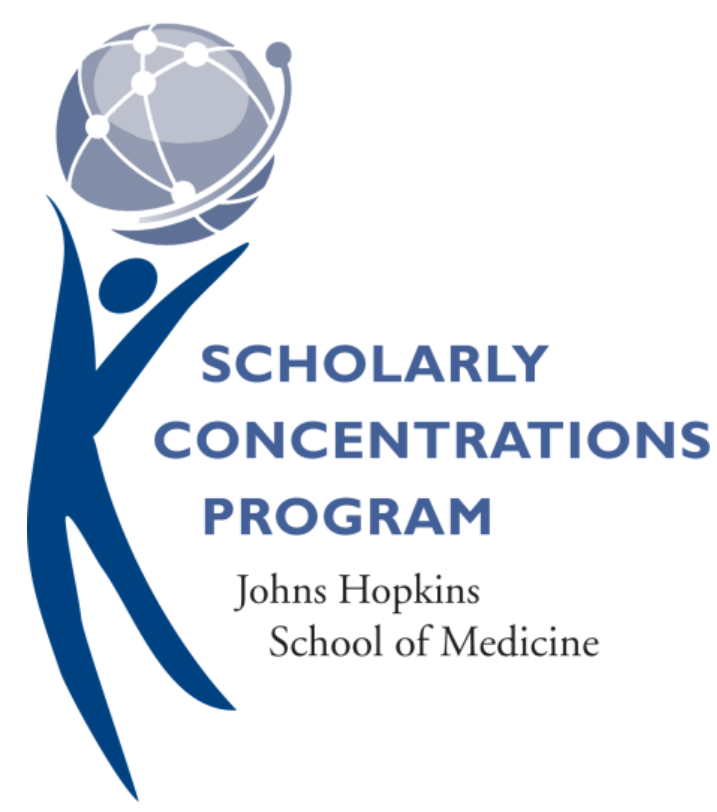


The role of spirituality in recovery from substance use disorder: perspectives from residents at a faith-based rehabilitation program



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BACKGROUND

- Both quantitative and qualitative studies have revealed an association between an individual's successful recovery from substance use disorder (SUD) and their personal spirituality.
 - Spirituality: that which gives transcendent or existential meaning to one's life
- Medical providers often hesitate to ask about patients' spiritual beliefs, despite the likelihood that spirituality could be relevant to their patients' recovery.
- There is a lack of knowledge for patients' preferences regarding spiritual discussion in medical settings.

STUDY OBJECTIVE

To explore how people with SUDs perceive the discussion of spirituality in medical settings, and to place this in conversation with their personal experiences with spirituality in recovery.

METHODS

Study Design: Semi-structured interviews of patients with a history of SUD.

Setting: Participants were recruited at the Helping Up Mission, a residential and Christian-affiliated rehabilitation center in Baltimore, MD.

Population:

Inclusion criteria: having met with a medical provider to treat their SUD at least once in the past year

Exclusion criteria: <18 years old

Data Collection: Interviews were conducted over Zoom by one researcher (AP).

Analysis: Two researchers transcribed audio recordings. Two researchers co-created a list of hierarchical codes after 2 interviews were coded independently. The research team met periodically to refine codes and discuss themes.

RESULTS

Table 1. Patient data

Characteristic	n (%)
Race	
Black	9 (60%)
White	6 (40%)
Sex	
Male	15 (100%)
Age (mean)	44.6 years
S/R* affiliation	
Christian	7 (47%)
Spiritual	6 (40%)
None	2 (13%)
Uses their S/R for recovery	
Yes	9 (60%)
No	4 (27%)
N/A	2 (13%)

*S/R: spiritual/religious

Figure 1. Helping Up Mission



Image source: [Helping Up Mission](#)

"If someone is in a bad place with their religion...if they feelin' like God isn't there for them, then bringing it up could hurt [how they view a medical provider]." –P07

"I mean, it's a nice feature for people to know where you're coming from. As long as you won't judge me for [my beliefs] that's probably alright." –P02

"...you have to have a personal, intimate relationship with the person to really want to open up...you just can't tell anybody everything." –P04

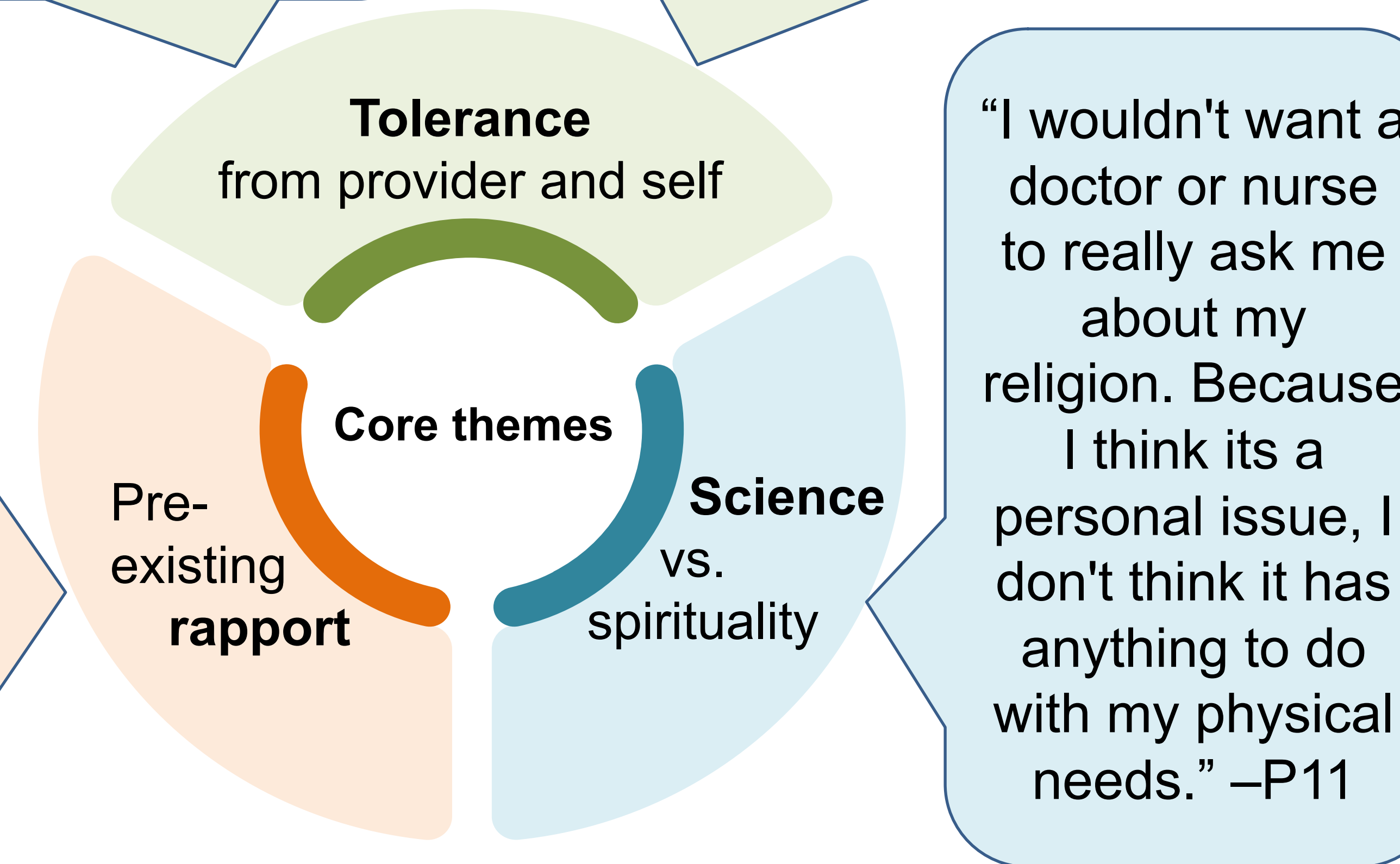


Table 2: Secondary themes

Spirituality's effects on SUD recovery	Interactions with medical providers
+ Providing strength, stability, structure	+ Providing reassurance and stability
- Absolving personal responsibility	- Miscommunication, condescension

CONCLUSIONS

- Participants had diverse perspectives on the role of spirituality in medical conversations.
- Most participants did not expect medical providers to inquire into their spirituality, and were neutral to its inclusion in medical questioning.
- Some participants believe discussing their spiritual beliefs can help a provider to better understand them.
- A productive discussion of spirituality can depend on pre-existing positive regard between patient and medical provider.

LIMITATIONS

- Selection bias: those who chose to participate may have been more comfortable discussing spirituality.
- Participants represent a narrow range of race, gender, and spiritual background.

IMPLICATIONS

- People with SUDs may hold a wide range of perspectives regarding spirituality's place in medical settings.
- Providers who discuss spirituality in medical settings should express spiritual and religious tolerance.