

## Opportunities for Faith Based Organizations in Substance Use Prevention: A Christian Perspectives

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### Abstract

*Despite efforts by government and non-governmental organizations across the world to reduce cases of drug and substance abuse, the prevalence of substance use among the youth and young adults is alarming. The church's role as outlined in the Holy Bible is not just concentrated on the spiritual well-being of the people in the community. Jesus himself cared for the people he ministered to, making sure to feed them, heal them and even raise the dead. This paper reviews opportunities for Faith Based Organizations in Substance Use Prevention in Christian Perspectives. Some of the opportunities of faith based organizations in the prevention of substance use that were covered in the paper include: creation of public awareness, community mobilization, counseling and rehabilitation services, and conducting mentorship programmes. Secondary data research method was used to collect, analyse and interpret the findings. The review concludes that the Faith Based Organizations stand a chance to do more in helping youth and young adults to discard the habit of drug and substance abuse. Further, the review recommends that Faith Based Organizations should focus on strengthening collaborations, expanding local resources, and building capacity to provide substance abuse prevention, treatment, and mental health services, as well as program management. Faith Based Organizations should also expand its capacity when tackling drug and substance abuse problem among the young people by partnering more with other sectors. For instance FBOs should appeal for funding and training of its personnel, from governmental and non- governmental organizations.*

**Keywords:** *Substance use prevention, drug abuse awareness, Substance abuse, Youth and drugs*

### Introduction

Substance abuse refers to the harmful or hazardous use of psychoactive substances, including alcohol and illicit drugs. The prevalence of drug and substance abuse has been on an increasing trend with an estimation of between 149-272 million people accounting to 3.3% - 6% of the world total population aged 15-64 years abusing drugs and substances annually (United Nations Drug Control Programme, 2010). The concern over substance abuse has become a continuum debate across the world and it has been associated with much losses. While every country in

the world incurs substantial costs as a result of damages caused by substance use, faith based groups and the varied eyes of all our traditions increasingly see the great potential of people of faith to prevent the tragedy of substance abuse.

According to the U.S. government data, approximately 22.3 million persons 12 years or older, or 9% of the U.S. population, met the diagnostic criteria for alcohol or other substance dependence or abuse (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration [SAMHSA], (2008). The report estimated 27 million children in the U.S live with a parent who abuses or is dependent upon alcohol or illicit drugs (National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse [CASA], (2005). According to SAMHSA (2008), almost 14% of children living with a substance abusing parent were five years or younger, compared with 9.9% of youths who were aged 12–17 years. Therefore, there is parental crisis in the fight against drug and substance abuse among the youth in the United States since children begin to experiment use of drugs and substances at an early age as they try to imitate their parents.

In Africa, the problem of drug abuse has been prevalent for years. In Nigeria for instance, abuse of drugs such as alcohol, tobacco, bhang and Khat have been on the increase among youth with varying prevalence rates found for both overall and specific drug of abuse (Oshodi, Aina & Anajole, 2010; Abasiubong, Alphonsus & Uwemendimbuk, 2012). South Africa is another state that has been badly affected by the issues of drug and substance abuse (International Narcotics Control Board, 2003; WHO, 2011). In Tanzania a study by Simbee (2012) revealed that in Dar-es-Salaam, the prevalence of current drug abuse among youth was 5.1% and that the abuse was higher by 6.2% among male youth than female. However, the governments and partner organizations or agencies have come up with myriad of programmes to minimize drug and substance uptake among the youth in their respective nations. Some of the programmes include: rehabilitation programmes, drug abuse awareness campaigns, community education programmes, and religious programmes among others. For instances, a report by Rwanda's Times Reporter (2018) revealed that faith-based organizations have laid out strategies to reinforce the national efforts in the fight against illicit drugs. This was announced during a meeting of members from different religious denominations in the country organized by Rwanda National Police (RNP) and the ministries of Health and Youth, as well as Rwanda Governance Board (RGB), held at the Police headquarters in Kacyiru in January 23, 2018. Among the resolutions raised in the forum include: making awareness against illicit drugs part of their evangelism in their respective religious denominations, jointly taking awareness in youth groups and schools; engaging mentors including parents and teachers in parental care and proper upbringing of children and supporting victims or addicts in rehabilitation and reintegration process.

Drugs and substances abuse is a major social problem in Kenya (NACADA, 2012). Half of drug abusers in Kenya are aged between 10–19 years with over 60% residing in urban areas and 21% in rural areas (UNODC, 2012). According to the National Authority for the Campaign against Alcohol and Drug Abuse (2012), 13 percent of teenagers aged 10 to 14 have used an intoxicating substance, such as alcohol. This is an indication of poor parental guidance on behavior change

among the children and adolescent. The most commonly abused drugs in Kenya are alcohol, tobacco, bhang (marijuana), glue, miraa (khat) and psychotropic drugs (NACADA, 2004). It is also worrying that of the 15 to 24 year youth in Kenya, 11.7 percent abuse alcohol, 6.2 percent are regular users of tobacco products, 4.7 percent chew khat, while 1.5 percent smoke bhang (marijuana). This has called for the government and Non-profit organizations to partner with faith based organizations to prevent this alarming rate of drug and substance abuse among young people in Kenya.

The use of religion and spirituality in preventing and treating substance abuse has been well established across the world (Wallace, Myers & Osai, 2015). According to Miller (1999), the possible ways religion may influence substance use and recovery include establishing moral order, providing opportunities to acquire learned competencies, and providing social and organizational ties. This implies that faith based organizations can work in partnership with other organizations to prevent drug and substance abuse in Kenya. It is against this background that the current paper examined the opportunities for faith based organizations in substance use prevention in Christian perspectives.

### **Opportunities for Faith Based Organizations in Substance Use Prevention**

The church's role as outlined in the Holy Bible is not just concentrated on the spiritual wellbeing of the people in the community. Jesus himself cared for the people he ministered to, making sure to feed them, heal them and even raise the dead. Particularly in the current situation where substance abuse especially among youth is on increase, the church and faith based organizations have opportunities to play in the society in the fight against substance abuse. Some of the opportunities of faith based organizations in the prevention of substance use that were covered in the paper include: creation of public awareness, community mobilization, offering rehabilitation services, promoting crisis counseling, and conducting mentorship programmes.

#### **Creation of Public Awareness**

Public awareness campaigns play a significant role towards substance use prevention. Most churches use social awareness campaigns as popular interventions in reducing drug and substance abuse among the youth in the community and learning institutions across the world. This program has been proved to be in influence learners' beliefs and behavior towards drug abuse. According to Githinji (2004), a number of churches in Kenya such as African Inland Church (AIC) and Anglican Church of Kenya (ACK) have established faith based organizations that are helping in training and teaching about the dangers of drug abuse in schools and universities through their outreach ministries. Basing on this program, the youth are taught how to reach others through peer counseling. For instance, the Anglican Church of Kenya (ACK) launched drug abuse preventive programs for the youth and adults in each diocese and has organized spiritual crusades to fight drug abuse in schools since 2003. Therefore, religious groups such as FBOs have a critical role to play in the society in creating awareness on the negative impacts of drug and substance abuse.

The faith based organizations have organized seminars for both adults and youth in social places like churches to promote moral values in the society. This plays a significant role in substance use prevention. While addressing a church seminar on the drug problem in Kenya, Bishop Nzimbi (2004) emphasized that the church has a biblical mandate, an obligation and commitment to be involved in the war against drugs and against the vices affecting society. Similarly, Nzwili (2018) compiled a report on a Kenyan Catholic bishop who appealed to the government to prioritize the fight against drugs and alcohol abuse in the country, saying the East African nation was losing a section of young learners to the crisis. In the same report, the chairman of the bishops' commission on education said the drugs were being encouraged in the schools by some adults for self-gain. According to the bishop, interventional education programmes on prevention in schools could help alleviate the problem and he assured that Catholic Church is ready to collaborate with the government and other agencies in this regard. This is a clear evident that the agencies entrusted to run substance use prevention programmes in Kenya are overwhelmed, thus, there is a great need for the religious based groups or faith based organizations to fully collaborate in the awareness programmes in the society.

### **Community Mobilization**

Faith based organizations employ community mobilization as one the key programs in substance use prevention. According to Wagenaar (1999), this strategy is intended to increase community willingness and engage communities in prevention activities and actions to moderate use of harmful legal products among youth. Churches demonstrate that effective community mobilization can support prevention actions and engage more community members. Hence, an effective community mobilization is essential to implementing a mutually supportive mix of prevention approaches such as health strategies and a school-based substance use prevention curriculum.

Faith-based organizations with a foundation in community welfare and social service delivery are particularly prominent development agents in the society (United Nations Population Fund, [UNFPA], 2008). Promoting behaviour change often begins by identifying religious leaders who have the capacity and legitimacy to motivate and mobilize communities. Moreover, partnering with local religious leaders or agents of change has repeatedly become an invaluable strategy in gaining wider acceptance and ownership of programmes. Carefully developed advocacy campaigns, closely tailored to the religious and cultural contexts in which they are launched, make it easier to deal with sensitive subjects in the society like substance use prevention. Incorporating language that appreciates the nuances of religion and religious sensitivities is sometimes critical to the creation of spaces in which there is understanding and support for programme objectives, with a solid understanding of each other's constraints. Thus, faith-based organizations (FBOs) have the opportunity to combine development and cultural features in a powerful mandate to fight against substance abuse in a society.

Through community mobilization, the church teaches adolescents ways to recognize situations where they are likely to experience peer pressure to use drugs. The youth are taught ways to

avoid or otherwise effectively deal with these high-risk situations in their lives. Participants are taught that they can effectively respond to direct pressure to engage in substance use by knowing what to say and how to deliver what they say in the most effective way possible. Further, the FBOs fully involve and educate parents and guardians who are addicted and those that do not use substances on the associated risks as a strategy to strengthen the foundation of bringing up the children and management of substance abuse by children and adolescent.

### **Promoting Crisis Counseling and Rehabilitation Services**

Faith based organizations play a key role in reducing the burden of drug abuse across the world through counseling and rehabilitation programmes. Church leaders take a role of counseling in the society that is key in substance use prevention, treatment and in providing a safe place for drug and substance users to talk (Galanter, 2002). In collaborations with community leaders, FBOs can ensure that substance users are receiving the education and assistance that they need to lead and maintain healthy lives. In Kenya, there are handfuls of religious based rehabilitation centres that help in transforming the lives of the victims of substance use victims into productive individuals (Nyabuto, 2018). These include: Asumbi Treatment and Rehabilitation Centre, Life Hope Rehabilitation Centre, Ray of Hope, Karira Miracle Rehabilitation Centre, Dawn of Hope Rehabilitation Centre, Reach out Rehabilitation Centre, Good Hope rehabilitation centre, New-Life Rehabilitation Counseling Centre Nairobi and Faith Treatment and Rehabilitation Centres among others.

According to Mulligan (2004), the teachings offered in the religious based rehabilitation centres play a fundamental role in persuading and motivating patients based on the biblical teachings in order to help them stabilize the acute symptoms of the psychiatric illness and/or the drug use disorder. The faith based organizations also motivates patients to continue in treatment once the acute crisis is stabilized or the involuntary commitment expires by offering religious and required social support. Dealing with ambivalence regarding recovery, working through denial of either or both illnesses, and becoming motivated for continued care are other important preventative ways of substance use offered by the FBOs.

### **Conducting Mentorship Programmes**

Mentoring consists of matching an experienced adult follower of Christ with a youth (aged 11 to 17), with the goal of developing soul-friendship and accountability (Union Church, 2018). It fits perfectly with Union Church's mission to make mature followers in all nations for Jesus Christ, through our united lifestyle, witness and mission. Mentoring is an old Christian practice based on the Apostle Paul's own relationship with Timothy: in Acts 16 we learn of Paul's decision to be Timothy's spiritual father. Therefore, a similar concept is applied by the faith based groups as they aim to transform youth and young adults from unhealthy living styles of drug and substance use to better lives in Christ. There are many benefits of a good mentoring program such as role-modeling, faith development, accountability, and deepening ties within the congregation.

As quoted by the Catholic Information Service for Africa [CISA] (2017), a Catholic bishop indicated that there is need to mentor boys to transform them into responsible men by instilling in them the virtues of courage and self-esteem and empowering them to live a value-based life. The bishop was speaking at Shrine of Mary Help of Christians, Don Bosco Upper Hill Catholic Church in Nairobi during the launch of Beacon Boys Project, an initiative aimed at empowering and mentoring the boy child in the society. Therefore, there is an opportunity by the faith based organizations to come up with empowerment and mentorship programmes as a strategy to inspire young people who are hopeless in the society and who have turned to substance abuse as a remedy to their problems. The mentorship programmes may create an economic platform to a good number of them or even instill key entrepreneurial skills that may help unemployed youth to start up their businesses. Further, the FBOs can gather successful youth in the society to run various programmes in order to empower those who are lost in drug and substance use.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, there are a variety of opportunities for faith based organizations in substance use prevention in a Christian perspective. Based on these research findings, the FBOs stand a chance to do more in helping youth and young adults to discard the habit of drug and substance abuse. Furthermore, the FBOs and other interested partners may adopt some of these research findings to do more in touching the lives of young people, especially those affected by alcohol and substance abuse.

The study recommends that Faith Based Organizations should focus on strengthening collaborations, expanding local resources, and building capacity to provide substance abuse prevention, treatment, and mental health services, as well as program management. Additionally, FBOs should upgrade their awareness on drug abuse and effects among the young people by learning more from other sectors, it should for example refer to the various research projects carried out by NACADA on the same subject, among other sectors.

The FBOs should emphasize the biblical approach in tackling drug abuse among the young people by teaching the word of God and acting accordingly, in order to help young drug abusers discard the habit, and to help enhance their moral development. Furthermore, the FBOs should work to improve their provision of a loving and caring community for the victims of drug abuse, which also includes reconciliation with their families by offering counseling and rehabilitation services.

FBOs should promote youth mentorship programmes to empower the young economically and to discourage negative behaviours like substance abuse through promotion of religious values that improves hope among victims. The FBOs should also expand their capacity when tackling drug and substance abuse problem among the young people by partnering more with other sectors. For instance FBOs should appeal for funding and training of its personnel, from governmental and non-governmental organizations.

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