The Effects of Meditation on Alcohol Use and Recidivism

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Introduction

There is evidence that spiritual interventions other than AA, particularly those that are meditation-based, are associated with reduced alcohol and substance use.
Introduction

Two types of spiritually-based meditation techniques, Transcendental Meditation, and to a lesser extent Vipassana meditation, have been evaluated as treatments for substance abuse, with encouraging results (Alexander et al., 1994; Marlatt, 1994; Marlatt & Kristeller, 1998).
Marlatt et al. (1984) examined the effects of Transcendental Meditation, progressive relaxation, and bibliotherapy among heavy social drinkers. They found significant reductions in alcohol consumption during the treatment and follow-up period for the treatment groups compared to the control groups.
Introduction

Vipassana meditation, the intervention addressed in this study, is rooted in traditional Buddhist teachings and has been made available to practitioners around the world by the revered Buddhist teacher, S. N. Goenka (Hart, 1987).
Preliminary results from research with inmate populations in India indicate that Vipassana meditation helps in reducing both recidivism and psychopathological symptoms, and in increasing positive behaviors such as cooperation with prison authorities (Chandiramani et al., 1995; Kumar, 1995; and Vora, 1995).
Vipassana — Self-observation & Self-correction

In the summer of 2002, as part of his North American Meditation Tour, S. N. Goenka came to the North Rehabilitation Facility in Seattle, Washington. He met with course students and others on Metta Day and later addressed an assembly gathered on Day 11 of the last men’s course to be held there. His address has been edited and adapted for the Newsletter.

Friends, I am so glad to be here with all of you this morning. You have given this technique a fair trial and you have received good results. Now, you must maintain the practice and apply it in day-to-day life. It is important to learn the technique under an experienced guide, but merely taking a course of ten days is not sufficient. Now, applying it in life — this is also very important. Nobody else can correct you.

You have to correct yourself; you have to develop self-awareness. Keep examining yourself, keep correcting yourself.

And you have two great friends to help you. One friend is your own respiration and the other is sensations on your body. More and more, as you become established in this technique, these two friends will be there to help you throughout life. Whenever the mind becomes unbalanced with some negativity, you will notice that your breath loses its normality. It will be slightly hard, slightly fast, giving you a warning. “Look, something is wrong in your mind!” And you will try to make your mind more balanced.

The second guide and friend with you is your sensations, the physical sensations that you have learned to observe in these...
The first Vipassana course in a North American correctional facility was conducted at the North Rehabilitation Facility (NRF) near Seattle, Washington in 1997.
Research Aims

- To document the effectiveness of a specific spiritual practice, Vipassana Meditation, on mental health, spiritual outcomes, alcohol and drug use, alcohol-related negative consequences, and criminal recidivism in a correctional population.
Participants

- 305 participants (244 men and 61 women) agreed to participate in the study while incarcerated at NRF.
- Participants completed a baseline assessment, and either attended the Vipassana course or participated in Treatment as Usual, completed a post-course assessment (n=173), and a follow-up 3 months after release (n=87).
Procedure

- Inmates self-selected to participate in the 10-day Vipassana meditation course
- Inmates could participate in the Vipassana course and not participate in the research study
- Participants in both the Vipassana and control conditions completed baseline measures approximately 1 week prior to the first day of the Vipassana course
- All participants completed a post-course assessment approximately 2-3 days after the last day of the Vipassana course while still incarcerated
Procedure

- Participants who completed both baseline and post-course were eligible for 3-month follow-up (57 Vipassana; 116 control)

- 29 Vipassana participants & 58 participants in the control group completed the 3-month follow-up.
Baseline Only Assessment Participant Characteristics

- Race: 63% Caucasian, 10% Native American, 9% Latino, 8% African-American, 3% Asian, 7% other
- Age: Average 37.8 years old
- Employment: 56% employed at least part-time prior to incarceration
- Education: 79% GED or high school diploma
- Religion: 58% Christian, 17% no formal religion, 25% other
- Religious Attendance: 26% attended religious services more than 1x month, 34% less than 1x month, 40% never
- Criminal history
- PTSD

★ Attrition analysis revealed no significant baseline differences between the original sample (n=305) and final sample (n=173)
Zen Dog Dreams for a Medium Sized Bone
Mean Changes from Baseline to 3-month Follow-up: Peak Weekly Marijuana Use

Peak Weekly Marijuana Use

% Days Used (x100)

Baseline

3 Months

control

vipassana
Mean from Baseline to 3-month Follow-up: Peak Weekly Crack Cocaine Use

Peak Weekly Crack Use

% Days Used (x 100)

Baseline

3 Months

control

tipassana
Mean Changes from Baseline to 3-month Follow-up: Peak Weekly Tobacco Use

Peak Weekly Tobacco Use

% of Days Used (x100)

Baseline

3 Month

control

vipassana
Mean Changes from Baseline to 3-month Follow-up: Peak Weekly Alcohol Use

Drinks per Peak Week

Estimated Marginal Means

- Baseline
- 3 Months

- control
- vipassana
Mean Changes from Baseline to 3-month Follow-up: Alcohol-Related Negative Consequences

SIP - Alcohol-Related Negative Consequences

Estimated Marginal Means

- Control
- Vipassana

Baseline vs. 3 Months
Mean Changes from Baseline to 3-month Follow-up: Brief Symptom Inventory

Brief Symptom Inventory

Estimated Marginal Means

Baseline

3 Month

control

vipassana
Mean Changes from Baseline to 3-month Follow-up: Optimism

LOT - Optimism

Estimated Marginal Means

- Baseline
- 3 Months

- control
- vipassana
Mean Changes from Baseline to 3-month Follow-up: Locus of Control

DRIE - Drinking Related Locus of Control

Estimated Marginal Means
Mediational Analyses

- Post Hoc analyses suggest mediating roles of psychosocial variables in the relationship between Vipassana and substance use.

  - Vipassana → Alcohol Use:
    - Thought avoidance (subscale of the WBSI)
    - Locus of Control (DRIE)

  - Vipassana → Alcohol Consequences:
    - Thought avoidance (subscale of the WBSI)
    - Locus of Control (DRIE)
    - Psychiatric symptoms (BSI)

  - Vipassana → Crack Cocaine Use:
    - Thought avoidance (subscale of the WBSI)
“Nothing happens next. This is it.”
Discussion

To be mindful is to be aware of the full range of experiences that exist; to bring one’s complete attention to the present experience on a moment-to-moment basis. This is consistent with the Buddhist view of transcendence as 'enlightened awareness of the true being' (Goldstein & Kornfield, 1987).
Meditation or “Right Mindfulness” is presented as a “skillfull mean” within the Eight-Fold Path leading to the ultimate spiritual goal of enlightenment.
Discussion

Alcohol and drug addiction are described in the Buddhist literature as problems related to ego-attachment, with an emphasis on “craving” as the major process underlying the motivational dynamic.
Thank You!