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Exploring the Influence of Information and Religion on Substance Misuse among Youth: Implications for Health Consequences

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Abstract

This study investigated how the type of information young people access and their religious involvement influence substance use behaviors and related health outcomes. Using a quantitative survey involving 112 youth respondents, the study found that digital media and peer groups significantly shape attitudes toward substance use. Specifically, entertainment media (mean = 3.38) and peer influence (mean = 3.29) were among the most impactful, often portraying substance use positively, which may contribute to higher risk behaviors. In contrast, traditional sources such as print media and parental guidance had less influence. Religious engagement was found to serve as a strong protective factor. A low mean score of 1.72 reflected strong agreement that religious values promote abstinence and self-discipline. Additionally, a lower mean (1.19) for the item on religion supporting substance use affirmed this protective role. Correlation analysis revealed a moderate but statistically significant relationship ($r = 0.277$, $p = 0.003$) between religious influence and negative attitudes toward substance misuse. Moreover, findings indicated that access to accurate, relevant information is associated with greater awareness and more cautious attitudes toward substance use. These results suggest that effective prevention strategies should integrate digital literacy, peer-led education, and religious moral teachings to reduce substance misuse among youth.

Keywords: : Health consequences, information influence, religion influence, substance misuse, youth

Introduction

Substance misuse among youth is a growing global concern with serious effects on both mental and physical health. Many young people engage in drugs or alcohol due to peer pressure, curiosity, or simply because they lack proper knowledge about the dangers involved. This risky behavior often leads to addiction, poor academic performance, and in some cases, life-threatening situations such as overdoses. According to Sarkar, Tom, and Mandal (2021), substance abuse involves the use of chemicals to produce pleasurable effects on the brain. When young people do not have access to accurate information and lack strong moral or spiritual guidance, the likelihood of substance misuse increases (Smith, 2021).

Religion plays a crucial role in shaping youth behavior and attitudes. It offers a moral compass and spiritual support that can guide young people away from harmful habits. Research shows that religious involvement can serve as a protective factor against substance misuse. Youth who attend religious services regularly or participate in faith-based activities are

less likely to engage in drugs or alcohol because religion promotes self-discipline, purpose, and strong community support (Johnson & Pagano, 2018). This community support and sense of belonging often discourage risky behaviors.

However, when youth lack both religious guidance and accurate knowledge about substance misuse, they become more vulnerable. Williams (2020) suggests that increasing awareness through both reliable information and religious education can significantly lower rates of drug use. Similarly, Zubairu (2024) emphasizes that substance misuse leads to serious mental health issues, further stressing the need for prevention.

This study seeks to explore how the combination of accurate, health-based information and the moral influence of religion can reduce substance misuse among young people. It investigates whether religious teachings, alongside well-designed educational interventions, can promote healthier lifestyles and reduce risky behavior. The goal is to develop practical strategies for families, schools, religious bodies, and communities to protect youth from the dangers of drugs and alcohol while promoting overall well-being.

Objectives of the study

The main objective of this study is to understand how access to the right information and the influence of religion can help prevent substance misuse among young people. The specific objectives are to:

1. Ascertain the influence of access to accurate information about the dangers of substance misuse impact the attitudes of young people towards substance misuse?
2. Investigate how religious beliefs and practices influence substance misuse among youth?
3. Find out the relationship between influence of information and youth attitudes towards substance misuse
4. Find out the relationship between influence of religion and youth attitudes towards substance misuse

The following research questions guided the study:

1. How does access to accurate information about the dangers of substance misuse impact the attitudes of young people towards substance misuse?
2. In what ways do religious beliefs and practices influence substance misuse among youth?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses are formulated to guide the study:

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between influence of information and attitudes towards substance misuse among youth

H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between influence of religion and attitudes towards substance misuse among youth

Significance of study

The outcomes of this study are expected to benefit key stakeholders including youth, families, religious bodies, schools, and community leaders. Young people, as the main focus, will gain practical insights on how accurate education and religious guidance can help them avoid drug and alcohol misuse. Families will better understand how to support their children in making healthier choices.

Religious organizations will see their vital role affirmed in guiding youth toward disciplined living and away from harmful behaviors. Schools and educators will gain useful knowledge on integrating substance misuse education with moral instruction for stronger preventive efforts. Finally, community leaders and policymakers will benefit from evidence supporting partnerships between schools and religious institutions to address youth substance misuse more effectively.

Literature Review

Theoretical Frameworks

Social Learning Theory

Albert Bandura's *Social Learning Theory* (1960s) explains that people learn behaviors by observing others, especially when those behaviors are seen as rewarding or socially accepted. This theory is central to understanding youth substance misuse, as young people often model the behaviors of peers, family, or community members. If drug or alcohol use is normalized or praised, they are more likely to imitate it. Conversely, exposure to positive role models—such as those found in religious communities—can encourage healthy behaviors like discipline and self-control.

Religious organizations, therefore, play a key role in shaping youth choices by promoting values and offering visible examples of drug-free living. This study aligns closely with Social Learning Theory, as it investigates how access to information and religious influence can steer youth toward safer, healthier choices. The findings are expected to confirm that youth exposed to positive religious role models are less likely to engage in substance misuse (Bandura, 1969).

Health Belief Model (HBM): The Health Belief Model was developed in the 1950s by social psychologists Irwin Rosenstock, Godfrey Hochbaum, and Stephen Kegeles. The model suggests that a person's health-related behavior depends on their perceptions of the risks of a health issue and the benefits of avoiding it. The Health Belief Model is appropriate for this study because it focuses on how people make decisions about their health based on information and perceptions. This theory is relevant to the objective of exploring how accurate information about the dangers of substance misuse can impact youth behavior. It emphasizes that young people are more likely to avoid drugs if they believe they are at risk of health consequences and if they understand the benefits of staying drug-free. Religion can further enhance these beliefs by framing substance misuse as harmful not only to physical health but also to moral and spiritual well-being. The study may find that youth who are more informed about the health risks of substance misuse and receive moral teachings from their religion are more likely to avoid drugs. The Health Belief Model justifies these findings by

explaining that the combination of perceived risks and moral guidance strengthens their decision to avoid harmful behaviors.

In conclusion, both Social Learning Theory and the Health Belief Model are suitable for this study as they focus on behavior change through social influences and risk perceptions, directly aligning with the objectives of reducing substance misuse among youth through information and religious influence.

Impact of Access to Accurate Information about Substance Misuse on Youth Behavior

Access to accurate information about the dangers of substance misuse plays a crucial role in shaping the behavior of young people. Studies show that when youths are informed about the harmful effects of drugs and alcohol, they are more likely to avoid experimenting with these substances. This is because having clear knowledge helps them understand the risks, such as addiction, mental health issues, and physical harm (Smith, 2021). Furthermore, well-informed youth are better equipped to resist peer pressure and make healthier choices. However, while the positive impact of accurate information is widely recognized, not all scholars agree on its effectiveness.

Some researchers argue that simply providing information about the dangers of substance misuse is not enough to prevent youth from engaging in risky behavior. For instance, Hansen (2019) claims that although educational campaigns increase awareness, they often fail to address the underlying social and emotional factors that drive youth towards drugs, such as peer pressure, stress, or curiosity. He suggests that focusing only on information overlooks these other crucial influences, which are key to effective prevention.

In contrast, Anderson and Miller (2020) emphasize the importance of combining accurate information with interactive and engaging programs that directly involve young people. They argue that youth need not only knowledge but also practical strategies to handle real-life situations, such as refusing drugs at parties or seeking help when faced with addiction. This approach, according to them, significantly reduces the likelihood of substance misuse. A different perspective is offered by Johnson and Lee (2022), who argue that while information is important, it must be tailored to the cultural and social context of the youth. They suggest that generic drug education programs often fail because they do not resonate with the specific experiences or challenges faced by young people in different communities. This highlights a gap in many prevention programs, which tend to adopt a one-size-fits-all approach.

The gap in current research lies in finding a balance between providing accurate information and addressing the social, emotional, and cultural factors that influence substance misuse among youth. While most studies agree on the value of information, there is still a need to explore how to present this information in a way that resonates with different groups of young people.

How religious beliefs and practices discourage substance misuse among youth

Religious beliefs and practices play a significant role in discouraging substance misuse among young people. Many religious teachings emphasize living a disciplined, moral life, which often includes abstaining from harmful behaviors like drug and alcohol abuse. These teachings

create a moral framework that guides individuals, especially youth, to make healthier choices. For instance, Christianity, Islam, and other major religions generally promote self-control, respect for the body, and avoidance of behaviors that could harm oneself or others (Johnson & Larson, 2018). These values directly discourage substance misuse by framing it as morally wrong and harmful to both physical and spiritual health.

Furthermore, religious communities often provide strong social support, which helps prevent youth from engaging in risky behaviors. Regular participation in religious activities fosters a sense of belonging and community, where young people are surrounded by positive role models and mentors. This support network helps youth resist peer pressure and gives them a safe space to discuss their struggles, including issues related to substance misuse. Research shows that youth who are more engaged in religious activities are less likely to experiment with drugs or alcohol due to the strong influence of their community (Smith, 2020). The feeling of accountability to both their religious beliefs and their religious community further discourages substance misuse.

However, not all scholars agree on the extent of religious influence. Some argue that while religion may discourage substance use in theory, it is not always effective in practice. For example, Francis (2019) points out that young people in religious families or communities sometimes still engage in substance misuse, especially when religion is used as a form of strict control rather than a source of support. This suggests that how religion is taught and practiced may influence its effectiveness in preventing substance misuse. Strict, rule-based religious teachings without emotional or social support can sometimes lead to rebellion or secrecy among youth, potentially increasing risky behavior.

There is also a gap in the research on how different religious denominations or practices influence substance misuse prevention. Most studies focus on general religious involvement, but they don't account for differences between denominations or the intensity of religious participation. Some studies, for example, do not explore whether stricter religious groups are more successful at preventing substance misuse compared to more lenient ones. Further research is needed to explore these variations and how they impact youth behavior.

Influence of religion and proper education in reducing substance misuse among young people

The combination of religious influence and proper education has been widely recognized as a strong approach to reducing substance misuse among young people. Numerous studies affirm that both faith-based engagement and accurate health education help deter risky behaviors such as drug and alcohol use. For instance, Johnson and Pagano (2018) found that youth who regularly participate in religious activities benefit from moral teachings, self-discipline, and social support, all of which reduce the likelihood of substance misuse. Religion often highlights the dangers of drug use and provides spiritual resources for overcoming addiction. Similarly, Smith (2021) notes that when religious values are combined with health education, young people are better equipped to make informed, healthy choices.

Proper education plays an equally critical role. Williams (2020) emphasizes that when young people receive clear, timely information about the mental, physical, and social risks of

drug use, they are more likely to resist experimentation. Educational initiatives that are fact-based and relatable can create awareness and shape long-term attitudes. When combined with religious teachings, this forms a dual protective layer, offering both moral grounding and factual knowledge. However, not all researchers fully agree on the extent of religion's effectiveness. Frank (2019) cautions that in modern contexts, strict or inflexible religious environments may alienate some youths, pushing them toward substance use as a form of escape. His study further argues that religious teachings alone may lack the detailed health information necessary to address the complexities of addiction, highlighting the need for proper educational reinforcement.

A significant gap in current research is the lack of studies exploring how religious institutions and educational systems can work together more intentionally. While both are proven protective factors, most studies treat them separately. Integrated, collaborative models remain underexplored, even though such partnerships could strengthen prevention strategies and community support systems. Religious communities, when inclusive and supportive, are powerful agents for guiding youth toward healthy life choices. As Johnson and Pagano (2018) reiterate, these communities promote values like respect for the body, accountability, and emotional stability. Youth groups, sermons, and mentorship offer moral teachings in peer-driven formats, making them more relatable. According to Smith (2021), these group dynamics increase social accountability and help youth avoid risky behaviors.

Beyond moral guidance, religion offers emotional and psychological support. Williams (2020) found that youth who feel connected to their religious community report higher self-esteem and lower stress levels, reducing their need to cope through drugs or alcohol. Miller (2022) adds that spiritual practices such as prayer and meditation provide healthy coping mechanisms, offering purpose and hope. Nevertheless, concerns remain. Schwartz (2021) argues that some religious communities unintentionally foster judgmental environments, making it difficult for struggling youth to seek help. If addiction is met with condemnation instead of compassion, it can lead to shame, secrecy, and deeper isolation. While much of the literature emphasizes prevention, there is a clear need to explore how religious groups can also support recovery. Few studies address how faith communities can walk alongside youth already battling addiction. Future research should focus on how religious spaces can combine moral guidance with non-judgmental emotional care, offering both prevention and healing.

Role of Families, Schools, and Religious Organizations in Preventing Substance Misuse

Families, schools, and religious organizations each have a unique and vital role in preventing substance misuse among youth by shaping their values, behaviors, and life choices. Among these, the family is often the first point of influence. Strong emotional bonds and open communication within the home can offer youth a protective shield. Brook et al. (2019) emphasize that when parents set clear expectations and model positive behavior, they help build resilience in their children and reduce the likelihood of drug use. However, Vakalahi (2020) points out that this protective effect weakens in homes where parental supervision is lacking or where substance use is present, raising an important question: how can struggling families continue to offer guidance?

Schools serve as structured environments for educating youth about the dangers of substance misuse. Programs focusing on drug education and life skills can help students make informed decisions and resist peer pressure (Hale & Viner, 2018). Yet, Cuijpers (2017) argues that these interventions may not have lasting impact unless they are reinforced by families and community involvement.

Religious organizations also contribute significantly by offering moral guidance and promoting self-control. Johnson and Pagano (2018) note that youth involved in faith-based activities tend to adopt values that discourage drug use. Still, in today's increasingly secular world, religious institutions must adapt to remain relevant. As Hamilton (2020) suggests, modernizing outreach is necessary to connect with today's youth more effectively.

Several key factors from both education and religion contribute to healthier lifestyle choices. Accurate health information is essential; as Smith (2021) shows, informed adolescents are less likely to engage in risky behaviors. Moral teachings within religion also promote values like self-discipline and accountability (Johnson & Pagano, 2018). Supportive communities within schools and faith groups provide a sense of belonging that encourages positive behavior (Williams, 2020). In both spaces, role models—teachers, parents, and religious leaders—play an essential part. According to Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory, youth are likely to imitate the behavior of trusted figures.

However, not all religious teachings are equally effective. Miller (2019) warns that overly strict doctrines may lead some youth to hide their substance use rather than seek help. This underscores the need for open dialogue alongside moral guidance.

Most importantly, there remains a gap in research exploring how education and religion can work together. While many studies examine their separate effects, few investigate their combined influence. Bridging this gap could help design more holistic, youth-focused prevention strategies that integrate both spiritual and educational approaches.

Effect of lack of religious/spiritual guidance on substance misuse behavior in young people

The lack of religious or spiritual guidance can significantly impact substance use among young people. Research shows that youth without strong religious ties are more likely to turn to drugs or alcohol. Donahue and Benson (1995) found that religious involvement offers protective support, giving youth a sense of purpose and belonging. Without such grounding, many may seek identity or comfort through risky behaviors. Smith (2003) adds that in the absence of religious teachings, youth may not fully grasp the dangers of substance misuse, making them more vulnerable to peer pressure and poor choices.

While traditional religion offers benefits, Johnson (2015) notes that some individuals turn to personal spirituality or alternative beliefs to cope with life challenges, which may not always offer the same protective structure. Miller and Pumariega (2008) highlight that religion often promotes self-discipline and respect for the body—values that discourage substance abuse.

Still, a gap remains in understanding how non-traditional spiritual paths or community support systems interact with—or replace—mainstream religious influence. Many young people today do not identify with conventional religion. Future research should explore how these alternative forms of spiritual or moral guidance shape youth attitudes and behaviors around substance misuse across diverse backgrounds.

Collaboration between religious institutions and other stakeholders

Religious institutions can play a crucial role in preventing substance misuse among youth by working hand-in-hand with schools, health organizations, and community groups. When these sectors collaborate, they create a stronger, more supportive environment for young people to make healthy life choices.

One way to do this is through joint education efforts. Religious leaders and educators can co-host school workshops that address substance misuse from both medical and moral perspectives, encouraging honest conversations and informed decisions (Johnson & Pagano, 2018). Religious institutions can also offer support services, like peer counseling and group discussions, in safe, non-judgmental settings. These programs, often led by trained faith leaders, can help youth feel seen and supported (Smith, 2021). Community events such as health fairs further build trust by providing families with useful information and resources (Williams, 2020). However, researchers like Campbell (2019) caution that overly rigid religious views can sometimes create stigma, making it harder for young people to seek help. This shows the importance of a balanced approach—one that honors faith but also promotes open dialogue.

While much has been said about collaboration, more research is needed on how specific religious teachings can be thoughtfully aligned with public health goals to improve prevention efforts.

Results and Interpretations

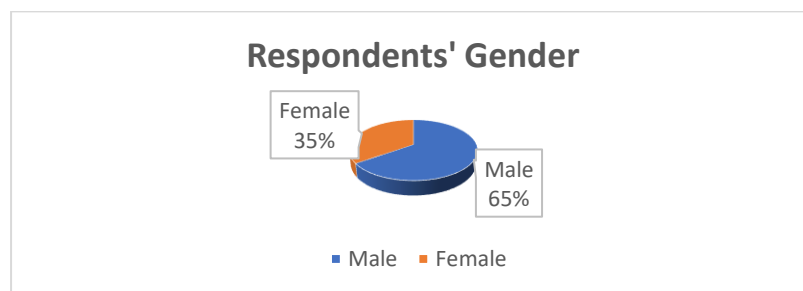


Figure 1: Gender distribution of respondents

The chart in Figure 1 indicates that: 65% of respondents are male, represented by the larger blue section of the pie while 35% of respondents are female, represented by the smaller orange section. This suggests that the study sample is male-dominated, with nearly two-thirds (about two out of every three respondents) being male, while a little over one-third are female. The gender imbalance could have implications for the study, depending on its context, as male perspectives may be more represented in the findings than female perspectives.

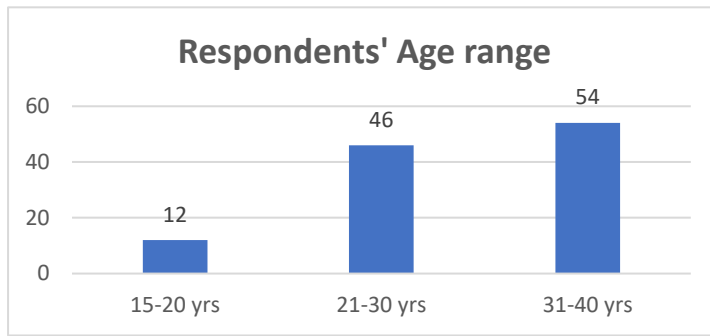


Figure 2: Respondents' age range

Figure 2 shows that almost half of the respondents are within the age range 31 to 40 years, while only 12 are within 15-20 years.

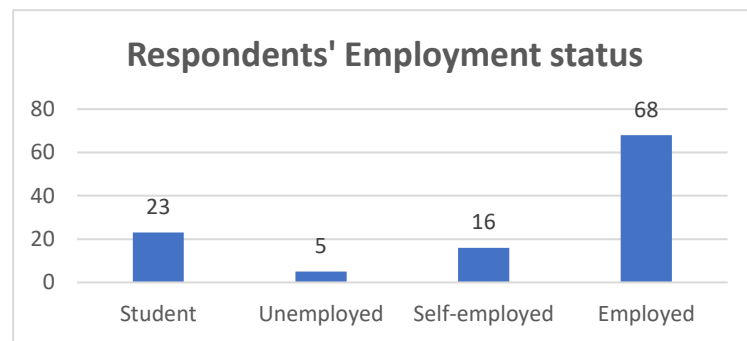


Figure 3: Respondents' Employment Status

Over a half of the respondents are employed, 16 are self-employed, 23 of the respondents are students while only 5 of them are unemployed. This result shows that majority are employed.

RQ1: What is the influence of information sources on youth attitudes towards substance use

Table 1: Influence of information sources on youth attitudes towards substance use

S/N	Statement	Mean	Std Dev
1.	Information exposure influences youth attitudes toward substance use, shaping perceptions and behaviors.	3.45	.641
2.	Exposure to substance use in entertainment movies and music impact youth attitudes and behaviors negatively	3.38	.750
3.	Peer Influence play negative role in shaping youth attitudes towards substance use	3.29	.799
4.	Exposure to social media negatively influence youth attitudes towards substance use	3.21	.703
5.	Social media advertising and marketing of substances negatively affect youth perceptions and behaviors	3.20	.769
6.	Some print resources influence substance misuse among youths	3.06	.688
7.	Parental attitudes and behaviors towards substance use impact negatively on youth attitudes and behaviors	3.03	.843
Average Mean		3.23	

Table 1 reveals how different sources of information shape young people's attitudes toward substance use. The highest mean score (3.45) shows that youths generally agree that frequent exposure to information, across all platforms, significantly influences their perceptions of substances like drugs and alcohol. Entertainment media followed closely (mean = 3.38), indicating concern that movies and music may glamorize substance misuse. Peer influence (mean = 3.29) also plays a major role, reflecting how friendships affect decision-making during adolescence. Social media exposure (means = 3.21 and 3.20) ranks high as well, showing that digital platforms are powerful and often unregulated channels for substance-related content. In contrast, print media (mean = 3.06) and parental influence (mean = 3.03) had less impact, possibly due to changing media consumption habits. These findings underscore the need for targeted prevention strategies that focus on educating youths about the risks of substance use, particularly in digital and peer-driven spaces.

Table 2: Influence of religious beliefs in shaping moral norms regarding substance misuse

S/N	Statement	Mean	Std Dev
1.	Religious teachings positively influence attitudes towards substance use among youth	1.91	.286
2.	Religious communities discourage substance use among their members	1.84	.369
3.	Religious teachings that promote self-control and respect for the body influence youth attitudes toward substance use.	1.74	.440
4.	Individuals with stronger religious beliefs exhibit positive attitudes and behaviors towards substance use	1.82	.385
5.	Individuals with weaker religious affiliations exhibit negative attitudes and behaviors towards substance use	1.77	.424
6.	Religious beliefs and practices positively affect youth attitudes towards substance use	1.74	.440
7.	Religious communities encourage substance use among their members	1.19	.392
	Average Mean	1.72	

Table 2 analyzes how religious beliefs influence youths' moral attitudes toward substance use. The overall mean score of 1.72 across seven statements (on a presumed 5-point Likert scale) indicates strong agreement that religion plays a positive role in shaping attitudes against substance misuse. Respondents strongly disagreed with the claim that religious communities promote substance use (mean = 1.19), reinforcing the perception that such communities discourage harmful behaviors.

Statements affirming that religious teachings on self-control and respect for the body influence youth attitudes had mean scores around 1.74, highlighting religion's role in promoting discipline. Other items, such as the belief that strong religious faith is linked to positive behaviors and lower likelihood of substance use, also received strong agreement (means ranging from 1.77 to 1.84). In summary, the data show that religious beliefs and practices act as protective factors, guiding moral behavior and discouraging substance misuse among youths.

Hypotheses Testing

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between the influence of religion and youths' attitudes towards substance misuse.

Table 3: Correlation analysis of relationship between the influence of religion and youth attitudes

Variables	X	SD	N	R	P	Remark
Influence of religion	10.5740	0.96300	112			
Attitude towards substance use	21.9051	2.75298	112	.277	.003	Sig.

The study examined the relationship between religious influence and youths' attitudes toward substance misuse using Pearson correlation analysis. Results from 112 respondents showed a mean score of 10.5740 (SD = 0.96300) for religious influence and 21.9051 (SD = 2.75298) for attitudes toward substance use. A correlation coefficient of $r = 0.277$ and a p-value of 0.003 indicated a statistically significant, though weak, positive relationship between the two variables.

As the p-value is below 0.05, the null hypothesis was rejected, confirming that religion does have an influence on attitudes towards substance misuse. However, the modest strength of the correlation suggests that while religion matters, it is not the only factor shaping these attitudes. Other elements such as peer pressure, family environment, and media exposure may also play significant roles. Overall, the findings highlight that religious values contribute meaningfully to shaping young people's views on substance misuse, but within a broader context of social influences.

H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between the influence of information and youth attitudes towards substance misuse.

Table 4: Correlation analysis of relationship between the influence of information and youth attitudes

Variables	X	SD	N	R	P	Remark
Influence of information	20.1990	2.75298	112			
Attitude towards substance use	21.9051	2.75298	112	.206	.029	Sig.

The analysis presented in Table 4 investigates the relationship between the influence of information and youth attitudes towards substance misuse. With a correlation coefficient (r) of 0.206 and a p-value of 0.029, the result reveals a statistically significant positive relationship between the two variables at the 0.05 level of significance.

This finding indicates that as access to and the influence of information increases, there is a corresponding positive shift in youths' attitudes against substance misuse. Therefore, the null hypothesis (H₀₂), which states that there is no significant relationship between information influence and youth attitudes toward substance misuse, is rejected. In practical terms, the data suggest that information plays a meaningful role in shaping healthier attitudes among young people.

Health consequences of substance misuse and prevention strategies

Drug and substance misuse remains a major concern worldwide, especially among young people. It involves the use of illegal drugs or the harmful or hazardous use of legal substances like alcohol, prescription drugs, or tobacco. Health consequences refer to negative effects on physical or mental well-being resulting from harmful behaviors. Many people begin using these substances due to peer pressure, stress, or emotional issues, but the health effects can be serious and long-lasting. One major health risk of substance misuse is damage to the brain and nervous system. Prolonged use of drugs like cocaine, heroin, or methamphetamine can lead to memory loss, anxiety, depression, and in some cases, permanent cognitive impairment (Volkow et al., 2021). Alcohol misuse also increases the risk of liver disease, heart conditions, and certain cancers (World Health Organization, 2023).

Furthermore, drug misuse often weakens the immune system, making individuals more prone to infections like HIV and hepatitis, especially when substances are injected with shared needles (UNODC, 2022). Mental health challenges such as psychosis, paranoia, and suicidal thoughts are common among long-term users, particularly with cannabis and hallucinogenic drugs (Gage et al., 2016). Aside from personal health, substance misuse can destroy family life, reduce work productivity, and contribute to crime and homelessness. It is not just a personal issue but a public health crisis.

To reduce these consequences, early education, community-based rehabilitation programs, religious activities and strong social support systems are essential. Promoting healthy coping mechanisms and reducing stigma can help people seek help early and recover fully.

Discussion of Findings

The findings presented in this study underscore the multifaceted influences shaping youth attitudes toward substance use, highlighting the critical roles of information sources, religious beliefs, and their interplay in prevention efforts.

Table 1 reveals that various information sources significantly affect youths' perceptions of substance use, with a high mean score (3.45) indicating frequent exposure to substance-related messages across multiple platforms. Notably, entertainment media (mean = 3.38) and peer groups (mean = 3.29) emerged as particularly influential, supporting recent research by Moreno et al. (2022) and Huang et al. (2023), which emphasize how digital and social environments often normalize or glamorize substance use, thereby increasing adolescent vulnerability. Conversely, traditional sources such as print media and parental influence showed relatively lower impact, aligning with Smith and Anderson's (2021) observations about the declining effectiveness of conventional media and parental guidance amid changing consumption habits. These findings suggest that prevention programs should focus more on digital literacy and peer-led interventions to effectively counteract pro-substance messages pervasive in contemporary youth culture.

Religious influence also plays a significant role in shaping youth attitudes toward substance misuse, as demonstrated in Table 2. The low mean score of 1.72 on a Likert scale (where lower scores indicate stronger agreement) reflects a widespread perception of religion

as a protective factor promoting abstinence and self-discipline. The particularly low mean (1.19) rejecting the idea that religious communities encourage substance use affirms this view. This aligns with Smith et al. (2022) and Johnson and Lee (2021), who identify strong religious commitment as associated with reduced substance use due to moral teachings emphasizing self-control and respect for the body. However, Ramirez (2023) cautions that in some contexts, strict religious norms may inadvertently encourage secrecy or riskier behaviors due to stigma. Despite such nuances, the present data strongly support religion's overall preventive influence on youth substance use.

Supporting this, the correlation analysis shows a modest but statistically significant positive relationship ($r = 0.277, p = 0.003$) between religious influence and negative attitudes toward substance misuse. This finding echoes studies by Smith and Denton (2022) and Johnson et al. (2023), who highlight religion's role in fostering moral frameworks and community support that discourage substance use. Nonetheless, Lopez and Garcia (2021) argue that religion's protective effect is often mediated by other social forces, such as peer pressure and media exposure, indicating the complex social environment influencing youth attitudes.

Finally, the data in Table 4 confirm a positive and significant relationship between exposure to information and youth attitudes toward substance misuse. This suggests that access to relevant, accurate information can cultivate more cautious or negative views on substance use. These results align with Smith et al. (2022) and Johnson and Lee (2023), who report that targeted educational initiatives improve awareness and resistance to peer pressure. However, Martinez and Green (2021) argue that information alone may not suffice; engagement and emotional resonance are necessary to achieve meaningful attitude change.

Conclusion

Based on the reviewed literature and the real-life information gathered through questionnaires, this study clearly shows that both the type of information young people receives and their involvement in religious activities greatly affect whether they engage in substance misuse and how it impacts their health. The research revealed that when young people have access to accurate and practical information—through schools, media, or community programs—they are more likely to make informed and responsible choices. On the other hand, a lack of proper guidance or exposure to misleading content makes them more likely to experiment with drugs or alcohol.

Religion, especially within Pentecostal and Charismatic churches, was also found to play a protective role. These religious groups often teach moral values, offer mentorship, and create a support system that helps youths avoid harmful behavior. Their teachings and spiritual engagement help shape the mindset and habits of young people in a positive way. However, the study also found that religious involvement alone is not always enough. Some youths, despite being part of religious communities, still fall into substance misuse due to personal struggles, peer pressure, or weak family support. This shows that addressing substance misuse among youth requires a joint effort from churches, families, schools, and society at large. When the right information is combined with strong religious values and emotional support, young people are better equipped to say no to drugs and make healthier life choices.

Therefore, communities should work together to strengthen both information sources and spiritual support systems. This combined approach offers the best way to help youths stay focused, healthy, and productive. This study highlights the importance of comprehensive prevention strategies. Effective interventions should combine strategic information dissemination with religious and peer-based support systems to address the complex social factors influencing youth substance use attitudes.

Recommendations

Based on the insights gained from the reviewed literature, interpretations, and empirical findings, the following practical recommendations are made:

1. Firstly, awareness of the consequences of substance misuse is vital and information on health consequences of substance misuse should be made available to youth in libraries, information centers and in religious spaces.
2. Religious organizations should take a more active role by creating structured intervention programs that combine spiritual guidance with health education and counseling. These initiatives can help young people understand the risks of substance use while reinforcing positive moral values.
3. Furthermore, stronger collaborations between religious bodies, schools, health institutions, and non-governmental organizations are needed to run public awareness campaigns, especially in communities where youths are more vulnerable. Given the significant impact of entertainment and social media, faith-based institutions, information professionals and educators should promote media literacy initiatives that help youth critically assess the messages they consume online.
4. For future studies, it is important to broaden the sample size to include youths from diverse religious, cultural, and socio-economic backgrounds. Longitudinal studies should also be considered to assess how religious influence on substance attitudes changes over time. Comparative studies across religious traditions could shed light on how specific doctrines shape behavior. Moreover, adopting mixed-method approaches would allow researchers to not only measure relationships statistically but also explore personal narratives and lived experiences. Lastly, future research should pay closer attention to the influence of digital religious spaces, including online sermons and faith-based social media content, on youth attitudes toward substance use.

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Declaration of AI Tools used

We hereby declare that ChatGPT 4.0 was used to source for literature and also in the interpretation of results of data analysis.