are few valid and reliable measures of mindfulness. Furthermore, mindfulness is often thought to be related to spirituality, given its roots in Buddhist tradition, but empirical studies on this relationship are difficult to find. The present study: (1) tested the reliability and validity of a new mindfulness measure, the Freiburg Mindfulness Inventory (FMI), (2) explored the relationship between mindfulness and spirituality, and (3) investigated the relationship between mindfulness and/or spirituality and alcohol and tobacco use in an undergraduate college population ($N=196$). Results support the reliability of the FMI and suggest that spirituality and mindfulness may be separate constructs. In addition, smoking and frequent binge-drinking were negatively correlated with spirituality scores; as spirituality scores increased the use of alcohol and tobacco decreased. Thus, spirituality may be related to decreased substance use. In contrast, a positive relationship between mindfulness and smoking/frequent binge-drinking behavior was uncovered, and warrants further investigation.

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1. Introduction

Mindfulness is receiving increased attention in the scientific community, and has been described as an awareness of moment by moment experience arising from purposeful

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attention (i.e., meditation), along with a non-judgmental acceptance of these present-moment experiences (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). A growing body of research suggests that mindfulness-based therapies may be effective in the reduction of chronic pain (Kabat-Zinn, 1990), anxiety (Kabat-Zinn et al., 1992), and in the prevention of depressive relapse (Segal, Williams, & Teasdale, 2002; Teasdale et al., 2000). Mindfulness-based interventions are now being considered for the treatment of substance abuse disorders (Marlatt et al., 2004), and Generalized Anxiety Disorder (Roemer & Orsillo, 2002, 2003).

Although mindfulness meditation is associated with positive outcomes, there are few valid and reliable methods for assessing the construct of mindfulness. Therefore, the first aim of this study was to test the reliability and validity of a new mindfulness measure, the Frieburg Mindfulness Inventory (FMI) (Buchheld, Grossman, & Walach, 2002).

As mindfulness is rooted in Buddhist philosophy, it is often thought to be related to spirituality; however, to our knowledge this relationship has not been studied empirically. Spirituality is a fairly new construct in empirical science, when viewed as separate from religiousness or religiosity. While religiosity may include spirituality within a framework of specific beliefs, customs, and practices, spirituality is a much more individualized approach to a practice of worship. A spiritual practitioner may not adhere to a formal religious practice or associate with an established religion (Longo & Peterson, 2002).

In a recent study of spirituality and substance use in college students, subjects were asked how important their spiritual or religious beliefs were in their decision to use drugs and/or alcohol, and in other life decisions (Stewart, 2001). Those students who rated spiritual beliefs important drank less than those who did not, but this buffering effect diminished as the students got older. Differences in use between high and low spirituality students did not diminish over time when examining marijuana use; 41% of students who reported low importance of spirituality used marijuana, as compared to approximately 15% of students who reported high importance of spiritual beliefs, across all age groups in the study.

Researchers have also examined the relationship between spirituality (as measured by the Spiritual Transcendence Index [STI]) (Seidlitz et al., 2002) and the effect of stress on both emotional and physical adjustment in college students. Findings suggest that spirituality buffered the adverse effects of stress on negative affect and physical adjustment/symptoms, but had no significant effect on positive affect (Kim & Seidlitz, 2002). In order to clarify the relationship between mindfulness and spirituality, the current study included the STI for comparison with the FMI. In addition, the authors chose to investigate the relationship between mindfulness and/or spirituality and substance abuse, specifically alcohol and tobacco use, in a college population.

It has been widely reported that alcohol consumption is a problem on college campuses throughout America, and the resulting negative consequences are experienced by the drinker and the non-drinker alike. It is estimated that annually approximately 1400 college students (between the ages of 18 and 24) die from alcohol-related injuries, 500,000 students are unintentionally injured while under the influence of alcohol, 600,000 students are assaulted by another student who has been drinking, and over 70,000 students are the victims of alcohol-related sexual assault or rape (National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism

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