

# Character Strengths & Recovery from Addiction

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Sahaya G. Selvam, PhD

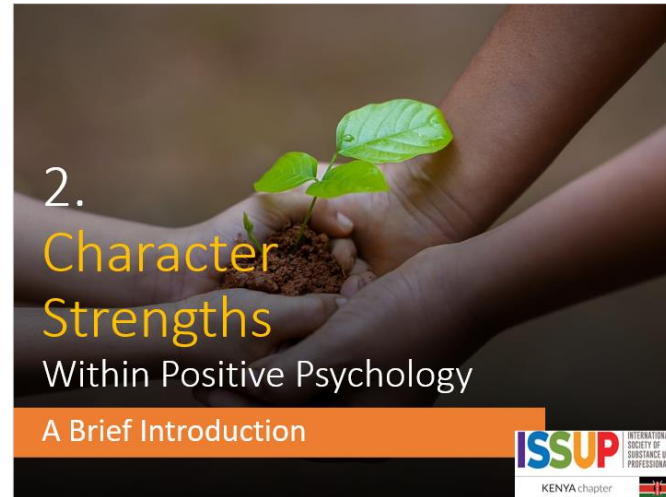


# Outline



1.  
Addiction, Spirituality,  
Character Strengths

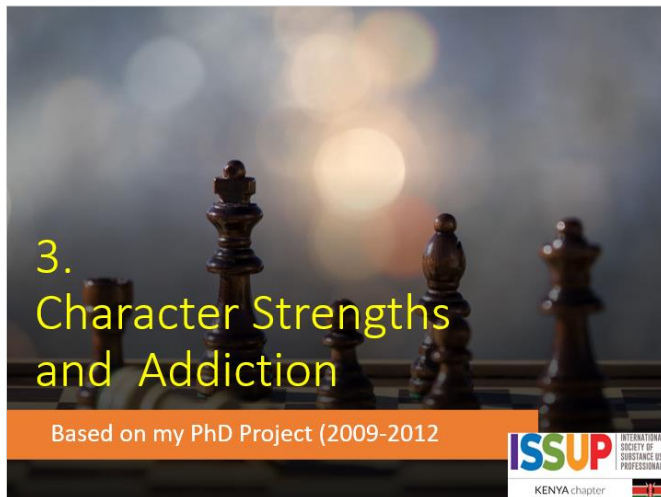
ISSUP INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY OF SUBSTANCE USE PROFESSIONALS  
KENYA chapter



2.  
Character  
Strengths  
Within Positive Psychology

A Brief Introduction

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3.  
Character Strengths  
and Addiction

Based on my PhD Project (2009-2012)

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4.  
Character Strengths-based  
interventions  
for Addiction Recovery

Four Samples

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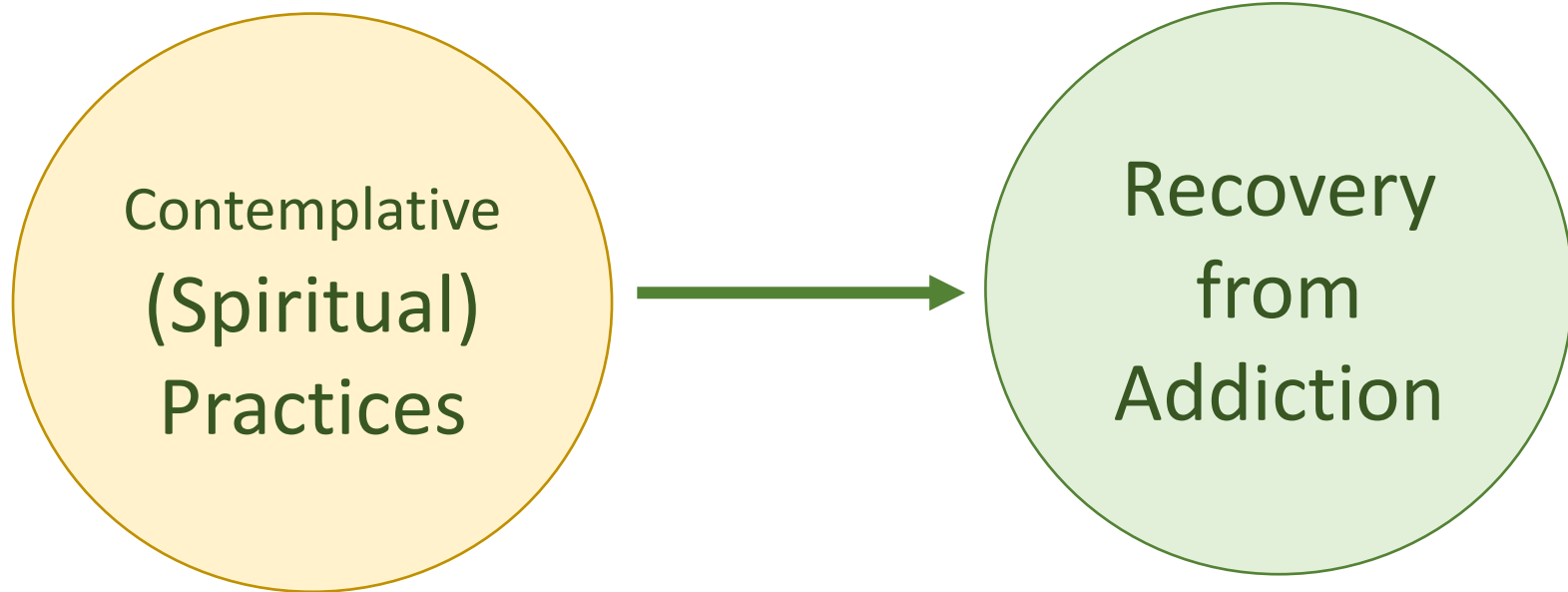
1.

# Addiction, Spirituality, Character Strengths

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# The Newtonian Apple

Most scientific enquiries begin with an experience of "falling-apple"!



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"AN EXQUISITELY WRITTEN AND CRAFTED  
CONTRIBUTION TO HUMAN UNDERSTANDING...  
A VERY GOOD BOOK." — M. SCOTT PECK

Synchronicity...

# ADDICTION & GRACE

LOVE AND SPIRITUALITY  
IN THE  
HEALING OF ADDICTIONS

GERALD G. MAY, M.D.

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# What is Addiction?

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- Jim Orford **excessive 'appetite'**, where the adjective 'excessive' is understood as "a form of activity which, for most people, serves as a pleasurable and moderate indulgence" (Orford, 2001a, p.9; see also Orford, 2001b).
- Di Clemente: *addiction* has been used to identify **self-destructive behaviour** (DiClemente, 2003, "p.3).
- Heather (1998) **addict** **repeated failures** **to refrain** from drug use despite prior resolutions to do so. "
- Robert West (2006): "a **reward-seeking behaviour has become out of control**" (p. 10).
- In summary, addiction includes: repetition, excess, loss of control, dependence, reward or pleasure, and self-destructive behaviour.

# 10 Criteria for Addiction

(According to DSM-5: pp.483-484)

Increasing amounts	Unsuccessful in discontinuing	Investment of time Preoccupation	Craving
Failure in fulfilling obligations	Normal life impeded	Physical harm to self	Continuing despite perceived harm
	Tolerance	Withdrawal	





# What is Spirituality?

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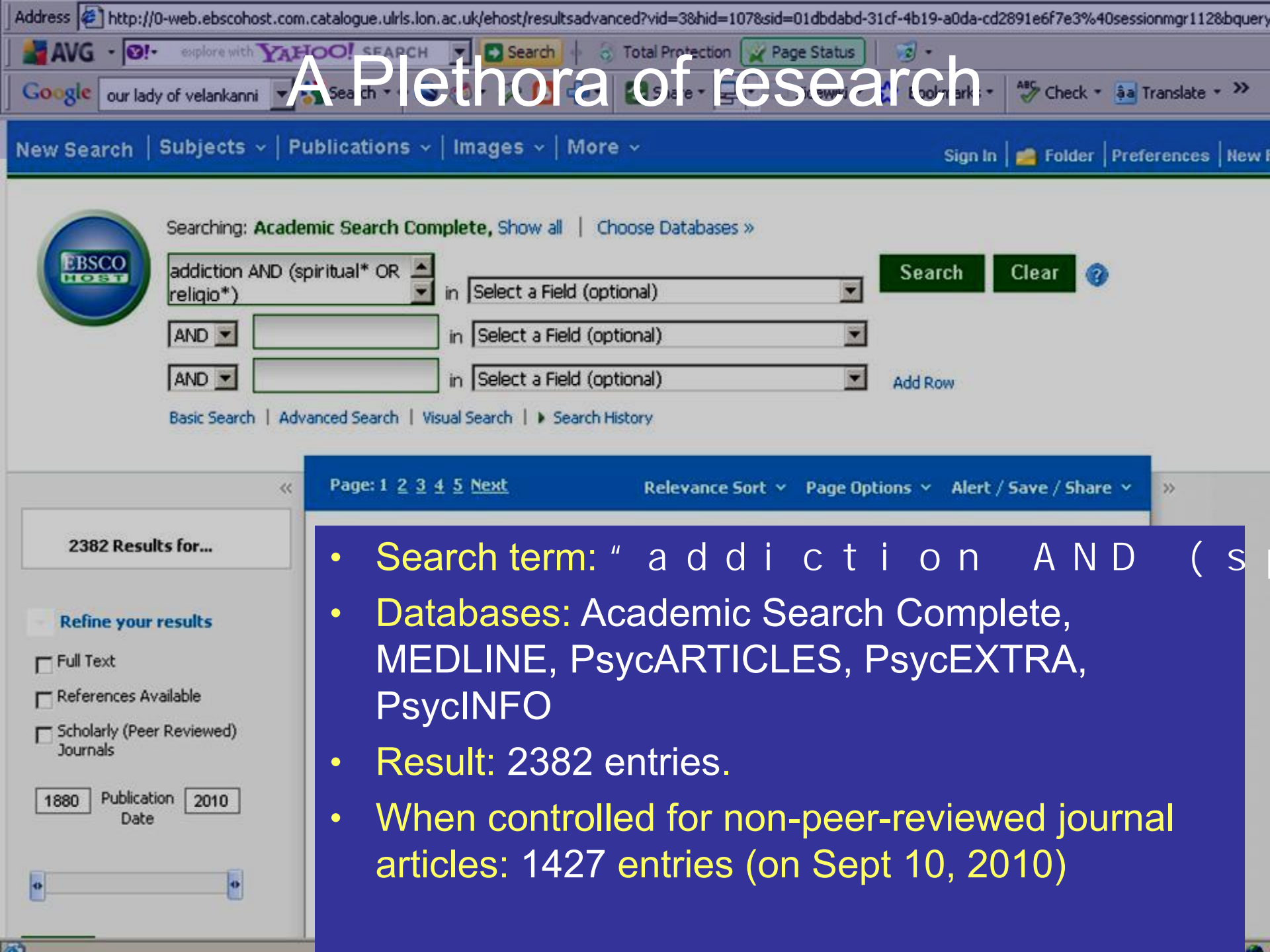
Y A way of fulfilling the need for transcendence (in terms of meaning, purpose, connectedness, compassion) from within religion or outside it.

Robert A. Emmons, *The Psychology of Ultimate Concerns: Motivation and Spirituality in Personality* (New York: Guilford Press, 1999), p.5.

Selvam, S. G. (2013). Towards religious-spirituality: A multidimensional matrix of religion and spirituality. *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies*, 12(36), 129-152.



# A Plethora of research



- **Search term:** " a d d i c t i o n A N D ( s p i r i t u a l \* O R r e l i g i o \* ) "
- **Databases:** Academic Search Complete, MEDLINE, PsycARTICLES, PsycEXTRA, PsycINFO
- **Result:** 2382 entries.
- **When controlled for non-peer-reviewed journal articles:** 1427 entries (on Sept 10, 2010)

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EBSCOhost Searching: **Academic Search Complete**, Show all | Choose Databases

(addiction OR substance abuse) AND (spirit\* OR religio\*) Search

Basic Search Advanced Search Search History

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Search Results: 1 - 10 of 12,122 Relevance Page Options Share

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Boolean/Phrase:  
(addiction OR substance abuse) AND (spirit\* OR religio\*)

Expanders  
Apply equivalent subjects

Limit To

Full Text  
 References Available  
 Peer Reviewed

From: 1074 To: 2022

1. **Spirituality, religiosity and attitudes toward addiction**

By: Stewart, Chris; Mayes, Benjamin T G; Openshaw, Linda. Source: Journal of **Religion & Spirituality** in Social Work: Social Thought, 41 no 2 2022, p 166-181. Publication Type: Article, Database: Atla Religion Database with AtlaSerials

Subjects: **Spirituality**; **Religiousness**; **Substance abuse**; **Drug addiction**; Social workers

2. **RELIGION, SPIRITUALITY AND ADDICTION RECOVERY: INTRODUCTION**

By: Dossett, Wendy E; Metcalf-White, Liam. Source: **Implicit Religion**, 22 no 2 2019, p 95-100. Publication Type: Article, Database: Atla Religion Database with AtlaSerials

Subjects: **Drug addiction** -- Treatment; **Substance abuse**; Alcohol and alcoholism; Psychology, Applied; Twelve-step programs; Self-help techniques

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 Peer Reviewed

From: 1964 To: 2023  
Publication Date

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Search Results: 1 - 10 of 3,740

1. **Stress and impact of spirituality** as a mediator of coping methods among social work college students.

By: Yun, Kwi; Kim, Suk-hee; Awasu, Carol R.. *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment*, Jan2019, Vol. 29 Issue 1, p125-136, 12p, 5 Charts; DOI: 10.1080/10911359.2018.1491918, Database: Humanities Source

Academic Journal

This exploratory pilot study was conducted to understand the stress level and coping strategies of social work students, with the aim to develop strategies to help students increase their ability...

**Subjects:** Psychological adaptation; **Religion**; **Research**; **Spirituality**; Students; Marketing **Research** and Public Opinion Polling; Psychological stress -- Prevention; Adaptability (Personality); Regression analysis; Statistical sampling; Social workers; **Substance abuse**; Pilot projects; Well-being; Distraction

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HTML Full Text PDF Full Text (865KB)

2. **Religiosity and Spirituality** in Latinx Individuals with **Substance** Use Disorders: Association with Treatment Outcomes in a Randomized Clinical Trial.

By: Jaramillo, Yudilyn; DeVito, Elise E.; Frankforter, Tami; Silva, Michelle A.; Añez, Luis M.; Kiluk, Brian D.; Carroll, Kathleen M.; Paris, Manuel. *Journal of Religion & Health*. Oct2022, Vol. 61 Issue 5, p4139-4154. 16p. 3 Charts. DOI: 10.1007/s10943-022-01544-2. , Database: Academic Search Complete

Although many studies have examined religiosity as a protective factor for substance use, few have considered its relationship to treatment outcomes among

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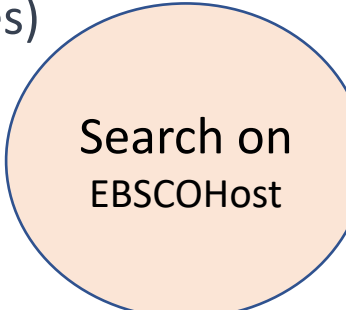
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Boolean Formula: (addiction OR substance abuse) AND (spirituality OR religion OR religious beliefs OR faith OR religious practices OR religious involvement) AND (literature OR research OR scholarly articles)

**RESULTS: 3,740**  
ON 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2023



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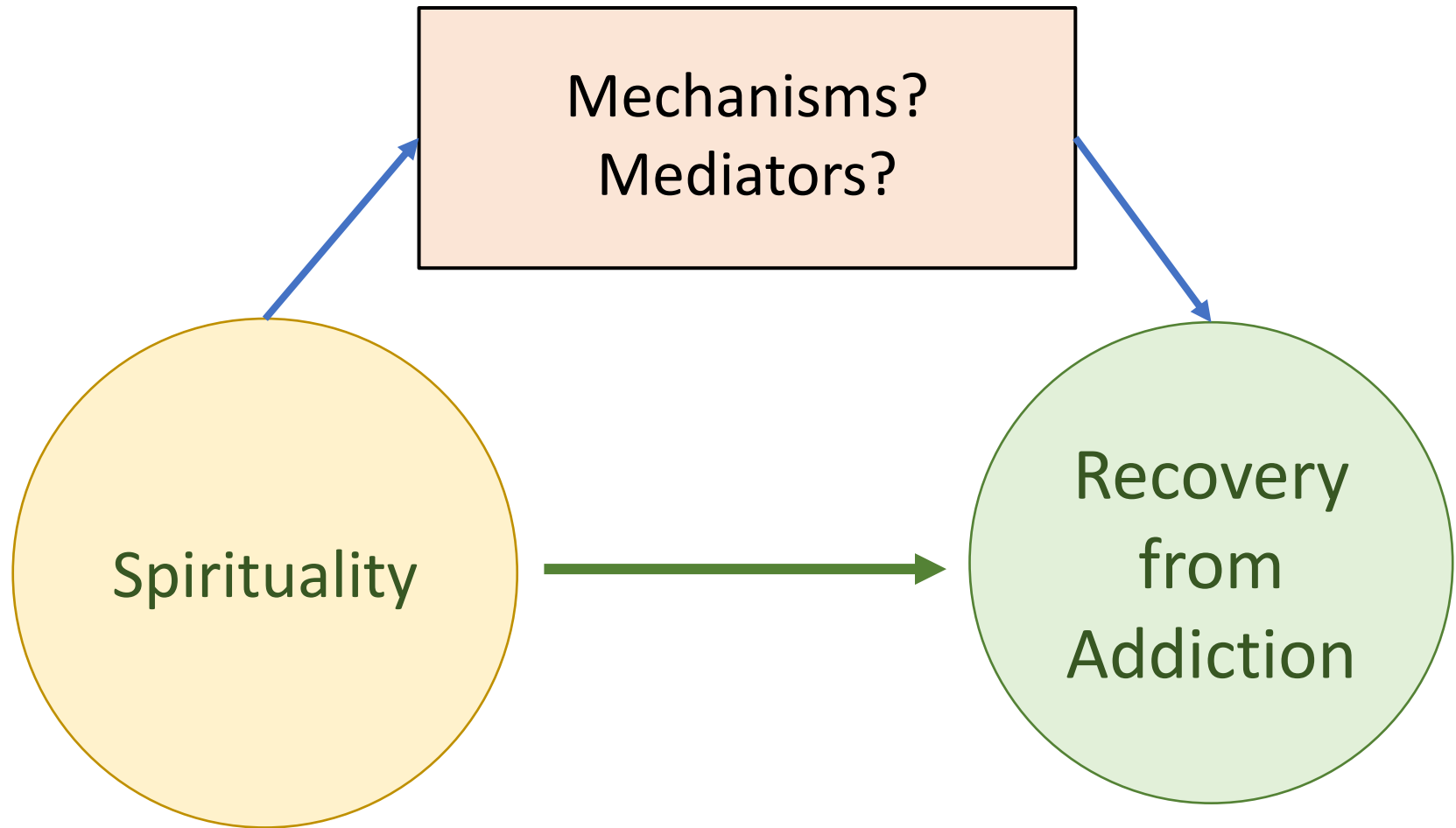
# The emerging un

1. **Religiosity** has been found to have some protective effect on addictive behaviour (Cook, 2009); and,
2. **Spirituality** based interventions sustain maintenance of recovery (Miller & Bogenschutz, 2007).

(Note the difference between religiosity and spirituality)

Cook, C.H.C. (2009). Substance misuse. In C.H.C. Cook, A. Powell, & A. Sims (Eds.), *Spirituality and psychiatry* (pp. 139-168). London, UK: RCPsych Publications.

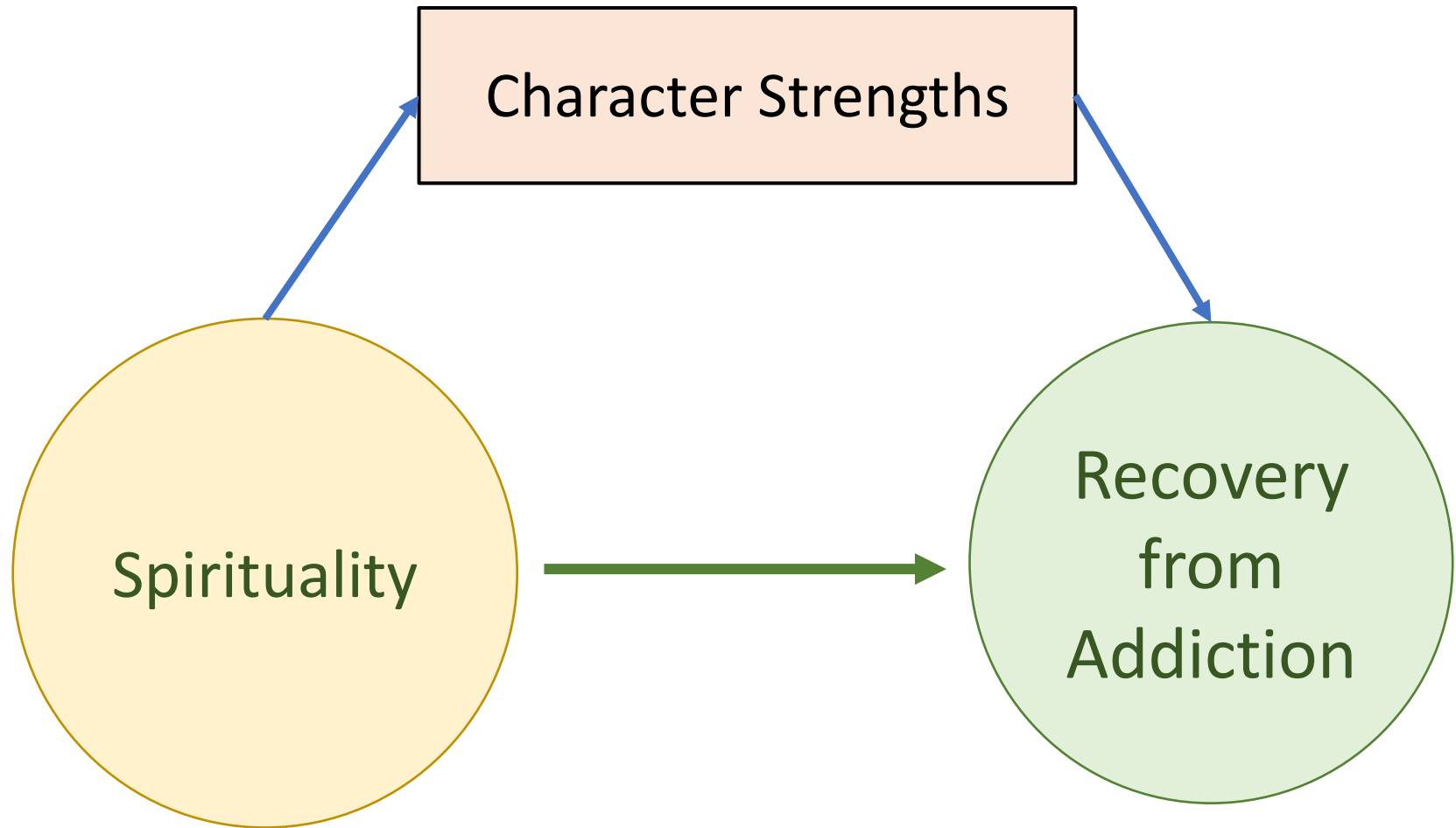
Miller, W.R., & Bogenschutz, M. (2007). Spirituality and addiction. *Southern Medical Journal*, 100(4), 433-436.



Selvam, S. G. (2012). Character strengths as mediators in a mindfulness based intervention for recovery from addictive behaviour. PhD Thesis. University of London, UK.



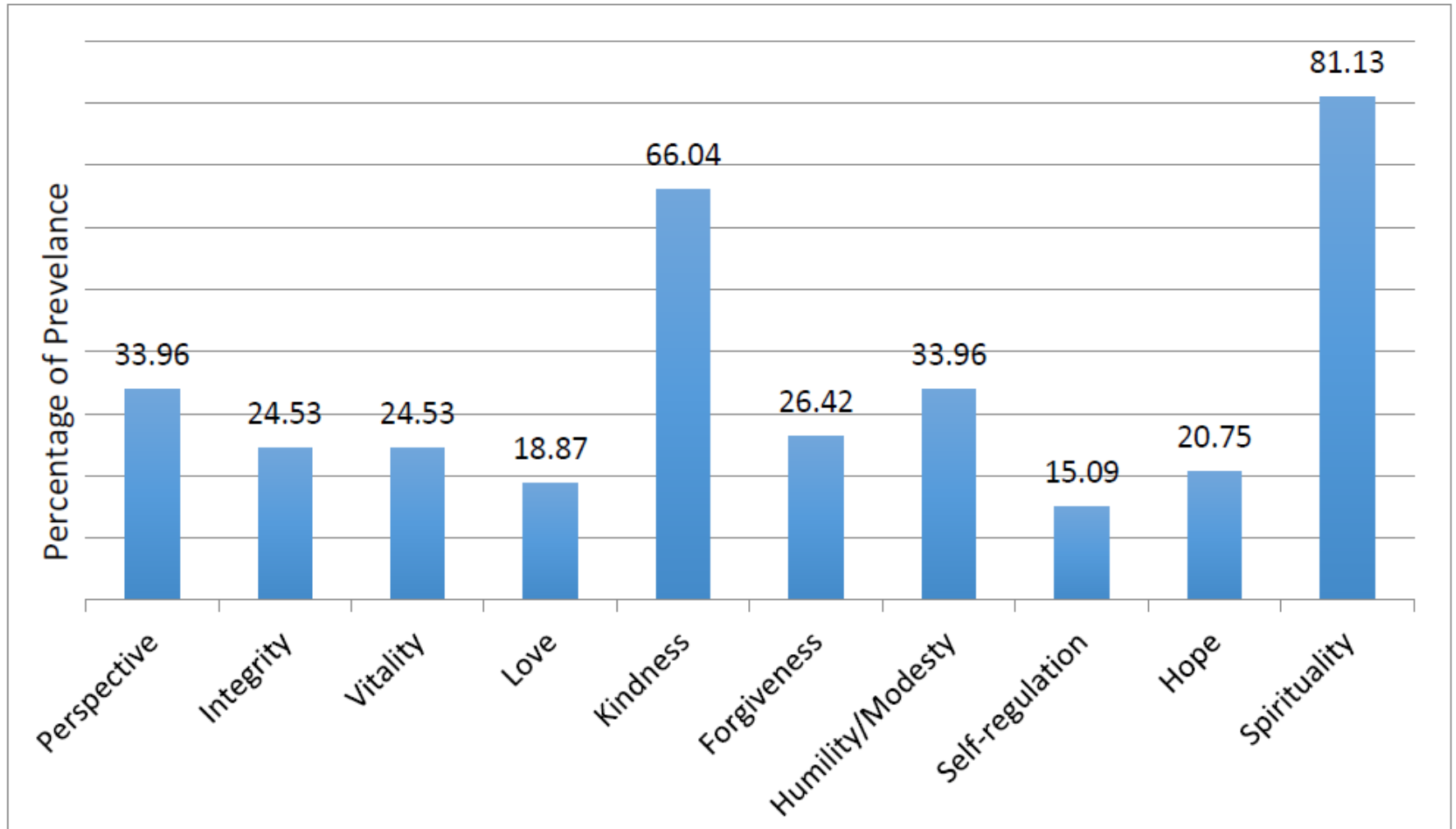
# My Hypothesis



Selvam, S. G. (2012). Character strengths as mediators in a mindfulness based intervention for recovery from addictive behaviour. PhD Thesis. University of London, UK.

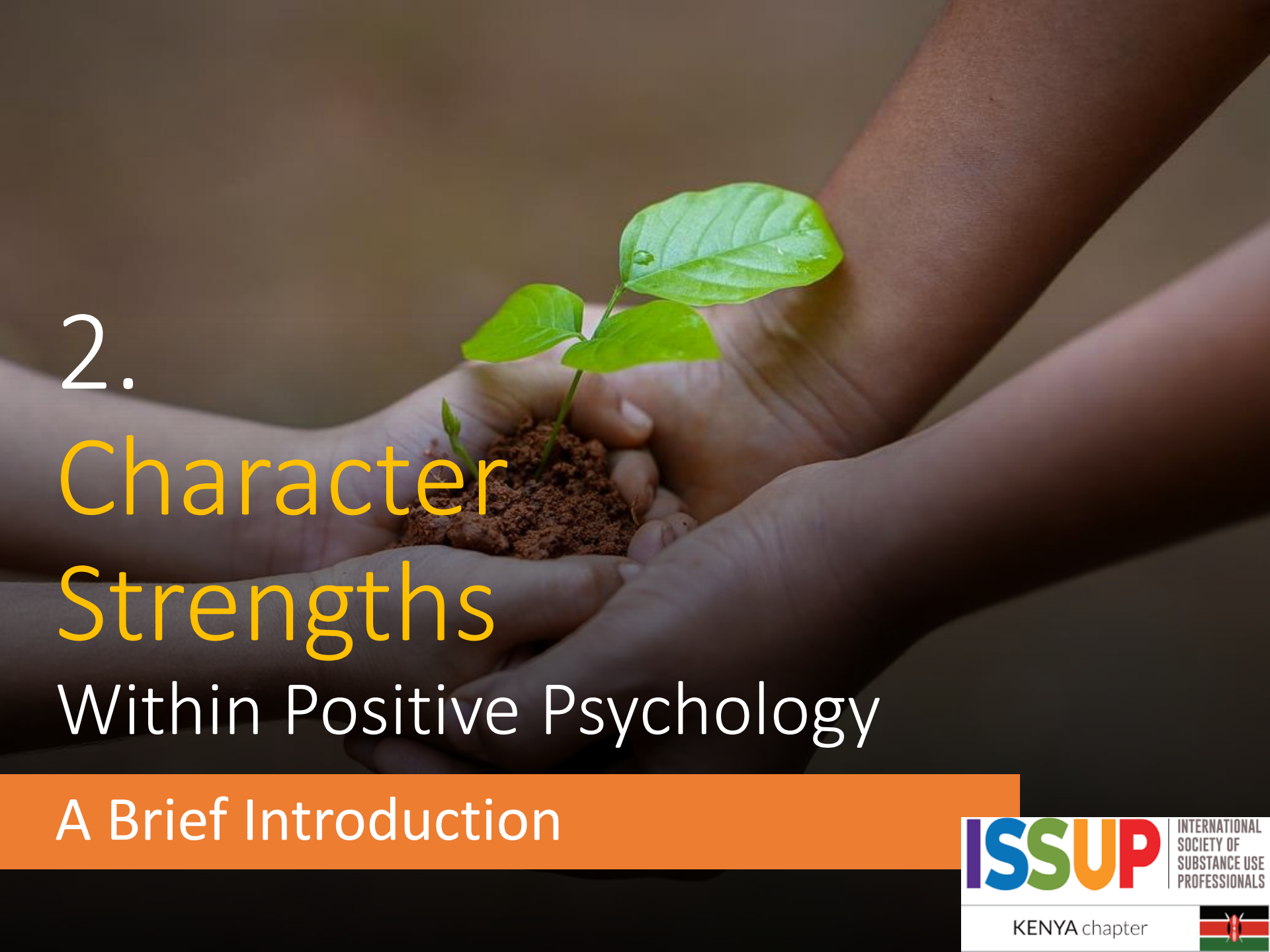


# Prevalence of Character Strengths in Addiction-Spirituality Literature



Selvam, S. G. (2015). Positive Psychology's Character Strengths in Addiction-Spirituality Research: A Qualitative Systematic Literature Review. *Qualitative Report*, 20(4).





2.

# Character Strengths

## Within Positive Psychology

A Brief Introduction

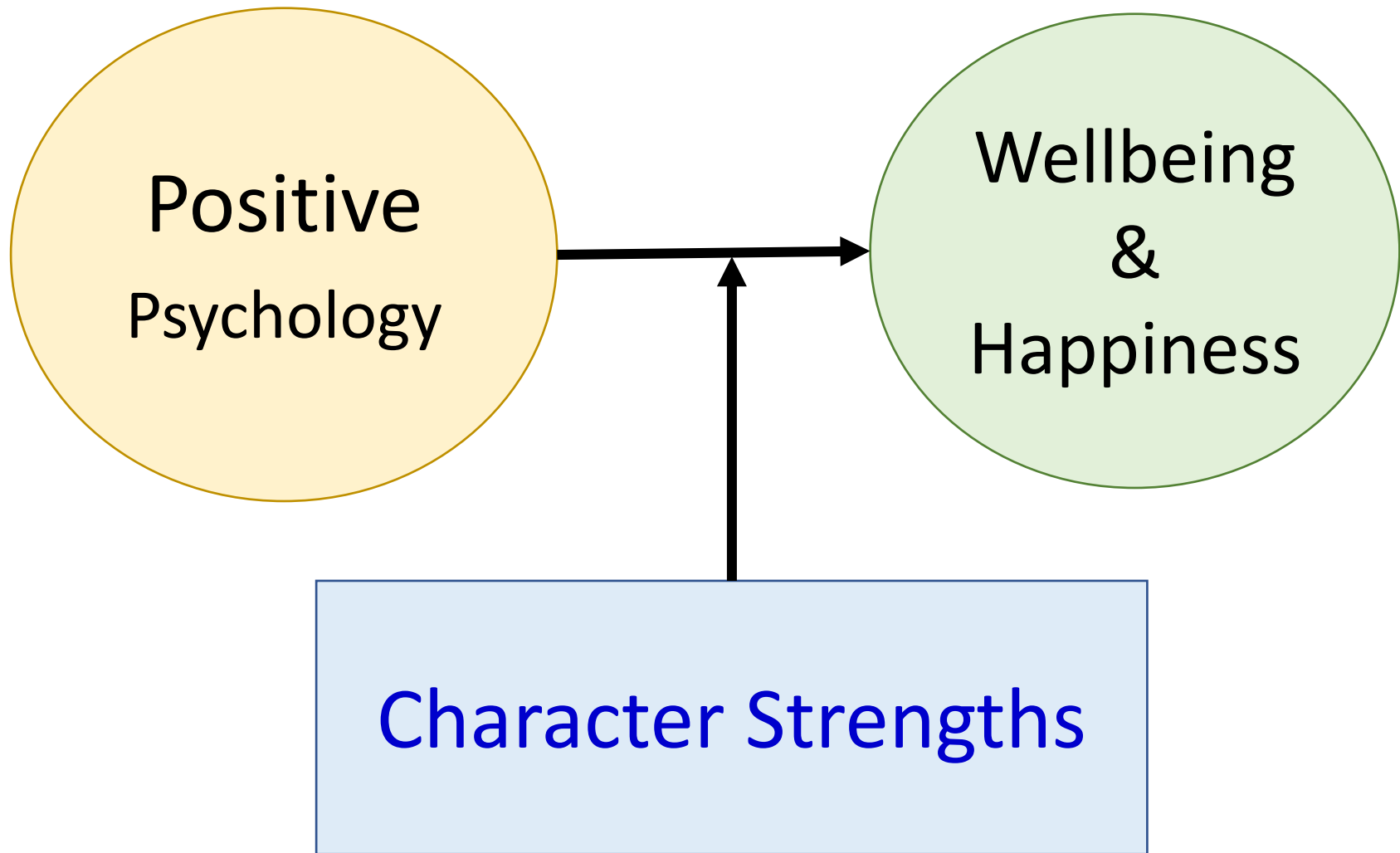


# What is Positive Psychology?

**ISSUP** INTERNATIONAL  
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SUBSTANCE USE  
PROFESSIONALS

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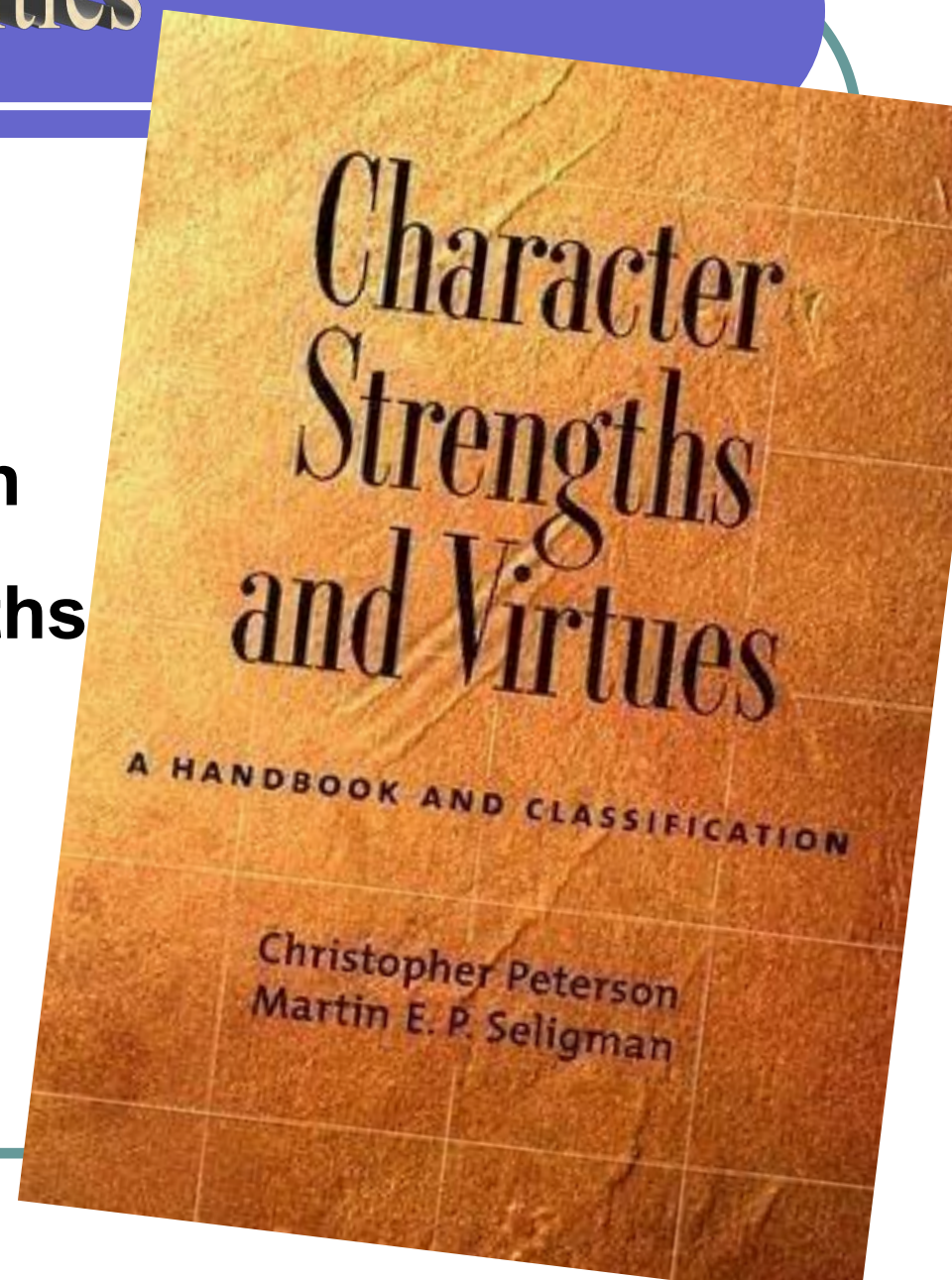
Rashid, T., & Niemiec, R. M. (2020). Character strengths. In *Encyclopedia of Quality of Life and Well-Being Research* (pp. 1-7). Cham: Springer International Publishing.



# The catalogue of 'sanities'

## Values in Action:

- Peterson & Seligman
- 24 Character strengths



# What are Character Strengths?

1

Morally Valued Dispositions

2

Trait-Like

(Not personality trait but strong habits)

3

Malleable

individual's thoughts  
feelings (affective states) and  
actions (behavioural patterns)

= Specific  
components  
of moral  
character

Park, N., Peterson, C., & Seligman, M. E. (2004). Strengths of character and well-being: A closer look at hope and modesty.



# Characteristics of Character Strengths

- They are **trait-like** – almost part of the autonomous behaviour of the person; developed through habits;
- They are largely **learned behaviour**; genes might have some genotype-orientation;
- They are **positive** in content;
- They are **malleable** – related to learnt behaviour;
- They have a **moral implication**: as a learnt behaviour and being malleable they involve a **choice**; hence also worthy of praise and blame.
- Contributes to individual and collective **Wellbeing**

# Catalogue of Character Strengths

- CS1. Creativity (originality, ingenuity)
- CS2. Curiosity (interest, novelty-seeking)
- CS3. Open-mindedness (critical thinking)
- CS4. Love of Learning
- CS5. Perspective (wisdom)
- CS6. Bravery (valour)
- CS7. Persistence (perseverance))
- CS8. Integrity (authenticity, honesty)
- CS9. Vitality (zest, enthusiasm, energy)
- CS10. Love
- CS11. Kindness
- CS12. Social Intelligence



# Catalogue of Character Strengths

CS13. Citizenship (social responsibility)

CS14. Fairness

CS15. Leadership

CS16. Forgiveness and Mercy

CS17. Humility (modesty)

CS18. Prudence

CS19. Self-regulation (self-control)

CS20. Appreciation of beauty

CS21. Gratitude

CS22. Hope (optimism)

CS23. Humour (playfulness)

CS24. Spirituality (religiousness, faith)



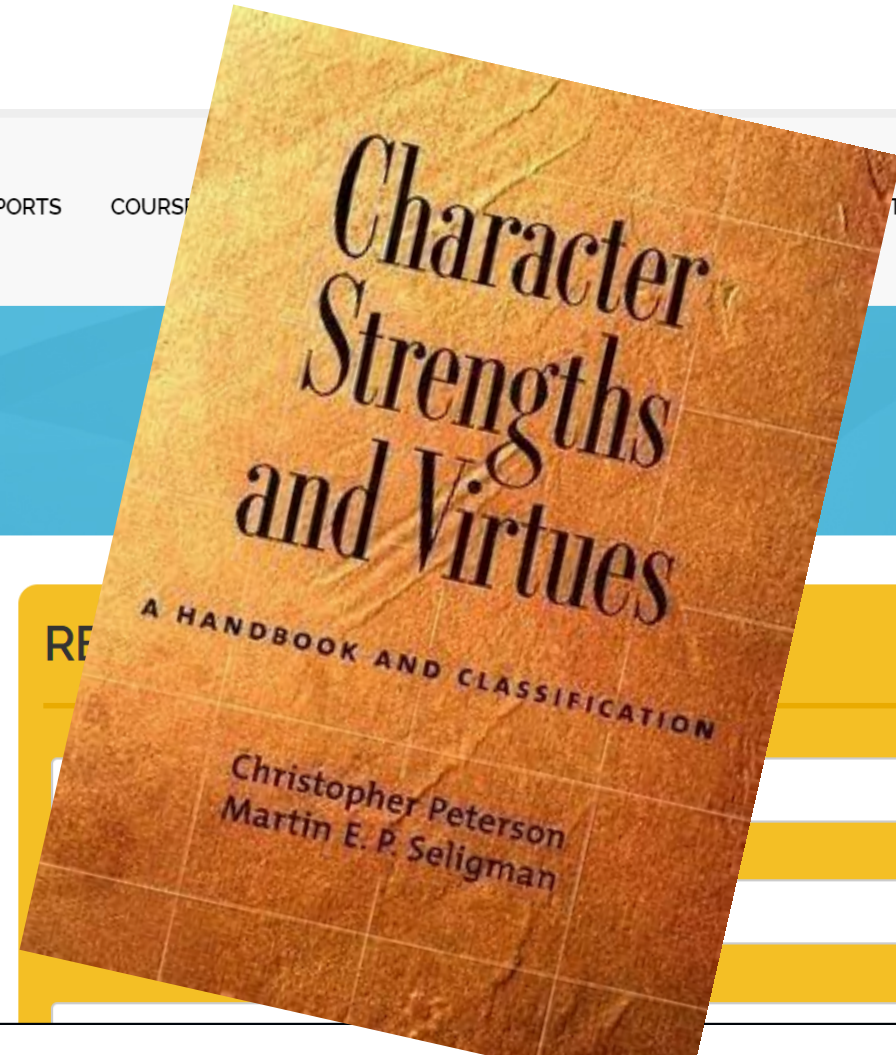


Take the **Free** Character Strengths Test

*Live your best life.*

## Why take the VIA Survey?

- ✓ It's positive, free and scientifically validated.
- ✓ It takes less than 15 minutes. If you log out before you have completed the survey, your answers will be saved so you can log back in and complete it at any time.
- ✓ It's private and confidential. We only require the





# 3. Character Strengths and Addiction

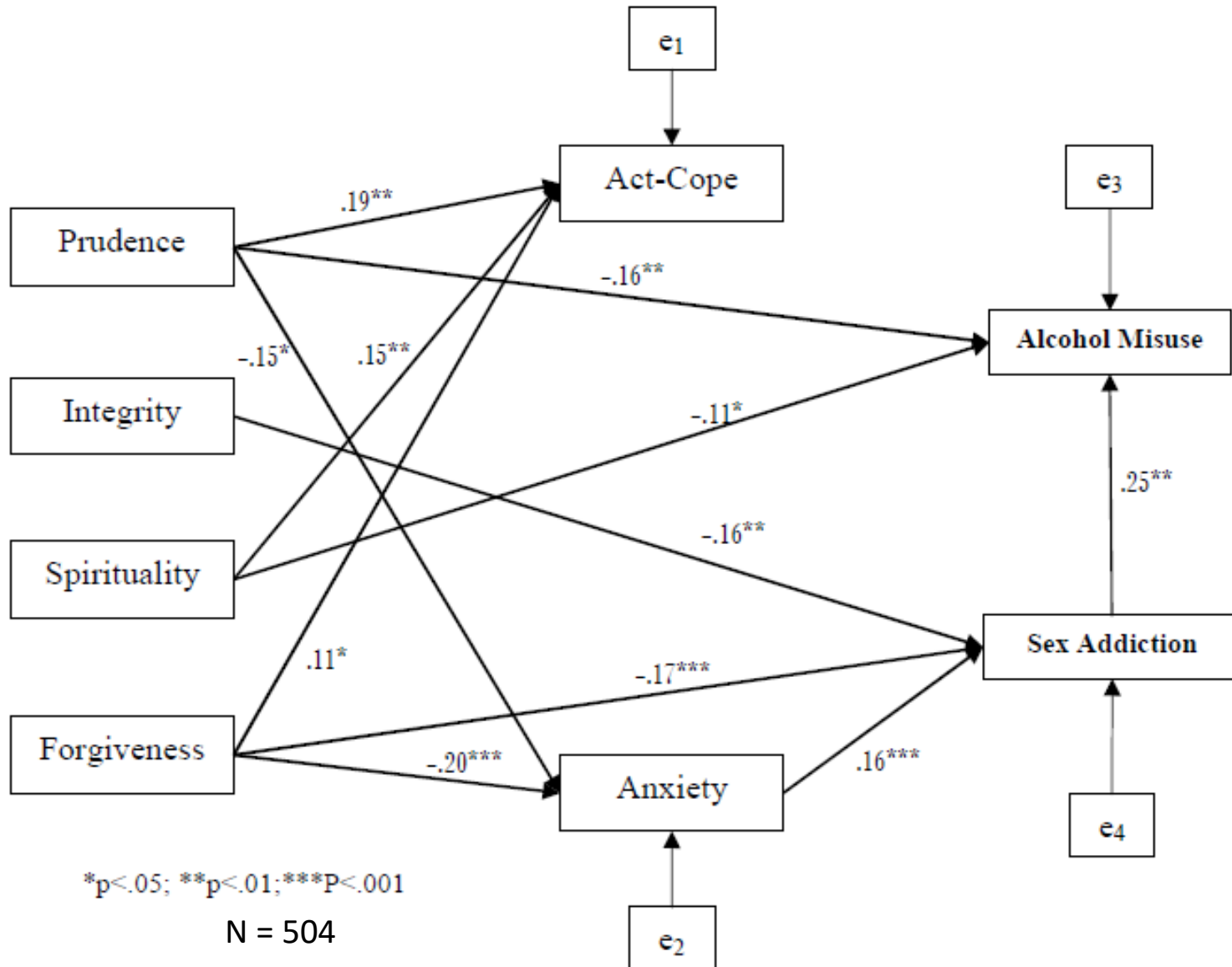
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# Lack of Character Strengths Predicts Addiction



# Two Case Studies



## Martin

- 27-year old
- Scored 30 out of 40 in the AUDIT measure;
- His least-ranked character strengths were (in ascending order): **Appreciation of beauty, Persistence, Love for Learning, Perspective, and Self-regulation**



## Edel

- 20-year old
- Scored 14 out of 40 in the Alcohol misuse.
- Her least-ranked character strengths were (in ascending order): **Forgiveness, Spirituality, Love for Learning, Self-regulation and Fairness.**

Selvam, S. G. (2015). Character strengths in the context of Christian contemplative practice facilitating recovery from alcohol misuse: Two case studies. *Journal of Spirituality in Mental Health*, 17(3), 190-211.

# Jesus Prayer

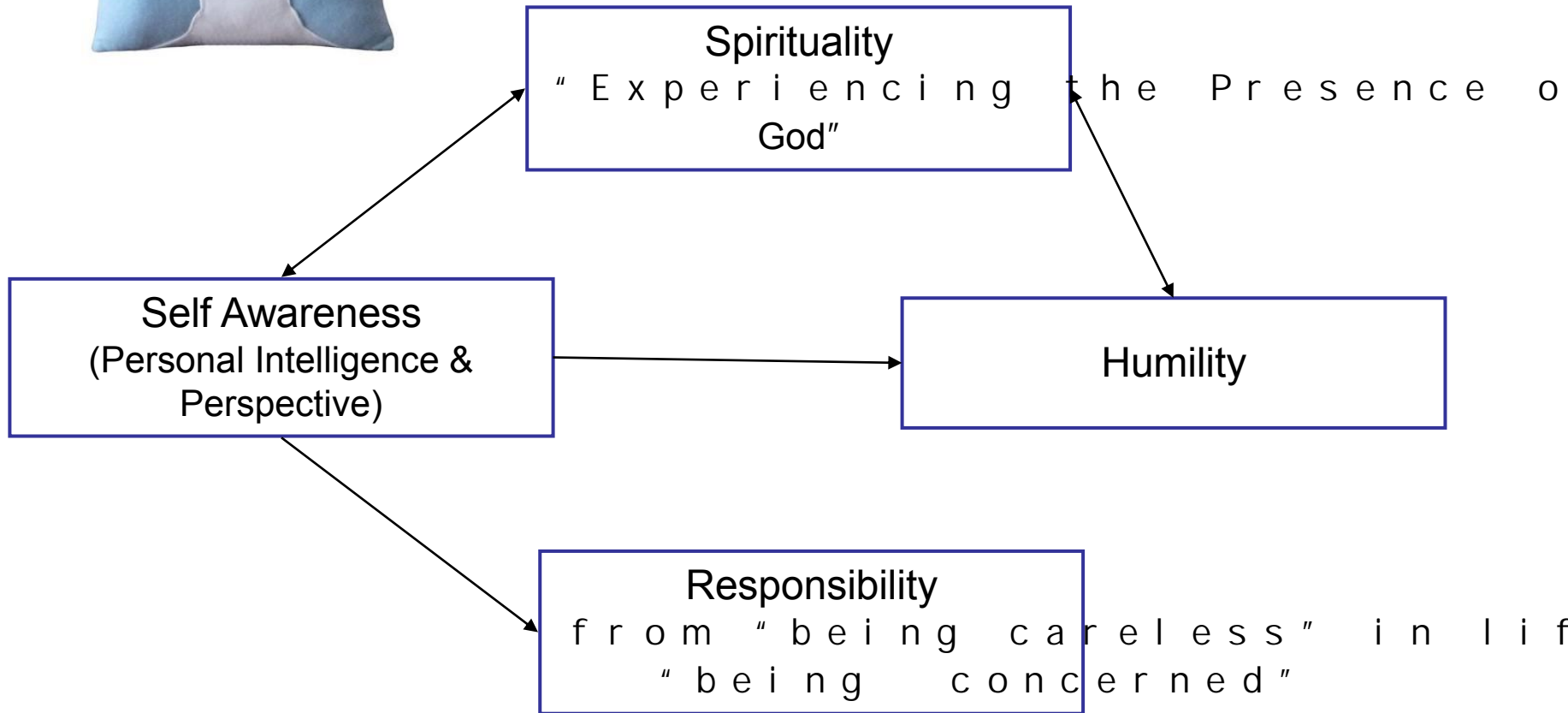
Quiet recitation combined with breathing & use of prayer beads:  
In: Jesus, son the living God  
Out: Have mercy on me!

The intervention consisted of 20 minutes of a Christian contemplative practice (Jesus Prayer) for 10 weeks. On Saturdays there was a session of common practice and clarifications. The participants were encouraged to journal their experiences



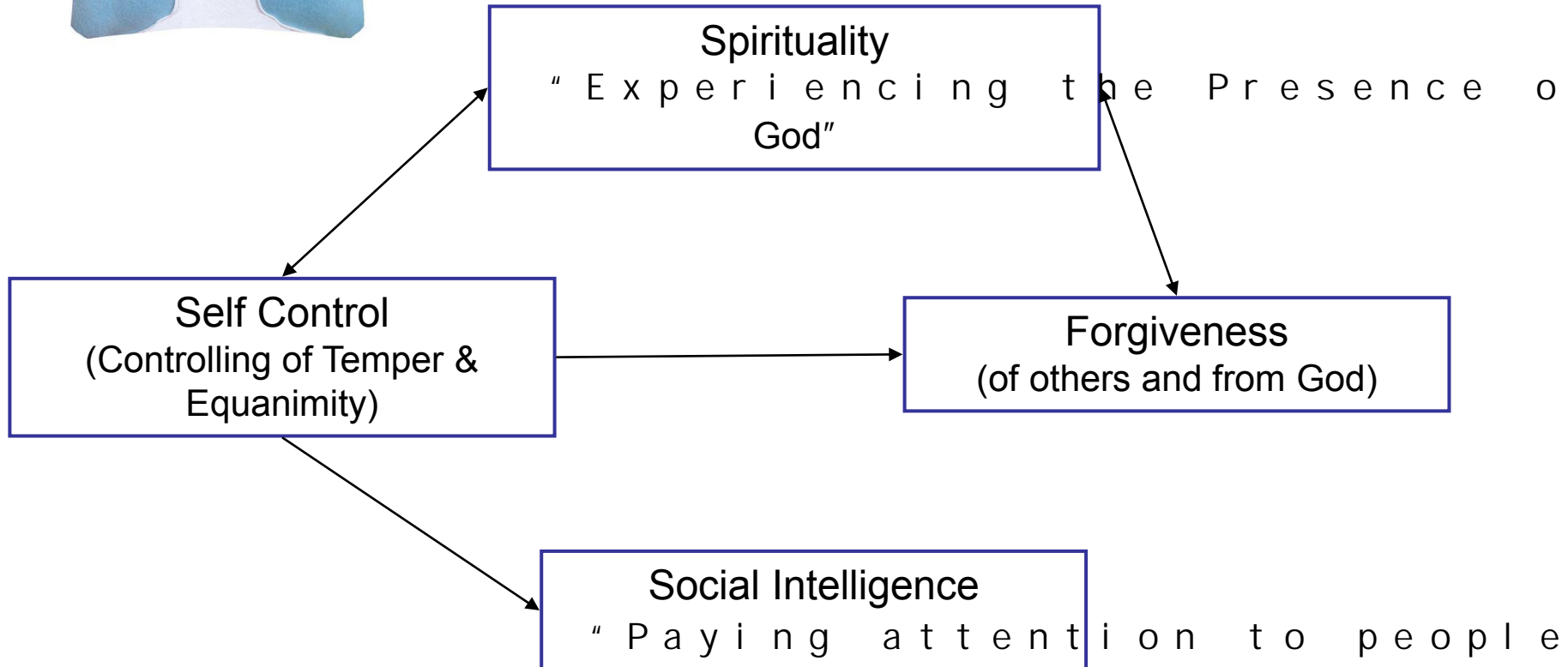


# Emerging character strengths for Martin after intervention

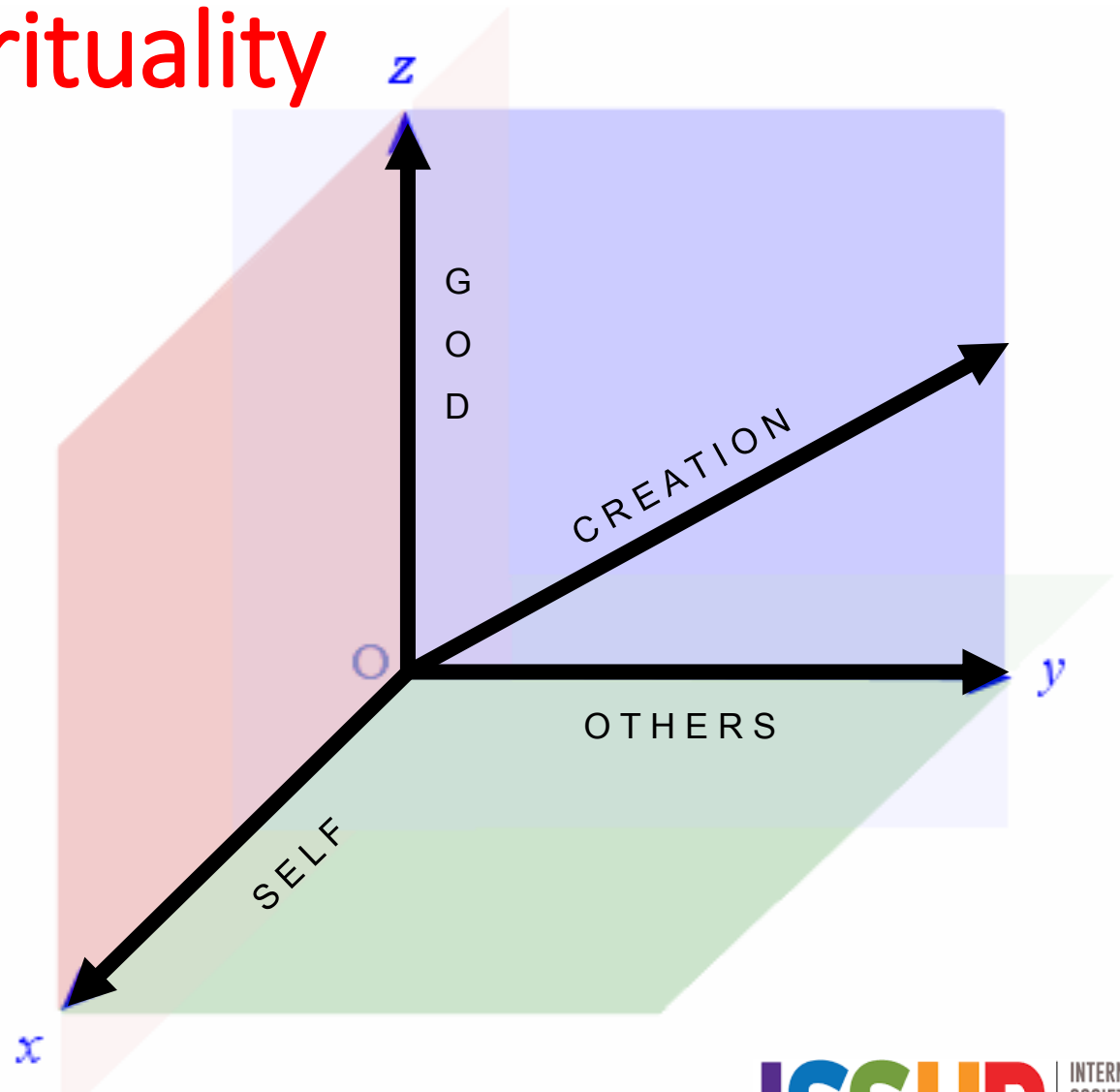




# Emerging character strengths for Edel after intervention



# Emergence of a 3-D Religious Spirituality



Selvam, S.G., & Mwangi, D. (2014). Meditation and contemplative practice among young adults in Nairobi. In S.G. Selvam, & D. Watt (eds.), *African youth today: Challenges and prospects* (pp.67-85). Nairobi: Acton Press.





4.

# Character Strengths-based interventions for Addiction Recovery

Four Samples



Spiritual  
-but-not-  
religious



# 1. Mindfulness

**paying attention in a particular way;  
On purpose,  
in the present  
moment, and**

**Jon Kabat-Zinn  
(1994, p.4)**



# Impact of Mindfulness relevant for Recovery from Addiction

Self-Control

Compassion/  
empathy

Forgiveness

Bowen, S., Chawla, N., Collins, S. E., Witkiewitz, K., Hsu, S., Grow, J., ... & Marlatt, A. (2009). Mindfulness-based relapse prevention for substance use disorders: A pilot efficacy trial. *Substance Abuse*, 30(4), 295-305.

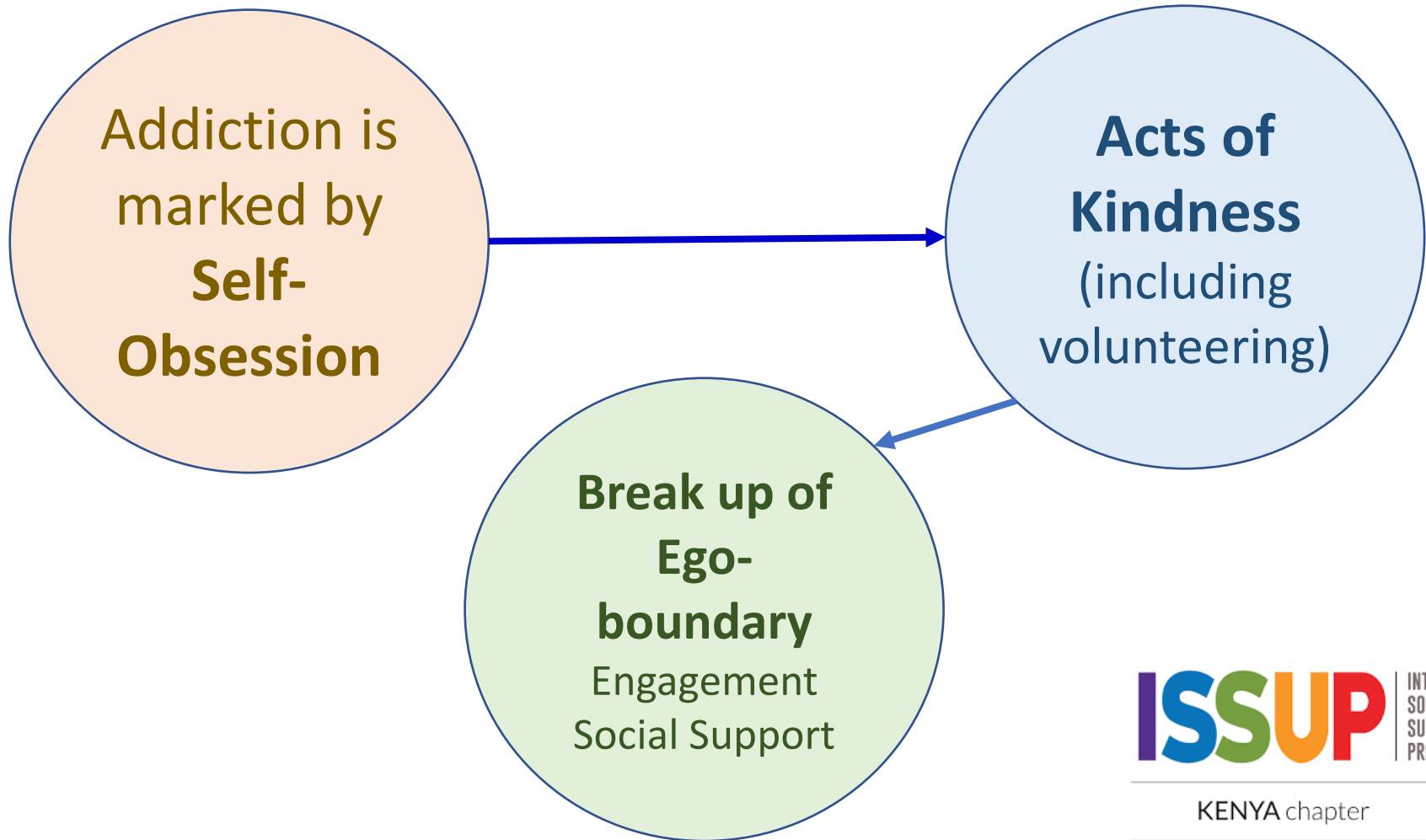


# 2. Random Acts of Kindness

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
Leave a nice note in a library book	Give someone an 8-Second Hug	Send someone a nice note	Donate old books	Don't complain all day long	Leave a nice note on a mirror	Give a compliment
Pick up trash in your neighborhood	Be kind to a stranger	Draw a picture for someone	Bake yummy goodies for someone	SMILE at everyone you see today	Do someone else's chores for them	water plants
Feed the birds	Write a gratitude list (20 things)	Pick up trash you see on the ground	Leave an extra tip	Bring someone flowers (or draw a picture of flowers)	Recycle	Share with another person
Donate old clothes	Help an elderly person	Walk someone's (or your own) dog	Make a list of 10 things you're thankful for	Tell someone the reasons you like them	Hold the door for someone	Donate to a local animal shelter
Offer water to those in need	Help make dinner	Make a bird feeder	Donate old toys	Make someone laugh	Write positive messages on the sidewalk	write a thank you note



## 2. Random Acts of Kindness



# 3. Forgiveness and Recovery

Forgiveness of self

Forgiveness from others

Forgiveness from Greater Power

## 12 Steps of AA

5<sup>th</sup> Step: Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.

<https://www.aa.org/the-twelve-steps>



# Three Steps in Forgiveness

## Enright and Coyle (1998, p.140):

1. the injured person **recognises** an actual injustice;
2. the injured person **chooses** willingly to respond with mercy rather than with justifiable retribution;
3. and to be **concerned** with the good of the interaction.



# Exercise: Forgiveness Litany

- Put yourself in a spirit of contemplation
- Choose a person-event of hurt;
- Write a litany of forgiveness:
  - When you did \_\_\_\_\_ to me, I felt \_\_\_\_\_, I forgive you for this;
  - When you said \_\_\_\_\_ to me, I felt \_\_\_\_\_, I forgive you for this;
  - When I saw you do \_\_\_\_\_ to me, I felt \_\_\_\_\_, I forgive you for this;
- Continue with the same person until you feel you have exhausted.
- Take a moment of break; if ready continue with another person.



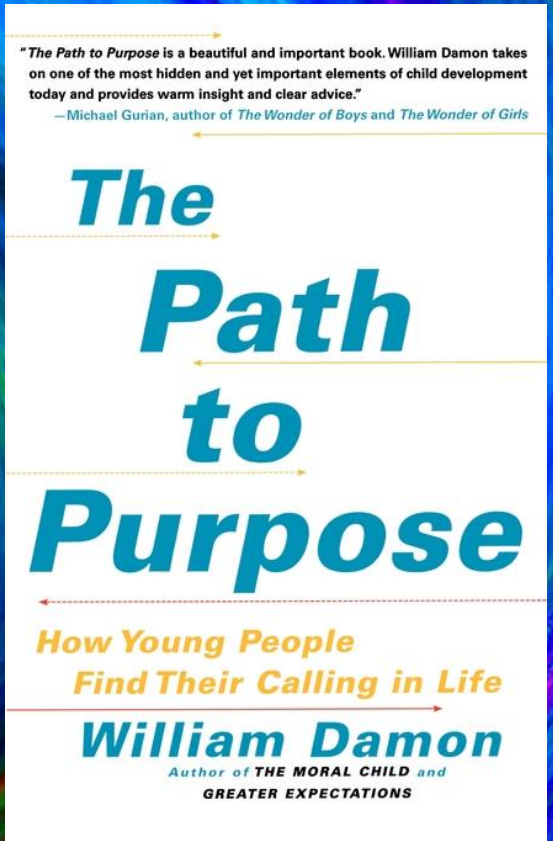
# 4. Purpose in Life

## **Purpose**

**Is the desire to  
achieve something  
beyond the self.**



11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> Steps of AA

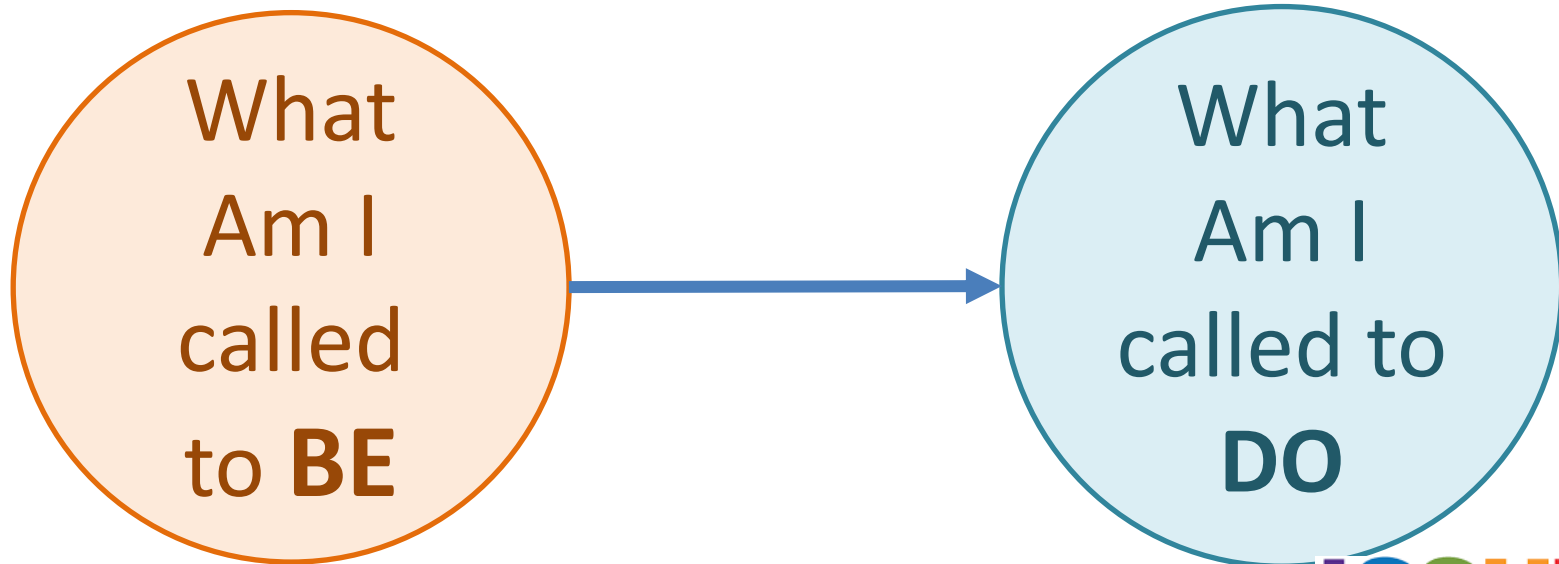


Research suggests:  
People are happy ...  
if they have a clear purpose in life,  
and if this purpose is focused on others



# Towards a Personal Mission Statement

With my talents and gifts, my skills and knowledge, my desires and passion, and my perception of the world and its needs





Thank you ...