

Addiction Prevention and Recovery: Ordinary spiritual experiences as a stress buffer
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Addiction and substance abuse are currently serious problems. We should continue to try to eliminate the societal, personal, biological and interpersonal problems and stressors that exacerbate these, but this is not easy. Meanwhile, are there ways to mitigate the effects of these stressors and pressures? Ordinary daily experiences of awe, compassionate love, mercy, being blessed, being uplifted by beauty, and a sense of transcendent strength and comfort, can help promote resiliency and recovery. This has been shown in a number of studies using the Daily Spiritual Experience Scale (DSES www.dsesc.org). This scale of 16 questions works for those from most religions, as well as for those not comfortable with religion, and has been translated into 40 languages including Hindi, Mandarin Chinese, Spanish, Indonesian and Arabic, and has been used in over 300 published studies. More frequent spiritual experiences are also correlated with less addictions in adolescents and adults from many countries, cultures, and religions. There are ways to enhance the frequency of these experiences, and studies have shown that various kinds of interventions can increase scores on the DSES. This can provide an adjunct to other approaches to addiction.

These experiences have been shown in 65 studies to prevent burnout, enhance resiliency and post traumatic growth, improve relationships and pro-social behaviors, and prevent and treat addictions. Many other studies have shown positive effects on various mental health outcomes. The effects on these various outcomes add to the support for the usefulness of these experiences for addiction prevention and treatment. These effects also show how these ordinary spiritual experiences can be helpful for many kinds of difficult life experiences such as chronic disease, trauma, mental illness, and disability.

The questions are also being used in health care, hospice, and social service agencies, as a way to communicate with people of different beliefs about spiritual issues, and identify possible resources for them to draw on.

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