

# CHURCH AND YOUTH RESILIENCE TO SUBSTANCE ABUSE: Assessing Church Responses, Challenges and Gaps

**Chanda Armstrong**

*Department of Educational Studies and Social Sciences*

*Mpika College of Education, Zambia*

Email: [chandarmstrong@yahoo.com](mailto:chandarmstrong@yahoo.com)

## ABSTRACT

*Realising the fundamental role of the church in youth development and social work, the study investigates the responses, challenges and gaps in combating youth substance abuse by the church. It highlights the need for holistic interventions while emphasising the need for mental health resilience. The study employed a qualitative approach, combining document analysis and review of literary materials to assess church and substance abuse among youth, especially cases studied in the Philippines and Kenya. The findings indicate that the church's interventions in youth substance abuse include moral teachings, awareness raising and support project activities. The study also underscores the importance of family dynamics in developing resilience against substance abuse. The major challenges faced by the church concerning youth substance abuse and promoting resilience include poverty and peer pressure, which hinder the youth's desire to undergo interventions. Moreover, cultural stigma and denial from the parents or guardians block the youth from seeking help. Cultural belief systems also disrupt family connections, further underlining the need for robust support systems. An enormous gulf exists between the church and the youth, which undermines any preventative measures that might be undertaken. The research proffers useful pointers for policymakers, church leaders, and social workers regarding the life-style aspects that link faith, culture, and youth substance addiction. It recommends that the church customise its approaches to address the specific challenges faced by young people struggling with substance abuse, focusing on health, healing, and resilience, aligning with the challenges faced by different youths and the need for urgent attention.*

**Keywords:** Church; Youth Resilience; Substance Abuse

## INTRODUCTION

The rampant use of substances among youth seems to be raising concern about its impact on the health, social and economic aspects of their life. Substance abuse tends to have a plethora of adverse effects through various addictions

or disorders of mental health, or by downgrading one's social functioning (Izdebski *et al.*, 2025). It becomes, therefore, essential to examine factors associated with substance abuse among young people, as this is important for crafting any effective preventive strategies. Psychoactive substance use predicts high-risk behaviours such as illicit sexual activities, which by itself warrants an intervention (Izdebski *et al.*, 2025). This further necessitates an investigation into the rising prevalence of substance abuse among youth, particularly how the church, as a pivotal institution in community life responds to this issue. This, therefore, necessitates church programmes to educate youth on the risks surrounding drug use and how to make the right choices. Furthermore, providing mental health resources and support for young people who struggle with substance abuse provides an avenue to deal with some innate problems and prevent risky behaviours. All communities, schools and healthcare systems come together to jointly work toward bold prevention and intervention programmes targeting substance abuse behaviours among the youth.

In this study, the term "church" refers to the various religious institutions and communities that are significant in the lives of people. The church often contributes significantly to value formation, providing support and nurturing a sense of belonging. It acts as a guide through moral teachings, influencing youth behaviour and their choices. While resilience in this study is defined as adapting and recovering from adversity, stress, or trauma, particularly among young people. In substance abuse, resilience can take the form of resisting peer pressure, managing life's challenges and asking for help when needed. Therefore, building resilience to substance abuse by youth is very imperative to combat and recover from substance abuse problems.

The awareness of the dangers that accompany substance abuse and the knowledge of coping strategies and healthier alternatives to prevent them go a long way in preventing and reducing substance abuse among youths (Nwogu, 2022). Substance abuse does not help the youth; it makes them develop poorly and brings up many societal issues, thus calling for urgent measures as effective interventions, such as prevention, early intervention strategies and access to treatment services. Efforts made by churches and communities in dealing with substance abuse should be linked closely to the genuine issues faced by young people. This, therefore, further indicates the urgency of this study on how church support systems would manage to effectively address youth issues concerning substance abuse, including but not limited to faith-based treatment, pastoral counselling and community outreach programmes, is relevant. Awareness of what these church-based initiatives do for the prevention and mitigation of substance abuse among young people is vital

in developing more comprehensive and effective prevention and intervention strategies (Kumar & Reddy, 2025).

Certain groups, such as sexual and gender minorities, face elevated risks of substance abuse and mental health challenges that call for a customised approach by the church to meet distinct community needs (Coulter et al., 2019). These approaches could include diverse and affirming support groups, counselling services and educational strategies that focus on substance abuse and mental health issues. The church can be an agent for the holistic health and healing of all people by identifying and responding to the particular demands of marginalised communities within the community. Engaging with critical social work principles may enable an engagement by the church to try to treat substance abuse as oppression within the broader context of seeking equality and justice for all (Rogowski & Thi, 2025). Such an approach emphasises the need to address not just personal behaviours, but also the more critical conditions that give rise to substance abuse, such as poverty, trauma and systemic inequalities. Studies show that parental communication and connection directly affect drug usage by urban youth (Boyd et al., 2021), and perhaps these faith-based family initiatives might even enhance protective factors against substance use. Also, family fighting and lack of supervision among parents are associated with an elevated consumption of different substances among adolescents. Despite the church's efforts, substance abuse among young people is still prevalent. Therefore, this study advocates for building resilience among the youth as a means of fighting substance abuse.

This study has a dual focus on resilience theory and the role of the church in combating youth substance abuse. While many existing studies analyse substance abuse trends among youth, few examine the specific responses and adaptations of religious institutions in this regard. The research highlights the intersection of faith, culture, and youth challenges, contributing unique insights into how church interventions can be tailored to meet the distinct needs of various youth groups, particularly marginalised communities. The study, therefore, addressed the following research questions: How does the church contribute to building resilience among youth in the context of substance abuse? What are the specific responses of the church to substance abuse issues faced by youth? What challenges does the church encounter in its efforts to mitigate substance abuse among young people? How can the church bridge the gaps related to substance abuse mitigation and resilience development? And what new modes of collaboration can be established in the fight against substance abuse? This study examines how the church helps build youth resilience to substance abuse, assessing its responses, challenges and

gaps to substance abuse and resilience development among the youth.

Despite the efforts made by the church, there still exists a gap between the efforts of the church toward the substance abuse problem and its actual mitigation among youth. The study highlights the need for more effective strategies and collaboration to enhance the church's role in supporting youth resilience. The study identifies and bridges gaps in substance abuse mitigation and resilience development among the youth by the church. The study discusses the challenges and opportunities for the church to develop resilience among individuals struggling with substance abuse. It provides insights into the temporal link between substance dependence and the church, and its pivotal role in offering support, intervention and rehabilitation. The study's core thrust revolves around new modes of collaboration between those addicted to substances and the church by assessing the church's present responses and challenges. The intended outcomes are to build effective answers to problems around substance use, recovery, and holistic healing within the church context. Applying resilience theory, the study emphasises the building of resilience to substance abuse among young people as a means to mitigating and preventing substance abuse behaviours and effects.

## **RESILIENCE OF THE CHURCH, YOUTH AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE**

Resilience theory, particularly as sought by Ann Masten, offers insight into how individuals and systems sustain changes to adapt successfully in the wake of adversity. Resilience should be considered within various levels of analyses, from purely individual through interpersonal contexts, to societal traits, highlighting important concepts, determinants, and applications. There is a definite movement toward unifying the resilience approaches across different systems to act more robustly when facing dire threats (Masten, 2018; Yates *et al.*, 2015). Resilience is understood in many ways but mainly refers to positive functioning over time after adversity, which brings forth its many-sided character (Southwick *et al.*, 2014). Self-regulation abilities and good parenting may nurture resilience across a variety of populations (Masten & Cicchetti, 2016). In addition, nurturing resilience means scrutinising and working on social determinants, cultural and economic challenges to accommodate a familiarity with resilience being a layered and complex construct (Southwick *et al.*, 2014; Yates *et al.*, 2015).

Michael Ungar's work on resilience theory emphasises the role of culture and context in understanding thriving under pressure as an indicator of growth. Resilience is more than an individual trait; it is a deeply kindled influence of one's social environment and culture. Resilience is definable differently

across academies of knowledge, with common themes revolving around adaptive functioning over time following adversity (Southwick et al., 2014; Fletcher & Sarkar, 2013). It is shaped by various determinants across multiple levels, including genetic, cultural and social factors. (Southwick *et al.*, 2014). This indicates the need for comprehensive approaches in resilience research. For instance, a specific application of resilience theory, ‘shame resilience’ focuses on how women develop strategies to cope with and overcome shame, demonstrating the importance of social-support relationships and personal awareness (Brown, 2006).

All of these reconceptualizations between ecological resilience, defined in terms of how much the ecosystem tolerates disturbance and psychological resilience, which concerns the coping ability of individuals, centre on adaptive capacity (Gunderson, 2000; Fletcher & Sarkar, 2013). According to this view, resilience should be perceived from a social-ecological framework, which includes both internalised and external factors that build positive development during stressful experiences (Ungar *et al.*, 2013; Ungar, 2011; Ungar, 2005). Different context-culture combinations offer specific legacies and pathways that serve in resilience, resulting in distinct patterns and manifestations of well-being (Ungar *et al.*, 2013; Ungar, 2013; Ungar, 2005). Resilience varies from one population to another, with protective mechanisms that are sensitive to individual and environmental factors, of which the contextual understanding is significant (Ungar, 2011; Ungar, 2013). Ungar describes strategies on how practitioners may scale up resilience development in contexts by identifying and channelling local resources that support health and general well-being (Ungar, 2010; Ungar, 2005).

The example of church and resilience development is cited in the U.S.A., where most addiction rehabilitation programmes are spirituality-based, thus making considerable economic savings and providing recovery from substance abuse (Grim & Grim, 2019). While going, participation in religious activities and spiritual practices has been associated with reduced substance usage among American Indian urban adolescents and thus, possible protective influences (Kulis *et al.*, 2012). The adolescent’s belief system concerning spirituality brings better well-being to coping capabilities, thereby promoting psychological and emotional well-being, which could serve to deter drug use (Kim & Esquivel, 2011). Researchers have recognised spirituality as a key factor in adolescent resilience, as it contributes to positive mental health outcomes and effective coping strategies (Kim & Esquivel, 2011).

An effective community-based effort to improve family resilience has strikingly reduced the drug abuse involvement of high-risk youth in many different

churches (Johnson *et al.*, 1998). There are plenty of different programmes that have been implemented throughout church communities, showing that family strength not only delays adolescent entry into substance use but also reduces prevalence at very early ages (Johnson *et al.*, 1998). Furthermore, it was found among urban American Indian youth that such a combination of beliefs of Christianity with traditional spiritual practices produced lower occurrences of substance use (Kulis *et al.*, 2012). This reveals the great potential of culture and religion in improving lifestyles toward healthier ones

The church can help the youth by providing an environment within which they can thrive through resilience-promoting activities. These would include talking about substance abuse, mentorship programmes for youth, and workshops on coping skills, emotional intelligence, and problem-solving. The church can further engage such youth in volunteer activities and church activities to enhance their sense of belonging. Through the eradication of stigma and ushering in understanding and good relationships, it is possible, therefore, for the church to support young people to feel connected and peer with them.

## **THE CHURCH TO SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND BUILDING RESILIENCE**

The findings of several studies reviewed in this study point out how the church rallies behind adolescents struggling with substance abuse. Church organisations often put-up psychosocial support and other protective factors that help lessen the negative effects of substance abuse. The church has a place in community support and enhances individual resilience in managing cases of youth substance abuse. It acknowledges the social and personal determinants related to substance use and subsequently strives to create an environment conducive to healthy development.

### **Psycho-Social Support**

Churches are important psychosocial supporters for the recovery of youth addicted to substances. They break the threat of stigma and bad examples to create a nurturing atmosphere of healing and growth (Muswerakuenda *et al.*, 2023). The faith-based community also actively take part in identifying children who require care and assisting anyone in ensuring the care is more than just physical but also addressing the vital psychosocial and spiritual aspects, which often coexist with substance abuse prevention efforts in recovery (Spaumer & Mavhandu-Mudzusi, 2025). These findings echo the relationship between youth substance abuse and psychological well-being,



indicating the need for urgent, comprehensive and holistic strategies that fully integrate mental health support into recovery programmes (Kumar & Reddy, 2025). The community and peer-level dynamics are the strongest influences on youth behaviour and choices (Izdebski *et al.*, 2025). This proposes that churches should become active agents of revolutionary change to bring about these positive social environments and connections among young people.

Churches are significant in the literature for providing psychosocial support to adolescent populations who struggle with substance abuse. Muswerakuenda *et al.*, (2023) and Spaumer & Mavhandu-Mudzusi (2025) studies indicate that faith-based communities can combat stigma and promote healing environments. Kumar & Reddy (2025) support holistic recovery by arguing for integrating mental health support into recovery programmes. Where churches provide spiritual resources, important recovery-related emotional and social environments also arise from other sectors of the community schools, organisations, and such. It can therefore be argued that church-based support may further reinforce stigmas that link substance use with sinfulness. These stigmas may outrightly deter persons from seeking support. For recovery programmes to be effective, it is essential to find a balance between the spiritual and the evidence-based perspectives.

### **Religiosity and Substance Abuse**

Religiosity serves as a protective shield against substance misuse and mental health issues (Quinn *et al.*, 2023). This suggests that one's faith can curb risky behaviours among youth, linking belief in God to less engagement in risky behaviours. Both intrinsic and extrinsic religiosity significantly reduce the likelihood of substance abuse among adolescents. Therefore, participating in religious activities may directly influence substance use behaviours (Carrà *et al.*, 2023). Programmes integrating spirituality and addiction interventions are seen as effective in supporting recovery from substance use disorders (Grim & Grim, 2019). This demonstrates the strong association between spirituality and recovery.

For instance, according to Berrien *et al.*, (2021), black church-led community initiatives have successfully engaged youth and have been tackling violence, implying the potential for applying the same approach to address substance abuse. Participation in church activities serves to lessen health-risk behaviours among adolescents; hence, church involvement can be protective and serve as a buffer against substance abuse only when combined with regular attendance (Buchtova *et al.*, 2020). Additionally, black churches mobilise community resources and facilitate moral accountability, thus deterring the youth from

substance abuse and violence (Berrien *et al.*, 2021).

According to reviewed studies, it is a proven fact that religiosity can technically defend against the abuse of substances in adolescents. For example, studies by Quinn *et al.*, (2023) and Carrà *et al.*, (2023) argue that strong faith and involvement in religious activities often correlate with reduced use of substances among adolescents. Both types of intrinsic as well as extrinsic religiosity are supposed to be considered in the protection brought forth by faith, although some studies indicate that religion might not address the possible causes of addiction. Meanwhile, secular interventions have their focus on the accountability of the individual and those associated with welfare. Differences in terms of social class, education, and type of support received may also result in varying effects of religious communities in preventing substance abuse. More studies will be needed to compare the spirituality impacts on these and other religions.

### **Collaboration with Community and Professionals**

It is possible to develop successful strategies for preventing drug abuse among adolescents using a combination of community involvement and holistic church approaches (Chifamba & Chifamba, 2023). Moreover, bridging the gap between church leaders, social services, police, and psychologists prop up a strong intervention for youth suffering from substance abuse (Spaumer & Mavhandu-Mudzusi, 2025). The problem of substance abuse among youths calls for comprehensive responses from society in training, legal frameworks and very effective educational campaigns (Nwogu, 2022; Chifamba & Chifamba, 2023). Collaborative strategies of various stakeholders, such as families, schools, churches and communities, can be said to be the most effective way of preventing drug abuse in the post-pandemic context (Chifamba & Chifamba, 2023). Internal determinants of development, such as planning and decision-making, are critical in preventing adolescent substance use, which signifies the need for programmes that impart these values (Belintxon *et al.*, 2022). Parent-child communication quality is a strong predictor of substance-use behaviours, as strong parent ties can help curtail drug usage in urban youth exposed to societal stress (Boyd *et al.*, 2021). Moreover, programmes involving community service, combined with restorative practices, lessen substance use among justice-involved youth. (Church & Marcus, 2021). Thus, meaningful engagements can positively redirect behaviours towards better meanings.

### **CASES FROM KENYA AND THE PHILIPPINES**

This section examines the cases of church participation in addressing substance



abuse and other issues amid the youth within the Presbyterian Church in Kenya (Mathai, 2022), the Anglican Church in the Diocese of Embu, Kenya (Nyaga *et al.*, 2024) and the Catholic Church in the Philippines (Cornelio & Lasco, 2020) as presented in these literary sources. It examines the various initiatives taken towards young men and women and the barriers that hinder the development of comprehensive programmes to combat youth-related substance abuse crises in these churches. Different strategies and influences from church communities have emerged on how churches address youth substance abuse. Churches have held that their role is crucial by conducting educational projects, advocating for communities and looking into broader social contexts.

The Presbyterian Church in Kenya treats this fight against substance abuse as a complex venture, which includes addressing drug abuse among the young congregants in its congregations. From lively youth camps, interactive workshops and buoyant, energetic and high-impact community service, the Church offers an inclusive environment, conditioning members towards healthy living and sound social connections (Mathai, 2022). The Presbyterian Church believes in active engagement through youth camps, workshops, community service, and so forth. It provides recreational activities and space for forming healthy relationships and social skills of utmost importance to resilience development. The participants learn strategies and life skills that are positive in building healthier choices. The youth may feel a sense of belonging and support from the community, which would help boost emotional resilience.

For some time now, the Catholic Church has engaged itself very constructively in meaningful conversation around drug use by making deep moral arguments. It is here emphasised that compassion and social harmony should play a vital role in confronting the devastating effects of substance abuse on individuals and communities (Cornelio & Lasco, 2020). As time passed, so too did the approaches of the Church, which now shows a deeper appreciation for the issues surrounding drug use. Today, the church emphasises more empathy and assistance while addressing urgent issues such as moral decay and concerns about the welfare of the youth (Cornelio & Lasco, 2020). This shift illustrates the Church's commitment to promoting compassionate dialogue, ultimately enhancing community resilience in addressing pressing social issues.

The Anglican Church is known for being at the forefront of offering compassionate guidance and counselling services through its initiatives aimed at reducing drug abuse (Nyaga *et al.*, 2024). Being a well-renowned institution, there is an ongoing organisation of seminars and recreational activities to attract the youth into its affairs, which forms a basis for nurturing an

environment that effectively discourages substance abuse (Nyaga *et al.*, 2024). Several challenges prevent the church from achieving its goals, including financial limitations that restrict resources, a shortage of skilled professionals to effectively carry out programmes, and an apparent reluctance from the community to support such initiatives. These barriers seriously undermine the capabilities of the Anglican Church in developing and conducting effective substance abuse programmes (Nyaga & Kagema, 2024).

The fusion of resilience theory with church interventions in the context of youth substance abuse requires multidimensional approaches. These cases demonstrate how faith-based organisations can create holistic resilience through community activity, moral empowerment, and support systems. Effectively, adopting the same frameworks would enable organisations to counter substance abuse and enhance resilience among youth globally. The church's involvement in substance abuse is manifested in community involvement and moral guidance. The above and other studies have shown these initiatives as crucial among faith-based initiatives and effective communication in reducing substance use and its associated behavioural complexities among the youth. These studies show a variety of ways in which the church and faith-based organisations relate to substance abuse among the youth, emphasising the blend of faith-based approaches with community action. These findings, therefore, suggest the development of effective interventions through pastoral care, education and addressing common underlying socioeconomic factors. On the contrary, traditional values within churches would limit the effectiveness of the churches in adapting to modern treatment approaches. Each denomination has its culturally comparative responses to substance abuse, leading to diverse results concerning the addict.

## **MITIGATING SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND BUILDING RESILIENCE**

The church faces challenges in building resilience among the youth. These challenges include: socio-economic factors, cultural myths, and youth engagement in religious activities.

### **Socio-Economic Factors**

Socio-economic challenges amplify the intensity of the problem of substance use, especially among youth, as is the case in Zimbabwe. Mugari (2024) explains that many young people are trapped in a serious crisis of substance abuse, which is worsened by several socio-economic hardships and emerging drug abuse trends. Substance abuse itself does not exist in a vacuum; it somehow came into being because of wider social problems, namely, endemic poverty

and gross inequality (Rogowski & Thi, 2025). Institutions like the church should not merely recognise these underlying problems, but also engage in their intervention. The topic of substance abuse continues to present challenges even within the church community due to the realities of peer pressure and the shockingly easy availability of drugs (Mathai, 2022). Various barriers to recovery include stigma, denial from the family and harsh religious views. All this discourages youth from seeking much-needed assistance in dealing with substances within their church communities (Muswerakuenda *et al.*, 2023). Therefore, there must be an environment where the youth feel empowered to seek recovery freely and without the judgment of their communities.

### **Cultural Influences**

Culturally rooted beliefs and stigma surrounding substance abuse have a deep impact on family subtleties in communities, thus further justifying the urgent need for focused public health programmes and general awareness to assist the youth who are being affected (Monari *et al.*, 2024). A good number of parents of adolescents battling substance abuse are under great emotional turmoil and practical distress (Mathibela & Skhosana, 2019). This creates an avenue for churches to build support networks for these families. The anguish faced by the parents is universal, as many stumble through raising teenagers involved in substance misuse (Mathibela & Skhosana, 2019). This further shows the urgent need for churches to assist them in building resilience and understanding of families in need.

### **Youth Engagement in Religious Activities**

Youth engagement in religious activities tends to be very helpful in dealing with substance abuse. As indicated by Mbuthia *et al.*, (2020), students not participating in any form of religious activity are at a significantly higher risk of turning to substance abuse. The church, therefore, has a huge role in nurturing relationships with youths. However, an even more alarming widening gap between the youth and religious institutions now poses a real challenge to all the attempts to put in place to curb substance abuse. Ntsanwisi (2024) argues that in light of the current divide, there is an urgent need for targeted programmes aimed at bridging this gap. The sight of youth stepping away from religious practices and activities has become so overwhelming that access to spiritual and religious programmes that promise positive behavioural change has become even harder to attain. This challenge is key in creating conducive settings for discouraging substance abuse among young people. But all religious teachings may not touch young people, especially the

disadvantaged, who feel judged. The church's limited knowledge of mental health hinders its effectiveness in addressing the issue.

## **BRIDGING THE GAP: MITIGATING SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND BUILDING YOUTH RESILIENCE**

There are gaps in the Church's efforts to mitigate substance abuse and build youth resilience. Some challenges mentioned in various studies assessing factors associated with substance abuse and evaluation of existing prevention activities are peer pressure, community awareness and engagement of, and education for the youth. These multidimensional challenges faced by the church while fighting against substance use are driving home the need for culturally appropriate methods and integration into the community. Multiple studies suggest that socio-economic issues, cultural perceptions, and engagement of trusted community leaders, including church officials, are major players in determining intervention efficacy. A huge call, therefore, exists for better mobilisation strategies and funding to develop and sustain youth welfare and substance abuse prevention initiatives (Nyaga & Kagema, 2024).

### **Community Leadership and Engagement**

Community leadership and engagement have shown great efficacy in resolving substance abuse. For instance, Black American church leaders play a crucial role in fighting Opioid Use Disorder, emphasising the need for compassion and the adoption of innovative, culturally sensitive strategies that address the particular needs of their communities (Dankwah *et al.*, 2024). These leaders understand that community support is vital for action. Churches are excellent resources for the dissemination of critical information and mobilising communities for substance abuse prevention efforts (Nwagu *et al.*, 2020). In this way, churches can employ culturally relevant strategies, significantly enhancing alcohol and drug interventions through the direct involvement of their youth in the adaptation of mental-health literacy programmes (Jumbe *et al.*, 2022). Moreover, involving church organisations in the mobilisation of community readiness is essential and acts as the proactive mouthpiece for information and interventions to curb substance abuse, especially in rural settings (Sadeghi *et al.*, 2024). The need to design, implement and maintain records on community-based preventive approaches to youth substance use, inextricably linked to the work of social practices inside the Church, must therefore not be overemphasised. Churches provide supportive and knowledge-ready environments that arm individuals and families with the resources to access and overcome the challenges associated with substance-

related disorders.

### **Holistic Prevention Strategies**

The involvement of various stakeholders, such as families, schools and churches, through collaborative measures is an effective intervention strategy for adolescent substance abuse (Chifamba & Chifamba, 2023). For instance, programme models like the “Lifestyle Risk Reduction Model” aimed to address substance abuse from developmentally appropriate methods at all ages (Dykstra *et al.*, 2023: 864). By interrogating the mainstream narratives around substance abuse, the church can develop more impactful interventions that resonate with the youth and incorporate their voices into the change (Rogowski & Thi, 2025). Possessing the element of holistic approaches calling for community support, engagement, and advocacy is essential to effectively counter youth substance use (Rogowski & Thi, 2025). The cultural context surrounding substance use is important because stigma and secrecy concerning family members who misuse substances are often highlighted (Monari *et al.*, 2024). Additionally, monitoring parental love and supervision contributes greatly to the avoidance of substance use among adolescents (Belintxon *et al.*, 2020). Thus, this suggests that both family and communal aspects are imperative in the church’s response towards these issues. Furthermore, interventions and programmes must be gender sensitive to address their specific determinants of risky behaviour among the two genders in supporting both boys’ and girls’ behaviours (Izdebski *et al.*, 2025). Ultimately, positive self-image and family support are very important in delaying risky behaviours (Izdebski *et al.*, 2025). Thus, the church could assist in enhancing these protective factors.

### **Faith-Based Support and Awareness Campaigns**

Since many addiction treatment programmes have begun embracing spirituality as a central element, this places the church’s role as critically important in resisting substance abuse using faith-based recovery programmes (Grim & Grim, 2019). Churches serve as important social support networks, effectively bridging access to vital psychosocial services while encouraging recovery through organised support programmes that care for mind and spirit (Muswerakuenda *et al.*, 2023). It has been shown that religious engagement can correlate with lower patterns of substance abuse and reduced mental health issues in the youth (Quinn *et al.*, 2023). This points to the possibility that the church is a protective factor within this vulnerable group. Also, social marketing strategies must be adopted to change the perception and behaviour of young people on drug use. According to Nnam *et al.*, (2021), these strategies can complement the Church’s outreach

efforts and lead to stronger and more meaningful programmes for promoting healthy choices and lifestyles. The increasing concerns raised by universities and organisations regarding the devastating effects of substance abuse call for intensified awareness campaigns and collaborative relations with religious institutions to nurture an amicable environment that supports individuals in their recovery processes (Mbuthia *et al.*, 2020).

### **Religious Education, Family and Community Support**

Religious education is seen as a lifeline for the youth, as it normally helps solve both prevention and cure measures when life becomes so challenging, especially in areas concerning substance abuse (Zellma & Mākosa, 2024). The relationships and social networks developed in tough times like the current ordeal, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, reflect the importance of community. Such would serve as positive influences in facilitating one's mental healing process, especially for someone recovering from substance abuse (Song *et al.*, 2025). In families suffering from substance use disorders, adult siblings often develop resilience through communication strategies that enable them to manage the challenges of emotions across their shared experiences (Nolan-Cody & Scharp, 2024). One has to appreciate the relationship for support established through different interpersonal exchanges from churches to local community organisations. Mushonga & Breda (2024) argue that these exchanges go a long way to improving resilient outcomes among young adults raised in environments characterised by alcohol misuse and provide them with a supportive network that enhances healing and growth.

### **Psychosocial Support**

Psychosocial support from the church is necessary in helping the youth build resilience and fight substance abuse. Adult children from parents with substance-related problems undergo dual processes of nurturing resilience, yet also adapting to the negative behaviours that somehow, they may unconsciously pick up from their parents. This complex interaction brings into sharp relief the profound impact of family context mediating access to social support systems (Jeremiah *et al.*, 2024). Within this framework, psychosocial support networks provided by churches come out as one pillar aiding the youth in recovery from substance abuse. Faith-based communities promote belonging and acceptance, often initiating structured recovery methods that provide direction and pathways to healing (Muswerakuenda *et al.*, 2023). For instance, coping strategies in African families affected by intimate partner violence tend to emphasise seeking social support. This creates a parallel situation to the



collective strength of existing community and church networks that also help individuals' recovery from substance abuse (Akinbode & Carter, 2025).

### **Religious and Spiritual Coping Approaches**

Strongly held spiritual beliefs can significantly enhance health and resilience, especially within marginalised communities (Lefevor *et al.*, 2023). Religious beliefs foreground the relationship between spirituality and the ability to deal with challenges stemming from substance abuse. A crucial aspect of the model is self-transcendence, which strongly interacts with spirituality and can help prevent relapse among recovering individuals by providing them with a renewed sense of meaning and purpose in life. (Sørensen & Lien, 2022). Religious beliefs also act as a formidable protective factor against the abuse of substances, especially with black youth confronted with an excess of overly burdensome societal challenges. Faith acts as a source of significant resilience, allowing individuals to push through the pressure to abuse substances (Quinn *et al.*, 2023). In another case, spiritual resilience is very significant among Pacific peoples, where evidence shows that engagement in spiritual practices enhances mental health and therefore could very much be potent in reducing risks of substance abuse (Taumoepeau *et al.*, 2025).

It is therefore imperative that the church, as a provider of community, support and spiritual guidance, addresses the substance abuse problem among youths through a network-like climate, counselling and support services, and the promotion of healthy lifestyles and values. The church should act as a connection between the youngsters in addiction and the resources required for their recovery. It must leverage the collaborations established between the church and other community stakeholders, such as health professionals, social workers, and law enforcement, must create a more effective and holistic way of dealing with substance abuse in young people. Given its place and role in the lives of the youth and society, the church could strive to create a more just and equitable society in which every individual has access to the resources and support needed to overcome substance abuse and thrive by taking this critical stance.

### **CONCLUSION**

The church's role in responding to substance abuse among youth, as seen in light of resilience theory, is very significant and loaded with complexity. Resilience theory suggests that people can develop adaptive coping mechanisms as a reaction to adversity, but the flourishing of such mechanisms requires interventions that reflect the particular experiences of marginalised youth. An ongoing

reflective practice must also be adopted to assess the impact of the programmes carried out by the church on youth dealing with substance abuse challenges. The church, through involving youth in the design and implementation of these strategies, can create an atmosphere that truly welcomes resilience. This could set a sustainable process in motion, therefore facilitating the youth not only to navigate present challenges but also to flourish in their quality of life and, by extension, towards wider community restoration. Resilience theory must underpin programme design and assessment to ensure that the church stays nimble and relevant to respond to the global epidemic of substance abuse among youth. As observed, the church is an important institution in countering the rising incidence of youth substance abuse and building resilience. Therefore, there should be a collaborative spirit with the community, schools, health providers and the church to strengthen the prevention and intervention of substance abuse. In this way, the church can empower youth by tilting towards management means of dealing with the substance abuse challenge and promote coping mechanisms that support the well-being of those affected. This strategy may tackle the short-term substance abuse problems, but more importantly, it develops the long-term resilience and vibrancy of youth in the community.

A critical reflection must be made concerning these existing programmes and support systems within religious circles, surveying their effectiveness in addressing the needs of young people dealing with substance abuse problems and in building substance resilience. This will ascertain why partnerships between churches, community entities and youth are vital in crafting integrated strategies that target substance abuse while also empowering youth to be resilient and make healthy choices. Future research should focus on evaluating the long-term impacts of church-led interventions on youth resilience and substance abuse outcomes, comparing faith-based approaches across different cultural contexts, and optimising collaborative partnerships between churches and community entities.

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