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Spiritual and Religious Factors of Recovery from Alcoholism¹

Duhovni in verski dejavniki okrevanja po alkoholizmu

Abstract: Recovery from alcoholism is a complex, dynamic, personal and social process aimed not only at abstaining from alcohol but also at improving the quality of various areas of life. In this process, individuals rely on a variety of internal and external resources. One of these is spirituality/religiosity, which contributes to the results of alcoholism treatment in various ways. In this paper, where we used the systematic literature review method to analyze 28 different studies in the field of spirituality/religiosity in the recovery process from alcoholism, we present findings that indicate the role of spirituality as one of the components in this process. We shed light on several spiritual and religious factors that are, each in its specific way, important support to the individual in the process of recovery from alcoholism.

Keywords: addiction, alcoholism, abstinence, relationship with God, religion, spirituality

Povzetek: Okrevanje po alkoholizmu je kompleksen, dinamičen, osebni in socialen proces, katerega cilj ni samo abstinenca, ampak izboljšanje kvalitete življenja na različnih življenjskih področjih. V tem procesu se ljudje naslonijo na različne notranje in zunanje vire. Med njimi je tudi duhovnost/religioznost, ki na različne načine prispeva k rezultatom zdravljenja odvisnosti od alkohola. V prispevku, v katerem smo z metodo sistematičnega pregleda literature analizirali 28 različnih raziskav s področja duhovnosti/religioznosti v procesu okrevanja od odvisnosti od alkohola, predstavljamo ugotovitve, ki nakazujejo, kakšna je vloga duhovnosti kot ene izmed komponent v procesu okrevanja od posledic odvisnosti od alkohola. Izpostavljeni so različni duhovno-religiozni dejavniki, ki na raznolike načine predstavljajo pomembno podporo posamezniku v procesu okrevanja od odvisnosti od alkohola.

Ključne besede: odvisnost, alkoholizem, abstinenca, odnos z Bogom, religija, duhovnost

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1. A Modern Understanding of Alcoholism

Recent research in the field of addiction confirms that alcoholism is not just a mental disorder of addiction but also a chronic physical disease that damages the biological balance in the brain (Urschel 2009, 5). From the point of view of mental health, alcoholism is diagnosed as a pattern of harmful consumption of a psychoactive substance (alcohol) that causes health problems and addiction syndrome. The latter is characterized by a strong desire to drink alcoholic beverages, persistent consumption of alcohol despite harmful consequences, higher commitment to alcohol consumption than other activities and obligations, increased tolerance and in some cases physical disorders due to substance withdrawal (World Health Organization 2016, 289–291). Alcohol addiction is thus manifested in the specific behaviour, thinking and emotions of an individual and at the same time causes permanent changes in brain function, especially in impaired frontal lobe function and in the damaged neurotransmitter system.

Although alcoholism is often described as an addictive behaviour driven by either the pursuit of pleasure or self-destructive motives, experts find that behind addictive behaviour there is deep and strong psychological pain (Gostečnik et al. 2010, 364–365; Khantzian 2014, 33). In understanding and dealing with alcoholism, it is thus increasingly important to understand mental development and, above all, the factors that cause and maintain psychological stress and pain in an individual during development. The disorder of self-regulation because of traumatic experience (De Bellis 2002, 164; Wright 2014, 27) or insecure attachment (Khantzian 2014, 36) and systemic adjustment of relationships to non-functional behavioural patterns are recognized as risk factors for the development of alcoholism (Vetere 2014, 62). Inappropriately regulated psychological contents associated with various forms of (relational) trauma are thus in the background of the dynamics of alcoholism, and addiction is a way of inappropriate regulation of these internal states.

2. The Process of Recovery from Alcoholism

Coping with alcoholism can be aimed at reducing the harmful effects of addiction or at maintaining abstinence (Wright 2014, 12). The recovery process can be based on the principles of non-spiritual approaches, non-religious spiritual approaches, or religious approaches (Brown et al. 2006, 655–656). All of these approaches should include medical, psychotherapeutic, and supportive interventions. Because alcoholism is understood as a disease, the first step in recovery must be a medical approach (especially for patients with withdrawal symptoms and comorbid mental disorders, for example, severe depression). With medicaments, we enable the brain to regain the ability of paying attention, listening and memorizing, thus meeting basic conditions for further psychotherapeutic and supportive treatment (Urschel 2009, 23, 27).

When we talk about psychotherapeutic support in the recovery process, the importance of re-establishing relationships is increasingly emphasized (Khantzian

2014, 53; Vetere 2014, 63). In this phase, the recovery process should therefore be focused primarily on building attachment, forming reliable interpersonal relationships and reorganizing traumatic relational experiences (Wright 2014, 17). New experiences in relationships enable new mechanisms of self-regulation (Khantzian 2014, 63) and thus one's autonomy and free and secure attachment to another person. Through interpretation, understanding, and explanation, conscious, verbal information is reorganized, and through the experience of this subjective environment the implicit relational knowing changes (Stern et al. 2010, 14). In the relational context, recovery from addiction is supposed to represent a new satisfaction of basic relational needs, where the way of connecting and establishing the basic elements of attachment in relationships is key. The satisfied need for significance and recognition is especially important since it is supposed to help the recovering individual to regain a sense of trust in relationships and the ability to re-attach to a person (which replaces attachment to the substance) (Khantzian 2014, 63).

3. The Importance of Spirituality in Recovery after Alcoholism

When we talk about the spiritual or religious approach in the treatment of addiction, we have in mind various support interventions that include these two dimensions (Brown et al. 2006, 656). These are two different, but inevitably connected and overlapping constructs. Spirituality is usually understood more broadly than religiosity and defines a personal and internalized sense of the transcendent, the sacred, where the individual establishes a deep and personal relationship with God or the transcendent being. Religiosity, on the other hand, is seen as a more external and organized expression of spirituality, also including an institutional and community dimension, spiritual life according to institutional rules and belief according to the value system of a particular religion (Bent-Goodley and Fowler 2006, 283). Religiosity can thus be understood as an expression of a spiritual relationship in certain forms, ways, beliefs, and practices that develop within a community with others who share the same experiences with transcendent reality (Hodge 2011, 22). In principle, we can say that spirituality can exist without religiosity, while religiosity is empty if it does not include spirituality (Brown et al. 2006, 654).

There are various ways in which spirituality and religiosity are linked to alcohol abuse and the recovery process. Spirituality and religiosity can help deal with stress (Pargament et al. 2001, 64), as religious coping can reduce or accelerate the effects of stressful events, depending on how it is involved in the process. Secondly, spirituality and religiosity can promote healthy behaviours and emotions, e.g. higher levels of spirituality and religiosity are associated with lower indicators of depression (Chatters et al. 2008, 958). Some religions explicitly forbid the consumption of alcohol, and almost all of them claim that alcohol abuse is a mistake (sin). Active and spiritually marked behaviours appear to promote self-esteem and create positive emotions such as being loved and forgiven (2000, 335). Final-

ly, spiritual and religious behaviour typically involves rather intense formal and informal social activities (e.g., inclusion in various groups) that are known to reduce stress and have a positive effect on psychological health (Miller and Saunders 2011, 2–3). From this point of view, spirituality is an important factor in the process of recovery from alcoholism (Jerebic and Jerebic 2012, 307).

Support groups for the treatment of alcoholism (e.g. Alcoholics Anonymous - AA) highlight the basic principles of self-help with which a person can find ways to maintain abstinence and offer a new social network in which individuals can try new ways to meet their relational needs (Urschel 2009, 110). In support groups with a spiritual or religious component, a person satisfies the need for recognition and the need to be with people they perceive as similar and sharing the same experience (Erskine 1998, 239). In addition, engaging in religious rites and cultivating a genuine spiritual relationship with God or another transcendent being during recovery can also alter attachment patterns (Kerlin 2017, 405) as a person in their vulnerability regains the experience of safe shelter and distress regulation when the contact is broken. Expressing gratitude through prayer and affection through religious rituals enables the individual in the recovery process to awaken spiritually and to reach a new state of consciousness, characterized by faith in the transcendent and joy of life (Dermatis and Galanter 2016, 511). Spirituality thus plays an important role in recovery from addiction, as it is associated with a more optimistic view of the world and stronger social support, which allows for healing and changing one's behavioural patterns (Pardini et al. 2000, 352).

In a personal relationship with God, a person in the process of recovery can experience new dimensions of understanding themselves, relationships, and the world. The spiritual identity of the individual, as an explicit and implicit expression of the relationship to God (Davis, Granqvist and Sharp 2018, 8), is important in the recovery process as it gives the individual a sense of confidence, efficiency, control and value. A relationship with a God who does not judge or disgrace and where there is always a place for human vulnerability can offer a new experience of security (Kirkpatrick 2005, 61) that replaces meeting security needs with addictive behaviour. Thus, by changing the attitude toward God, when in moments of vulnerability a person experiences its importance for living, they form or change the explicit perception of spirituality as well as the inner implicit attitude towards God, thus creating support in coping with challenges in the process of recovery.

4. The Purpose of the Study

Most studies on alcoholism, focusing on its aetiology and treatment, rely mainly on the medical model of understanding. Therefore, little research would focus on the qualities of alcoholics who have opted for sobriety. The recovery process is based not so much on medical or biological predispositions, but on how an individual seeks meaning and purpose, the ability to make moral decisions, the decision to know and work on oneself, and the ability to be creative. Recovery from alcoholism is an internal phenomenon, it is a 'success story' that can only be told from

within. Of course, alcoholics often opt for abstinence due to external pressures from family or society. This decision, however, must also become internal; a transformative process must evolve in which the alcoholic discovers the internal factors, including spirituality, that lead to change (Wisner Bowden 1998, 337–338). In this regard, the purpose of this paper is to present a systematic overview of the findings of recent scientific studies that have examined the role of spirituality in the process of recovery from alcoholism. Based on the analysis, we want to present the role of spirituality as one of the components in the process of recovery.

5. Method

5.1 Systematic Literature Review

For the research method, we used the systematic literature review method, which is similar to meta-analysis. It can be described as a method that compares the results of qualitative and quantitative studies, using a qualitative approach (Snyder 2019, 335). It provides an objective and systematic overview of the field and offers a good insight into a particular scientific field by identifying, critically evaluating and integrating findings of important qualitative studies addressing a specific research topic (Cooper 2003, 5). The method needs to be based on the preparation of a detailed analysis protocol, and the research material consists of relevant studies that comply with pre-defined criteria for inclusion in and exclusion from the analysis (Ressing, Blettner and Klug 2009, 457). The result is a comprehensive and systematic review of the results of a large number of already published quantitative and qualitative research in a particular field. By integrating the findings and perspectives derived from the various empirical findings of these studies, we obtain answers to research questions in a way that no single study can (Snyder 2019, 333). In our study, by a systematic literature review we identified, summarized, and synthesized achievable research that addressed various aspects and the role of spirituality in the process of recovery from alcoholism.

5.2 Procedure

For this study, we searched for scientific articles of qualitative and quantitative studies on two online bases of articles, Scopus and Web of Science. To capture the articles, we selected the period from January 2000 to December 2021. We searched the databases for results under the search terms ‚alcoholism‘, ‚recovery‘, ‚spirituality‘ and ‚religion‘, which were found in the title, summary or keywords. The following criteria were considered in identifying relevant studies:

- The full article presented an original study (quantitative or qualitative) in English and was published in a peer-reviewed scientific journal between January 2000 and December 2021.
- The content of the article referred (also) to aspects of spirituality/religiosity in the process of recovery from alcoholism (even if the article dealt with the process of recovery from abuse of other substances and addictions, we focused only on the part that was related to recovery from alcoholism).

- The research sample consisted (also) of individuals with the experience of alcohol addiction and were currently or in the past involved in the process of recovery from alcoholism.

Articles were first evaluated based on their title and abstract. In articles that were not excluded we then looked at the full text that seemed relevant. By the set criteria, we designed the final selection of articles, which we analyzed in detail in accordance with the purpose of our research. The entire process of finding and selecting articles is shown in Figure 1.

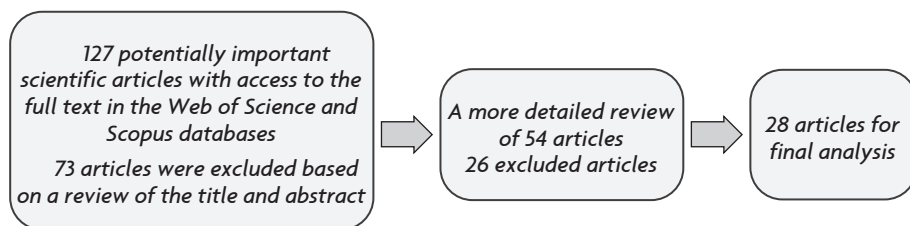


Figure 1: Process of obtaining and selecting studies.

6. Results

Table 1 presents the main features of the included studies. Of the 28 studies included, 21 were quantitative and 7 used qualitative research approaches.

Survey (authors, year) and type of survey	Sample	Research approach and method of data collection
Andó et al. (2016) Quantitative research	Adults involved in addiction treatment programs (N=169)	Statistical analysis (questionnaires)
Atkins and Hawdon (2007) Quantitative research	Participants in addiction treatment support groups (N=924)	Statistical analysis (questionnaires)
Blakeney, Blakeney and Helmut (2005) Qualitative research	Chronic addicts who have entered the recovery process in the Jewish community (N=29)	Phenomenological content analysis (semi-structured interviews)
Brown et al. (2007) Quantitative research	Participants in the program of recovery from alcoholism (N=26)	Statistical analysis (questionnaires)
Brown et al. (2013) Quantitative research	Adults cured of addiction (N=91)	Statistical analysis (questionnaires)
Doty-Sweetnam and Morrisette (2018) Qualitative research	Women in the process of recovering from alcoholism with at least 5 years of abstinence (N=7)	The phenomenological method with content analysis (interviews)
Galanter, Dermatis and Santucci (2012) Quantitative research	Young participants of AA groups (N=266)	Statistical analysis (questionnaires)
Galanter et al. (2013) Quantitative research	Adult participants (physicians) who were AA members (N=144)	Statistical analysis (questionnaires)
Galanter et al. (2020) Quantitative research	Participants of the Narcotic Anonymus program (N=450)	Statistical analysis (questionnaires)
Jackson and Cook (2005) Qualitative research	Members of a spiritual group in the community recovery program for people with alcohol problems (N = 5)	Content thematic analysis (analysis of topics that emerged at the meetings)

Survey (authors, year) and type of survey	Sample	Research approach and method of data collection
Kelly and Eddie (2020) Quantitative research	Adults (USA national sample) (N=2002)	Statistical analysis (questionnaires)
Kerlin (2017) Quantitative research	Women involved in integrative institutional treatment of addiction (N=95)	Statistical analysis (questionnaires)
Lewis and Allen (2017) Qualitative research	50+ years old Alaskan natives involved in the People Awakening project (N=10)	Thematic analysis (interviews)
Mason et al. (2009) Quantitative research	Men involved in a substance abuse rehabilitation program (N=77)	Statistical analysis (questionnaires)
Medlock et al. (2017) Quantitative research	Adults diagnosed with a serious addiction disorder (N=131)	Statistical analysis (questionnaires)
Miller and Saunders (2011) Quantitative research	Persons in the process of group and individual therapy (N=55)	Statistical analysis (questionnaires)
Murray, Goggin and Malcarne (2006) Quantitative research	Members of AA (N=144)	Statistical analysis (questionnaires)
Necula, Baciú and Punga (2019) Qualitative research	Participants in the alcoholism treatment program organized by the Blue Cross Association from Romania (N=over 700)	Triangulation of methods (direct observation, analysis of daily reports and interviews with users of the recovery program)
Panati et al. (2020) Quantitative research	Adults diagnosed with alcohol addiction syndrome (N=50)	Statistical analysis (questionnaires)
Pardini et al. (2000) Quantitative research	Adults cured of alcohol and/or other drug addiction (N=236)	Statistical analysis (questionnaires)
Piderman et al. (2007) Quantitative research	Adults in the process of treating alcohol addiction (N=74)	Statistical analysis (questionnaires)
Piderman et al. (2008) Quantitative research	Adults who have completed an alcohol addiction treatment program (N=74)	Statistical analysis (questionnaires)
Polcin and Zemore (2004) Quantitative research	Participants in AA groups and other treatment programs (N=200)	Statistical analysis (questionnaires)
Robinson et al. (2007) Quantitative research	Adults cured of alcohol addiction (N=123)	Statistical analysis (descriptive longitudinal study) (questionnaires)
Selvam (2015) Qualitative research	Participants (a man and a woman) with experience of alcohol abuse included in a program where elements of Christian contemplation were practised (N=2)	Case study (interview and questionnaires)
Wade (2013) Qualitative research	Alcoholics in the process of recovery in AA (N=12)	Phenomenological method (interviews)
Webb et al. (2006) Quantitative research	Adults with alcohol addiction included in a community treatment program (N=157)	Statistical analysis (questionnaires)
Yeterian, Bursik and Kelly (2015) Quantitative research	Adolescents one year after the end of treatment (N = 127)	Statistical analysis (questionnaires)

Notes: AA - Alcoholics Anonymous. In articles that included different types of addiction in the research, we analyzed only data related to alcohol addiction.

Table 1: *Included studies and their characteristics.*

Research mostly emphasizes that various spiritual variables develop and function in the recovery process and that this spiritual development is associated with achieving better results in the process of recovery from alcoholism. With the exception of two studies (Atkins and Hawdon 2007; Yeterian, Bursik and Kelly 2015) that did not confirm that the spiritual/religious dimensions increase an individual's ability to maintain abstinence, studies highlight some important aspects of spirituality. These are related to lower levels of craving for alcohol, one remains sober more easily and with higher certainty, and better recovers psychologically. The findings of research on the role of spirituality as one of the components in the process of recovery from alcoholism can be summarized in the following topics: the level of spirituality, spiritual practice, religious coping, spiritual growth and personal relationship with God.

6.1 Level of Spirituality/Religiosity

The research results show a positive correlation between higher levels of spirituality/religiosity and positive aspects in the recovery process, which also contribute to a higher ability to maintain abstinence. A higher level of spirituality is associated with a higher level of self-confident decisiveness to maintain sobriety (Brown et al. 2013). Spirituality and religiosity are associated with a more optimistic life orientation, greater perception of social support, higher resilience to stress and lower levels of anxiety, which contributes to a more successful coping with addiction (Pardini et al. 2000). When a higher level of spirituality in the recovery process is also associated with a person's self-efficacy, i.e. a proactive attitude that leads to change, the desire for alcohol decreases (Mason et al. 2009; Piderman et al. 2007). A higher level of spirituality is also associated with less negative affect, more social and positive behaviour, and more appropriate self-care (Panati et al. 2020), thereby increasing the power to abstain from alcohol.

In general, spiritually/religiously-oriented individuals are expected to have a lower propensity to consume alcohol and other substances, and strengthening spirituality/religiosity provides a stronger commitment to maintaining abstinence during recovery. Developing spiritual and religious beliefs in the recovery process in addicts is also therapeutic and increases the chances of treatment success (Necula, Baciu and Pungă 2019). Research confirms that in recovery programs that include spiritual growth, the level of spirituality and faith increases, which helps to maintain sobriety (Brown et al. 2007), as the symptoms of anxiety decrease in relation to a higher level of spirituality (Andó et al. 2016). Spirituality is said to be more important in the recovery process for individuals who have completed formal treatment than for those who have recovered without it. In addition, higher levels of spirituality/religiosity are expected to contribute differently to major changes according to certain characteristics (e.g. they have shown more significance in African Americans than Caucasians and in women compared to men in the recovery process) (Kelly and Eddie 2020).

6.2 Spiritual Practice

Some research has focused on general or specific aspects of spiritual/religious practice associated with the recovery process. In general, personal spiritual practices increase the possibility of maintaining abstinence (Piderman et al. 2007; 2008). Promoting spirituality through reading spiritual texts, discussions, listening to others, and participating in conversations about spirituality is an important factor in achieving sobriety (Brown et al. 2007). Christian contemplative practice, which promotes spiritual growth through strengthening self-awareness, self-regulation, humility, forgiveness, social responsibility and intelligence, also has the potential to lower cravings for alcohol (Selvam 2015). Prayer and attending church/Mass, which enable a personal relationship with God while also providing a support network outside the 'drinking company' (non-drinking social environment), are important factors in motivating sobriety (Lewis and Allen 2017). Attending Mass (and sacramental practice) can promote the complex recovery process, as there one can listen to God's word and pray with others, thus establishing a sense of community, which also promotes recovery by lowering the feelings of loneliness and alienation (Wade 2013).

6.3 Spirituality as a Way of Coping with Stress (Religious Coping)

Some studies have focused on examining the relationship between the role of spirituality/religiosity as a mechanism for coping with stress and the aspects of the recovery process. They find that various interventions in the recovery process deepen many positive dimensions of spirituality and religiosity, including positive religious coping (Robinson et al. 2007). They confirm that positive religious coping (incorporating spiritual/religious aspects of coping with stress, which stems from a sense of positive connection and collaborative relationship with God, from which one draws strength to face one's trials) is associated with higher success in the recovery process (Polcin and Zemore 2004). For example, this way of religious coping is associated with a lower level of alcohol consumption before entering the recovery process and a tendency to stronger mutual support of participants in the recovery process, which is reflected in a lower desire for substance and abstinence that is more reliable after dismissal (Medlock et al. 2017).

6.4 Spiritual Growth

Research that has examined the progress of persons in the area of spirituality in the recovery process, without exception points to the fact that the dimensions of spirituality and religiosity in people in the recovery process are strengthened. Higher levels of spirituality are also associated with greater success in maintaining sobriety. Spiritual growth in the recovery process is often the result of interventions that specific recovery programs include in the recovery process (e.g. spiritual content in discussion groups, discussions, reading texts with spiritual/religious content) (Brown et al. 2007), as well as relationships with other persons (friends, relatives) that encourage spiritual growth (Doty-Sweetnam and Morrissette 2018).

Thus, in the process of recovery, a kind of spiritual awakening occurs (Galanter, Dermatis and Santucci 2012). Participants experience God's presence on a personal level and as a result, their sense of connection with God deepens (Galanter et al. 2013), their daily spiritual experience increases, they experience a deeper meaning of life (Robinson et al. 2007) and feel higher existential well-being in general (Miller and Saunders 2011). In recovered participants, we may find that spiritual growth they experience in the recovery process increases their optimistic life orientation and openness to social contacts and resilience to stress, while it lowers anxiety (Pardini et al. 2000) and depression (Galanter et al. 2020). An important dimension of spiritual growth in the recovery process is also the achievement of forgiveness (to self and others), which is a noteworthy component of successful recovery, as it allows one to overcome unresolved aspects that may drive alcohol abuse (Webb et al. 2006). All of the listed dimensions of spiritual growth in the recovery process are associated with a lower craving for alcohol.

6.5 Personal Relationship with God

The dimension that emerges from research and explains how spirituality and religiosity help in the recovery process and support the maintenance of abstinence, is an aspect of experiencing a relationship with God on a deeper, personal level. It is important to experience God's genuine presence, also reflected in a secure attachment to God, which is associated with less craving for alcohol and maintaining sobriety (Galanter et al. 2013; Kerlin 2017). Persons in the healing process deepen their personal relationship with God, where they experience God as a personal saviour who has helped them survive all the dangers of addiction and stop drinking. For them, the decision to stop drinking and to recover equals a crucial moment of change in their lives, and they believe that they would not be able to persevere on this path and would start drinking again if they did not experience support and salvation from God (Lewis and Allen 2017). This personal and saving relationship with God is also the result of spiritual awakening (Galanter et al. 2013), and they experience it as mentally 'hearing' how God speaks inside them (2020). Many experience their addiction to alcohol as something they have replaced God with, and feel that intense hunger and thirst for God lie behind their addiction. Because of drinking, they faced inferiority and feelings of loneliness and alienation, which, however, diminished in their personal relationship with Jesus in the Eucharist, where they felt accepted by Jesus even though they were sinners. They experienced his mercy and forgiveness - and without a sense that one has been forgiven, there is no recovery. The Eucharist ensures the true presence of Jesus and thus a relationship in which one can be felt, restructure one's existing life and observe new things in real life, as well as to continue sobriety. The Eucharist means to unite with Christ, who is life, and to go with him through the process of recovery, which is death and resurrection. During these experiences, as well as in belonging to the Church and community, they felt safe, and above all, they were inspired by the view of death and resurrection, which is an important parallel to the recovery process (Wade 2013). For persons in the process of recovery, a per-

sonal relationship with God thus represents an internal point from which control over alcohol abuse can take place (a decision to quit, a decision to remain sober) (Murray, Goggin and Malcarne 2006).

7. Discussion

Using the method of a systematic literature review, we identified five areas that cover the results of research in the field of spirituality and recovery from alcoholism. These are: level of spirituality, spiritual practice, religious coping, spiritual growth and personal relationship with God. It turned out that these are the main areas through which we can explain the importance of spirituality for the process of recovery from alcoholism.

Spirituality or religious practices, which an individual develops as part of their experience and behaviour, contribute to a more successful coping in the process of recovery from addiction and also from the consequences of addiction. Spirituality and religiosity often help people find meaning and purpose in their lives, especially in stressful and traumatic situations (Hill and Pargament 2003, 64–65; Peres et al. 2007, 346), and also contribute to faster post-traumatic growth after difficult experiences (Calhoun et al. 2000, 522), as well as in recovery from addiction (Kerlin 2017, 398). In coping with difficulties, the spiritual dimension is often one that helps to understand the seemingly incomprehensible and achieve control over something that is difficult to manage at first glance (Erzar 2021, 928–929), which also seems challenging in the process of recovery from alcoholism. Based on the results of the research, we can conclude that aspects of spirituality and religiosity enable an individual to divert attention from addiction, learn new strategies for satisfying basic relational needs, new strategies for coping with stress and finding new meaning in life.

What is important here is that spiritual or religious coping with stress is based on a strong and secure relationship with God (or other transcendent being) from which a person draws a sense of certainty and trust. Research, too, shows that a personal relationship with God is an important factor in successful coping with addiction, especially in maintaining abstinence. For many religious people, God (or other transcendent being) is not an abstract or distant being, but an important person who has an important place in their intimate world. Many theorists and researchers of the relational psychology of religion find that the intrapsychic image of God has the psychic energy and dynamics of a living person. God is a psychic reality whom one feels as real, alive, someone it is possible to be in a real and living relationship with. (Belford Ulanov 2001, 17–22) Even in moments of stress and vulnerability, it is a relationship that calms, offers refuge and comfort (Beck and McDonald 2004, 93). Namely, when we face emotional turmoil, feelings of loneliness, guilt, and anxiety, and we are vulnerable, secure and trusting relationships are of paramount importance (Johnson, Makinen and Millikin 2001, 146). Providing a sense of security when we are vulnerable is also said to be one of the

main functions of religion (Durkheim 1965, 419–421). It is in times of trouble and crisis that people feel vulnerable and fragile, which is awakened in the process of recovery from alcoholism, that they turn to God (or another transcendent being) and seek protection, security and comfort (Rowat and Kirkpatrick 2002, 638–639). Such a relationship with a transcendent being provides people with security and confidence to function more easily in daily life and helps them cope more easily with trials and tribulations.

In this light, spirituality also opens up the possibility of post-traumatic growth after coping with the consequences of addiction. Due to the distress caused by facing addiction and its consequences, people in their vulnerability find and establish contact with God in a new way. They often experience a spiritual awakening, which promotes the process of recovery from alcoholism, by establishing contact with a higher power through prayer and meditation, which are the cornerstones of recovery support programs (Kerlin 2017, 405–406).

The presented study is thus a starting point for further research into the importance of spirituality in the process of recovery from alcoholism. Above all, it focuses on the importance of an individual's spirituality as a significant aspect of coping with addiction. Here we recognize the need for further research that would shed even more light on aspects of the experience of those recovering from alcoholism. There is especially a need for additional qualitative research, which would provide in-depth insight into how spiritual dimensions enter this structure of experience and what is their role and contribution in the process of recovery from alcoholism.

8. Conclusion

The nature of the process of recovery from alcoholism is extremely complex: it is a continuous and multifaceted life change that allows a person to first recover and then eventually maintain sobriety (Pouille et al. 2020, 2; Wade 2013, 1138). It is a distinctly personal process, and abstinence being only one aspect of it; in this process, the individual embarks on a path of deeper transformation and personal growth, part of which is spiritual growth. Spirituality in recovery can be understood as a relationship with someone/something with meaning transcending the individual. The findings suggest that substances are of particular importance to the addict (McCauley and Reich 2008, 25). Addicts develop a deep emotional attachment to a substance and can give it very personal meaning. It, therefore, seems reasonable to think that only something with similar depth and greater personal significance, both spiritual and emotional, can transcend and change this attachment. From this perspective, addicts must first recognize and acknowledge the depth of their emotional attachment to the substance and then accept guidance towards finding higher meaning and significance in some other aspect of life. Spirituality and growth in this area can therefore be of paramount importance in the process of recovery from alcoholism.

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