Full spectrum knowing: comparing the mind-body-world

benefits and risks of natural (kratom) and synthetic (oxycodone) psychoactive substances for potential integrative techniques in medicine

By: Shannon Campbell, Ph.D.

**Summary of Results**

Problems with adverse events and addiction from pharmaceutical opiates like oxycodone has skyrocketed. Many doctors have endorsed integrative models that incorporate herbal medicines like kratom, but U.S. regulatory policies limit information and access to these natural substances. To broaden integrative potentials, research on the comparative safety and effectiveness of kratom and oxycodone was assessed along with the holistic health aspects influenced by the consumption of either drug. Engel’s biopsychosocial model and ecopsychological theories informed these research questions and the online questionnaire created by the investigator. In this post-only, quasi-experimental study, the questionnaire utilized the Effectiveness and Safety (ES) scale, the Holistic Health Aspects (HHA) scale, the Drug remedy scale, and a qualitative inquiry to assess the best integrative techniques for medicine. Data was collected and analyzed to explore the research questions regarding the effectiveness/safety, holistic health, and drug remedy preference for kratom and oxycodone users.

The effectiveness and safety exploratory items helped to highlight drug consumption patterns and the doctor-patient relationship. Results confirmed previous research findings that oxycodone users acquire it from their doctor as well as alternative sources like drug dealers and friends. Due to legal limitations kratom is usually discovered and acquired via the internet. Unlike the more potent oxycodone, Roxicodone, and OxyContin tablets, kratom users preferred the tea/powdered leaf variety that is less potent, the green Maeng da in particular. Both kratom and oxycodone users consume other drugs, however, oxycodone users consume other drugs more often, tobacco especially. Unfortunately, many oxycodone users claimed that they didn’t spend more than 5 minutes with their doctors. They read the prescription information, but received little information from their doctor or pharmacist. Many were also not informed about how to taper down from oxycodone nor alternative holistic treatments that appreciate healthy diet, restful sleep, and exercise. Some oxycodone participants selected that they spent ample time with their doctor and received important information. This is a good sign that integrative techniques are being utilized by more doctors. Hopefully, more will join in as time progresses.

Analysis of the Effectiveness and safety (ES) scale and qualitative research found that oxycodone users experienced pain relief, improved mood, improved sociability, enhanced motivation, and increased energy and focus when they first started the medication. However, problems with tolerance, withdrawal, dependence and negative side effects began to occur. Eventually, they needed to take more medication to deal with the negative side effects, especially those diagnosed with a mental disease. Kratom users, on the other hand, experienced all of the positive effects and significantly less of the negative effects. Kratom users found the drug to be more effective and safe than oxycodone over time.

The Holistic Health Aspects (HHA) scale and qualitative research added to these results. Over time, oxycodone users experienced more problems with their physiological and psychosocial (biopsychosocial) health while kratom users experienced more improvements with their biopsychosocial health. In fact, kratom is perceived as a better remedy than oxycodone. Kratom participants not only highlighted the same relief of pain, mood stabilization, enhanced motivation, and increased energy, but also the ability for kratom to be a good substitute for prescription opiates. They also mentioned that kratom helped them taper off of prescription opiates by reducing cravings and withdrawal symptoms.

These results present integrative potentials that could be viable for medical professionals. Oxycodone could be used for acute conditions of pain, while kratom could be used for follow-up treatment of chronic pain. Kratom could also be used as an alternative or step-down from synthetic opiates. Future research should focus on longitudinal studies that appreciate these integrative potentials for prescription pain relievers like oxycodone and herbal medicines like kratom.