



# Understanding the Response of Christian Religion in Curbing the Menace of Drug Abuse in Taraba State, Nigeria

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**Abstract:** Drug abuse has emerged as a significant social and public health challenge in Taraba State, Nigeria. This study examines the response of Christian organisation in addressing drug abuse. The work adopted quantitative survey method, data were collected from 384 respondents with religious leaders, community representatives, and individuals affected by drug abuse. Findings reveal a high prevalence of drug abuse in Taraba State, Nigeria, with 67.2% of respondents acknowledging it's widespread, and 65.3% perceiving an increasing trend over recent years. The study identifies key drivers of drug abuse, notably, 58.2% of respondent's link drug abuse to rising crime and violence, while 64.8% highlight its adverse effects on family and economic productivity. Christian organizations play a pivotal role in curbing drug abuse through awareness campaigns, faith-based rehabilitation programs, religious counselling, and support groups. The study finds that 56.9% of respondents recognize the contribution of awareness campaigns, while 66.1% acknowledge the role of religious counselling in discouraging drug abuse. Faith-based rehabilitation programs also receive positive assessments, with 58.7% of respondents viewing them as effective tools for addiction recovery. However, key challenges persist, including insufficient funding (51.3%), limited community involvement (52.9%), stigma surrounding addiction (62.9%), and a shortage of trained personnel (64.6%). Furthermore, inadequate collaboration between Christian organizations and government agencies is identified as a major obstacle to the success of faith-based interventions. The study concludes that while Christian organizations provide valuable support mechanisms for individuals battling drug abuse, their efforts require greater financial resources, increased community engagement, enhanced training for personnel, and stronger partnerships with government agencies. The study recommended among others that, policy integration between religious and governmental agencies, aid and improved access to rehabilitation services.

**Keywords:** Drug Abuse, Christian Organization, Youth, Religion, Social Control, Taraba State.

## INTRODUCTION

Drug abuse has escalated into significant societal problems in Nigeria, particularly among the youth, impacting both individuals and communities in profound ways [1]. Similarly, the prevalence of drug abuse has reached alarming levels, drawing attention from health authorities and policymakers alike [2]. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the statistics surrounding substance abuse are troubling, revealing that these issues pose serious health risks

and contribute to numerous societal challenges [3]. More recent studies clearly reveal persisting high rates of drug abuse especially among the youths [4].

The use and misuse of substances such as marijuana and various psychoactive drugs have become rampant in many regions of Nigeria, creating a ripple effect that extends beyond the individual users to affect families and communities at large [5]. The consequences of substance abuse are multifaceted; they include a rise in crime rates, an increase in health problems, and the erosion of social structures. For instance, communities plagued by high levels of drug abuse often experience a breakdown in family units, leading to further social instability and increased vulnerability among children and other dependents.

Moreover, the relationship between substance abuse and crime is particularly concerning. Studies have shown that areas with high rates of drug abuse often see a corresponding rise in criminal activities, including theft, violence, and trafficking [6-8]. This not only threatens public safety but also places an additional burden on law enforcement and the justice system, which are often ill-equipped to handle the complexities of drug abused related offenses. Health-wise, the implications of substance abuse are equally dire. Individuals who engage in heavy drug use are at a higher risk for a range of health issues, including mental health disorders, liver disease, and infectious diseases linked to risky behaviors. As a result, the healthcare system faces increased pressure to address these challenges, diverting resources from other critical areas of public health [9][10].

The interplay between religion and substance abuse prevention is well-established, as faith-based institutions provide moral teachings and communal support systems that can influence behavior [11]. Religious teachings, especially within Christianity, commonly emphasize abstinence from substances that impair judgment and moral responsibility. Studies show that religious involvement significantly lowers the likelihood of substance abuse by promoting adherence to ethical guidelines and self-discipline [12]. The Christian religion, in particular, has a history of fostering social norms that discourage behaviour like drug use, thereby potentially acting as a protective barrier against addiction.

The urgency to tackle the menace of drug abuse is underscored by these alarming trends. Addressing this issue requires a multifaceted approach that combines public health initiatives, community engagement, and effective policy-making. It is essential not only to provide treatment and rehabilitation for those affected but also to implement preventive measures that educate the youth and promote healthier lifestyle choices. The involvement of various stakeholders, including government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and religious institutions, will be crucial in creating a comprehensive strategy to combat substance abuse in in Taraba state and Nigeria at large.

However, there is limited research on how Christian churches specifically address substance abuse in Taraba State, Nigeria. This study aims to explore the Christian religion's response in curbing the rising cases of drug abuse within this state, with an emphasis on understanding the unique challenges faced and suggest other ways Christian organizations can employ to address and mitigate drug abuse in Taraba State and Nigeria at large.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### *The Concept Drug*

Drugs are chemical substances that interact with biological systems to alter physical, mental, or emotional states. While some drugs serve essential therapeutic roles, others, especially when

misused or abused, can have harmful effects on individuals and society. Drug abuse occurs when drugs are used compulsively and excessively, outside of medical guidance, leading to dependency and numerous adverse effects [13]. Drugs are composed of active chemical compounds that produce physiological or psychological effects on the user. The composition of drugs varies widely based on their intended use and category. Therapeutic drugs, like antibiotics, are specifically formulated to treat infections, whereas psychoactive drugs contain substances that primarily act on the central nervous system to alter mood, perception, and behavior [14]. Psychoactive drugs can be particularly addictive due to their ability to stimulate dopamine pathways in the brain, creating a sense of pleasure or euphoria [15].

### *Types of Drugs*

Drugs are broadly categorized into several types based on their effects and composition:

**Stimulants:** These drugs increase central nervous system activity, causing heightened alertness, energy, and focus. Common stimulants include cocaine, amphetamines, and caffeine. While used medically in cases like ADHD, their abuse can lead to serious health risks, including paranoia, anxiety, and cardiovascular issues [16].

**Depressants:** Depressants decrease central nervous system activity, leading to relaxation or sedation. They include alcohol, benzodiazepines, and barbiturates. These drugs are used to treat anxiety and sleep disorders but can lead to dependency and overdose when abused [17].

**Opioids:** Opioids, such as morphine, heroin, and fentanyl, are known for their pain-relieving effects. Although effective in managing pain, they have high potential for addiction and can be life-threatening when misused, contributing to the ongoing opioid crisis [18].

**Hallucinogens:** Hallucinogens, like LSD and psilocybin, induce altered sensory perceptions and can lead to hallucinations. Although some are being studied for therapeutic applications, these drugs can produce severe psychological disturbances when abused [19].

**Cannabis:** Cannabis contains the psychoactive component THC, which can produce relaxation and mild euphoria. While increasingly legalized for medical and recreational use, its abuse, particularly in young users, is linked to cognitive impairments and mental health issues [20].

### *Drug Abuse*

Drug abuse refers to the misuse of legal or illegal substances in a manner that deviates from medical guidelines and has harmful effects on physical, mental, and social health. It involves the recurrent use of drugs, leading to dependence, tolerance, and various adverse consequences (National Institute on Drug Abuse [21]. According to World Health Organization [22], the abuse of substances such as opioids, alcohol, stimulants, and cannabis has become a global public health concern, exacerbated by factors like socioeconomic challenges, peer influence, and psychological issues.

Drug abuse is characterized by the compulsive seeking and usage of drugs despite negative consequences. It typically involves a pattern of misuse that can result in physical or psychological dependency. Substance abuse is often distinguished from casual or experimental drug use by the intensity and frequency of consumption, which disrupts various aspects of daily life [23]. Unlike dependence, which is primarily physiological, drug abuse is often driven by emotional and social factors, making it a complex analyzed that requires comprehensive intervention strategies [24]. Drug abuse has escalated globally, with opioids, alcohol, stimulants, and cannabis among the most commonly abused substances [25]. Patterns of drug abuse vary by age, gender, and socioeconomic status, with younger populations typically at

higher risk of experimentation and dependency. A significant body of research highlights that social and environmental factors, such as availability of substances, peer pressure, and family dynamics, contribute to substance abuse across age groups [26].

### *Effects of Drug Abuse*

Drug abuse has significant social repercussions, often disrupting family, community, and workplace environments. Individuals suffering from addiction may experience strained relationships, job loss, and social isolation. Additionally, drug abuse is strongly linked to increased crime rates, particularly in cases where individuals engage in theft or violence to support their addiction [27]. Substance abuse also perpetuates cycles of poverty and homelessness, especially among marginalized populations, by limiting access to stable employment and social support systems [28]. The health consequences of drug abuse are profound and multifaceted. In the short term, drug abuse can lead to impairments in motor skills, memory, and judgment, increasing the likelihood of accidents and injuries. Chronic abuse of drugs results in a host of physical and mental health issues, including liver disease, respiratory problems, cardiovascular disease, and compromised immune systems [29].

Long-term abuse of psychoactive drugs often leads to mental health disorders, such as depression, anxiety, and psychosis. For example, chronic methamphetamine use is associated with cognitive decline and permanent damage to brain regions involved in emotion and memory [30]. Substance abuse is also associated with increased risks of infectious diseases, such as HIV and hepatitis, due to risky behaviors like needle sharing [31]. Drug dependence compounds these health issues, as individuals develop tolerance and require progressively larger doses to achieve the same effects, increasing their exposure to harmful health consequences. Overdose, often fatal, is a critical risk associated with drug abuse, particularly with opioids and other high-potency drugs [32].

Drug abuse presents a multifaceted challenge that affects individuals and society on social, physical, and psychological levels. While therapeutic drugs play an essential role in healthcare, the misuse of psychoactive substances has led to significant social and health burdens worldwide. Understanding the nature, types, and effects of drugs is essential for creating effective prevention, intervention, and treatment strategies. Collaborative efforts from medical professionals, policymakers, and community organizations are necessary to address the pervasive impacts of drug abuse and promote healthier communities.

### *Empirical Studies*

Empirical studies have shown that drug abuse has become one of the major social and moral challenges confronting Nigerian society, especially among youths. In Taraba State, the increasing use of substances such as cannabis, codeine, tramadol, alcohol, and other psychoactive drugs has generated concerns among families, religious institutions, educational organizations, and government agencies.

Studies reveals that the Christian moral teachings on holiness, discipline, and moral uprightness discourage drug abuse among adherents [33]. Research studies also suggests that churches in Taraba State use biblical teachings and spiritual mentorship as preventive measures against drug abuse. The Pentecostal and evangelical movements influence social behaviour through moral reforms and lifestyle transformation [34]. The study noted that Christian revival movements encourage youths to abstain from drugs and other immoral practices through discipleship programs, crusades, and accountability systems [35].

Ekanem, Okolisah and Hikon [36] in their study notes that the important response of Christianity in curbing drug abuse is youth engagement and education. It was also observed that Churches organize seminars, conferences, Bible study groups, and awareness campaigns to educate youths about the dangers of substance abuse. They argued that education and value orientation significantly reduce the tendency toward drug abuse among youths in Wukari Local Government Area of Taraba State. The authors maintained that moral and philosophical education, when combined with religious teachings, can reshape youths' attitudes toward drug consumption and antisocial behavior [37]. Christian institutions also collaborate with schools, parents, and community leaders in combating drug abuse. Michael found that awareness creation and behavioural counselling significantly reduced risky drug-use practices among students of Taraba State University, Jalingo [38]. The intervention strategies included interactive discussions, drama presentations, and counselling approaches similar to methods used in many church-based anti-drug campaigns [39].

Furthermore, Christian religion contributes to curbing drug abuse through rehabilitation and pastoral counselling. Many churches in Taraba State provide spiritual counselling, deliverance sessions, mentorship, and emotional support to recovering addicts. Pastors and church leaders often serve as moral guides who encourage repentance, behavioural change, and social reintegration. Some churches establish rehabilitation ministries and prayer groups specifically targeted at youths struggling with addiction. These interventions provide emotional stability and spiritual hope for affected persons [40]. Empirical findings also reveal that socioeconomic conditions such as poverty, unemployment, peer pressure, and family instability contribute significantly to drug abuse in Taraba State. Christian organizations attempt to address these underlying causes through empowerment programs, vocational training, charity services, and youth development initiatives. Ekanem, Okolisah, and Hikon [41] emphasized that youth empowerment and educational engagement are effective tools for reducing drug abuse and promoting sustainable development among young people in Taraba State.

Despite these efforts, scholars argue that the response of Christian religion to drug abuse still faces several challenges. Some churches lack professional rehabilitation facilities and trained counsellors. In certain cases, excessive dependence on spiritual solutions without medical or psychological treatment limits the effectiveness of intervention programs. Nevertheless, Christianity continues to provide moral discipline, spiritual support, and social guidance for many youths affected by drug abuse in Taraba State.

In summary, empirical studies indicate that Christian religion plays an important role in curbing the menace of drug abuse in Taraba State through moral instruction, counselling, youth education, rehabilitation support, and community sensitization. Churches continue to function as agents of social transformation by promoting ethical values and discouraging behaviours associated with substance abuse. However, greater collaboration between Christian churches, government agencies, schools, health professionals, and community organizations is necessary to achieve sustainable reduction in drug abuse across Taraba State.

## METHODOLOGY

This study adopted quantitative approaches for the purpose of data collection. Descriptive method involving the use of primary and secondary sources was employed. Primary source of data collection was derived through structured questionnaire to collect data from respondents. While the secondary sources of data cover journals, magazines, periodicals, textbooks, newspapers (print and electronic), and relevant internet articles. This research is based on a

total sample size of three hundred and eighty-four (384) respondents with the study having 378 respondents for questionnaire administration. The research relied on methods of data collection which were the administration of structured questionnaires in the survey aspect of the study.

The probability sampling which was the multi-stage sampling method was used and it comprised of cluster sampling, stratified sampling and snowball sampling techniques. The cluster sampling technique was chosen because Taraba State is geographically a wide settlement and large in size with its population scattered across sixteen (16) local government areas, which made it impossible to have a sample frame of all the persons who have knowledge of response of the Christian Religion in curbing the menace of drugs abuse in the study area. Due to the nature of the research, stratified sampling technique was employed to stratify the entire population of the study according to the Christian-populated areas while the snowball sampling techniques was used to identify the respondents.

In the cluster sampling technique, Taraba State was divided into two main clusters, urban and rural areas. The urban areas include, Jalingo, Wukari, Lissam, Zing, Bali, Donga, Takum Kunini, Pantisawa, Karim, Gembu, Kurmi, Mutum-biyu, Ibi and other local government headquarters. While the rural areas covered majority of electoral wards such as; Kente, Gayama, Kwesati, Sabon gida Tukura among others wards within the state. The data generated from the survey through the use of questionnaires were sorted, coded and analysed by using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23.0 through the use of statistical methods of tables with frequencies and percentages. The data generated were analysed and interpreted in a descriptive form to supplement the quantitative data.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### *Strategies Employed by Christian Organizations to Address drug Abuse in Taraba State, Nigeria*

Table 1 presents the responses regarding the effectiveness and availability of various strategies employed by Christian organizations in Taraba State to address substance abuse. The majority of respondents (215) represented by 56.9% agree or strongly agree that Christian organizations are engaged in awareness campaigns. This suggests a recognition of the importance of these initiatives in educating the community about the dangers of substance abuse. A total of 222 (58.7%) respondents view faith-based rehabilitation programs positively, indicating that these programs are perceived as valuable resources for individuals facing addiction challenges. This reflects a belief in the effectiveness of integrating faith into recovery. Notably, the highest number of respondents (151) representing 39.9% strongly agreeing, suggest significant awareness about the availability or effectiveness of support groups. This could indicate an awareness or access to these groups within the community, highlighting a potential area for improvement. Religious counselling receives a positive assessment, with a total of 250 (66.1%) respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing on its role in discouraging substance abuse. This suggests that religious counselling is viewed as a beneficial strategy, reinforcing its significance in recovery efforts. The result corroborates the findings of many studies [42], [43], [44], [45] which noted that Christian organizations engage in spiritual guidance, counselling, and rehabilitation to curb substance abuse. Furthermore, the result reflects the view of Kabugi [46], that churches play a role in community engagement and education through seminars and workshops.

Commenting on the specific programs or campaigns Christian religious organizations have initiated to curb drug abuse. The results indicate that while awareness campaigns and faith-

based rehabilitation programs are generally well-received, there is notable concern regarding the effectiveness and accessibility of support groups organized by Christian organizations.

**Table 1: Strategies to address substance abuse.**

| Sl. | Statement                                                                                                                 | SD | D  | A   | SA  |
|-----|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|----|-----|-----|
| 1   | Christian religious organizations in Taraba State actively conduct awareness campaigns against alcoholism and drug abuse. | 72 | 91 | 111 | 104 |
| 2   | Faith-based rehabilitation programs are available for individuals struggling with addiction.                              | 60 | 96 | 109 | 113 |
| 3   | Support groups organized by Christian organizations provide essential help to substance users.                            | 52 | 64 | 111 | 151 |
| 4   | Religious counselling plays a significant role in discouraging drug abuse.                                                | 67 | 61 | 117 | 133 |

[Source: Field Survey, 2025]

Religious counselling also appears to be viewed positively, suggesting that it is an important component in addressing substance abuse. These insights could inform future initiatives aimed at strengthening community support systems and enhancing the overall effectiveness of substance abuse prevention efforts in Taraba State, Nigeria. Addressing the gaps, particularly concerning support groups, could lead to more comprehensive strategies for tackling substance abuse in the community.

#### *Challenges Faced in Implementing Anti-Drug Initiatives in Taraba State, Nigeria*

**Table 2: Challenges of anti-drug abuse initiatives.**

| S/N | Statement                                                                                                       | SD  | D   | A   | SA  |
|-----|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| 5   | Lack of adequate funding limits the effectiveness of Christian organizations in addressing drug abuse.          | 131 | 53  | 83  | 111 |
| 6   | There is a lack of community involvement in anti-drug initiatives led by churches.                              | 75  | 103 | 111 | 89  |
| 7   | There is a shortage of trained personnel in Christian organizations to handle drug abuse cases effectively.     | 71  | 63  | 112 | 132 |
| 8   | Stigma surrounding addiction prevents individuals from seeking help from Christian organizations.               | 73  | 67  | 97  | 141 |
| 9   | Collaboration between religious organizations and government agencies on drug abuse prevention is insufficient. | 64  | 93  | 146 | 75  |

[Source: Field Survey, 2025]

Table 2 presents responses regarding the challenges faced by Christian organizations in their efforts to combat drug abuse. A total of 194 (51.3%) respondents agree or strongly agree that inadequate funding limits the effectiveness of Christian organizations. The high number of strong disagreements (131) representing 34.7% suggests that while many acknowledge funding issues, a significant portion may not perceive this as a major barrier. This could indicate varying perspectives on the impact of funding on program efficacy. The result indicate that 200 (52.9%) respondents believe there is a lack of community involvement in anti-drug initiatives led by

churches. The relatively high number of disagreements (178) representing 47.1% suggests that some community members may feel engaged or that involvement levels vary significantly. This highlights a potential area for improvement in fostering community partnerships.

A total of 244 (64.6%) respondents believe there is a shortage of trained personnel in Christian organizations to effectively handle substance abuse cases. This points to a critical need for training and capacity-building within these organizations to ensure they can adequately support individuals facing addiction. The issue of stigma is significant, with 238 (62.9%) respondents agreeing that it prevents individuals from seeking help from Christian organizations. This highlights a social barrier that can hinder recovery efforts, suggesting a need for educational campaigns to reduce stigma and encourage individuals to seek assistance.

A total of 221 (58.5%) respondents believe that collaboration between religious organizations and government agencies is insufficient. This indicates a recognized need for better partnerships to enhance the effectiveness of anti-substance abuse initiatives, suggesting that collaborative efforts could lead to more comprehensive solutions.

These findings align with the finding of Ajayi [47] that stigma prevents individuals from seeking help, making faith-based rehabilitation efforts less effective. Similarly, the result also reflects the finding of Mbiti [48] that theological differences also pose a barrier, as some churches emphasize spiritual deliverance over medical interventions, limiting rehabilitation effectiveness.

The response also reflects the view of Adeyemi and Shittu [49] that, many Christian organizations rely on donations and volunteer efforts, which restrict program expansion. The respondent's views also align with the finding of Abiola [50] which reported that the Government collaboration is also insufficient, as policy frameworks on drug prevention are weak or inconsistently enforced. The results highlight several challenges faced by Christian organizations in their anti-substance abuse initiatives.

Key issues include funding limitations, community involvement, shortages of trained personnel, stigma related to addiction, and insufficient collaboration with government agencies. Addressing these challenges is crucial for improving the effectiveness of substance abuse programs. Strategies may include enhancing community engagement, investing in training for personnel, and fostering partnerships with governmental and other organizations to create a more supportive framework for those struggling with addiction. Christian organizations can better serve their communities and improve outcomes for individuals facing substance abuse issues by tackling these challenges.

## **CONCLUSION**

The findings from the study clearly demonstrate the urgent need to address substance abuse in Taraba State, Nigeria, as reflected in both quantitative data and qualitative insights from community leaders. The prevalence of drug abuse poses serious social, economic, and familial challenges, necessitating comprehensive and collaborative interventions. While faith-based organizations play a significant role in addressing these issues through awareness campaigns and rehabilitation programs, the limitations in funding, stigma, and community involvement must be addressed to enhance their effectiveness. The positive perceptions of faith-based interventions indicate that such initiatives can be effective; however, there is a clear need for increased resources, better training for personnel, and stronger partnerships between religious organizations and government agencies.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are put forth:

- Faith-based organizations should advocate for financial support from government entities and private donors to ensure that faith-based organizations can expand their programs and reach more individuals in need. This could include grants specifically aimed at substance abuse initiatives.
- Educational campaigns should be implemented aimed at reducing the stigma associated with addiction. This could involve seminars, workshops, and the use of social media to promote understanding and encourage individuals to seek help without fear of judgment.
- Formal partnerships should be established between Christian organizations and government agencies to create a comprehensive framework for addressing drug abuse. This collaboration can enhance resource sharing, improve program effectiveness, and foster a unified approach to tackling addiction in the community.

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