STASH, Vol. 20(11) – Coping strategies used by people in recovery from drug addiction

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People in recovery from drug addiction often encounter barriers that impede their recovery. For example, people in recovery might experience stigma or might have trouble accessing treatment centers. For these reasons, it is important for people in recovery to establish effective coping mechanisms to handle stress and drug use triggers. This week, STASH reviews a study by Agus Setiawan and colleagues that examines the coping strategies that individuals in recovery use to overcome challenges.

What were the research questions?

What coping strategies or techniques do individuals in recovery from drug addiction use to handle stress and temptation?

What did the researchers do?

The researchers conducted a meta-synthesis, which is a method that allows researchers to systematically identify and synthesize the results of multiple qualitative studies. The researchers used a thematic analysis technique to identify themes across studies.

What did they find?

The researchers included a total of 13 studies in their analyses. Analyses revealed that there were five major themes related to the coping mechanisms that individuals with drug addiction use to overcome challenges during the recovery process. These themes were: (1) psychological coping strategies, (2) seeking social support, (3) professional interventions, (4) spiritual experiences, and (5) awareness enhancement. See Figure for themes and representative quotes.

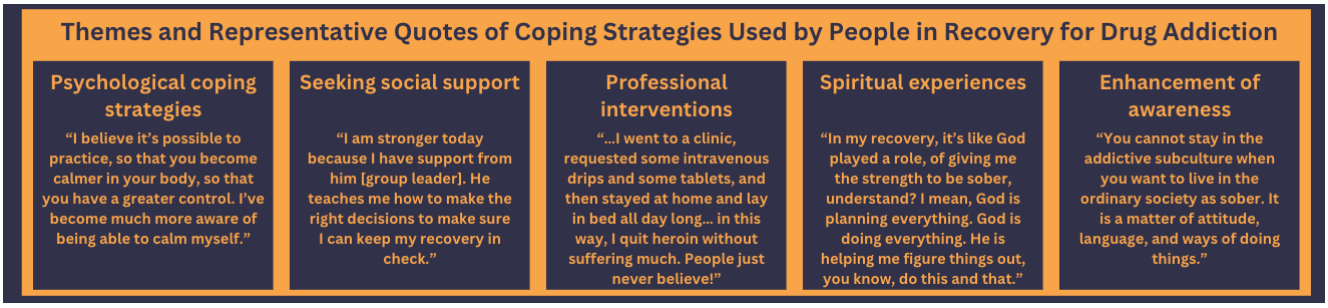


Figure: Coping strategy themes and representative quotes that emerged from the authors' meta-synthesis. Click image to enlarge.

Why do these findings matter?

Stress is one of the most common reasons why people in recovery return to drug use. Understanding how people in recovery cope with stress is important for several reasons. Healthcare providers can leverage this knowledge to inform patients about and engage them in healthy coping strategies, tailoring their approach to each individual's needs and circumstances. Additionally, friends and family members play a vital role in promoting different forms of coping, particularly through providing social support. By recognizing the importance of stress management in recovery, both professionals and personal support networks can contribute more effectively to the individual's healing process, offering targeted assistance and encouragement that aligns with proven coping mechanisms.

Every study has limitations. What are the limitations in this study?

The results of meta-syntheses are dependent on the studies included in their sample. Consequently, the validity of the results can be impacted if included studies use a variety of methodologies that do not lend themselves to synthesis, or if included studies are of poor quality. In addition, because this study only included 13 qualitative studies, it is limited in the potential number of themes that it could have developed to characterize participants' coping mechanisms.

For more information:

If you are worried that you or someone you know is experiencing addiction, the SAMHSA National Helpline is a free treatment and information service available 24/7. For additional self-help tools, please visit our Addiction Resources page.

— Seth McCullock, PhD