



# Analysis of the Role of the Church in Preventing Alcoholism Among Youth

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**Abstract:** Alcoholism among youth has become a growing public health concern in Indonesia, with significant implications for physical, mental, social, and spiritual well-being. This research explores the role of the Church as a moral and community-based institution in preventing alcohol abuse among young people. The study employs a qualitative approach, including interviews with church leaders, youth members, and community stakeholders, as well as analysis of church-based programs and preventive strategies. Findings indicate that the Church contributes significantly to youth alcohol prevention through spiritual guidance, value-based education, peer support networks, and community engagement. Despite challenges such as resource limitations, variation in church capacity, and stigma surrounding addiction, faith-based interventions show promise in promoting behavioral change and long-term resilience. The study concludes that the Church, when integrated into broader public health frameworks, can serve as an effective partner in holistic youth development and alcohol prevention efforts. Implications for church leadership, youth ministry, and policy highlight the need for collaborative, culturally relevant, and spiritually grounded approaches to substance abuse prevention.

## Research Highlights:

- Identifies the rising trend of alcoholism among youth in Indonesia and its adverse physical, mental, social, and spiritual impacts.
- Explores the Church's role as a faith-based institution with moral authority and community trust in influencing youth behavior.
- Demonstrates the effectiveness of Church-led prevention strategies, including spiritual education, youth ministry programs, and peer support.
- Highlights the potential of integrating religious institutions into public health efforts for a more holistic approach to youth alcohol prevention.
- Provides practical implications for Church leadership, youth ministry, and policymakers in designing culturally rooted and spiritually relevant interventions.

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## INTRODUCTION

Alcohol consumption among youth in Indonesia is a growing concern, despite the country's cultural and religious norms that generally discourage such behavior (Parker & Nilan, 2013). Although Indonesia is a predominantly Muslim country where the consumption of alcohol is often restricted by both religious teachings and local laws, recent trends indicate a rise in alcohol use among adolescents and young adults, especially in urban areas and among certain social groups. The increase in youth alcohol consumption is influenced by a range of factors. One of the primary drivers is peer pressure young people often begin experimenting with alcohol in social settings, driven by a desire to fit in or appear more mature (Törrönen et al., 2019). Media and pop culture also play a significant role, as alcohol is frequently portrayed as a symbol of modernity, freedom, and enjoyment. Furthermore, easy access to alcohol, particularly through illegal or unregulated sources such as homebrewed drinks (e.g., oplosan), has made it more available to underage individuals, despite existing legal restrictions.

Studies and reports by national institutions and international organizations have highlighted that a notable portion of Indonesian youth have tried alcohol at least once, with some continuing to consume it regularly. A concerning aspect of this trend is the increasing number of cases involving underage binge drinking and alcohol poisoning, particularly in low-income communities where cheap and unsafe alcohol is more accessible (Burton et al., 2017). *Oplosan*, a mixture of alcohol with other toxic substances, has claimed the lives of many young people in recent years. The impact of alcoholism among youth is profound. It not only endangers their physical and mental health but also affects their education, family relationships, and future prospects (Keyes et al., 2011). Alcohol abuse can lead to risky behaviors such as unsafe sex, violence, and involvement in crime. Additionally, young people who consume alcohol are at higher risk of developing long-term addiction and chronic health conditions such as liver disease and depression.

While the Indonesian government has enacted policies to regulate alcohol sales and consumption, enforcement remains a challenge. Many young people continue to obtain alcohol through informal channels (Treno et al., 2008). Therefore, addressing this issue requires a multi-sectoral approach that includes families, schools, health services, and religious institutions. Religious organizations, particularly the Church in predominantly Christian regions, have the potential to play a crucial role in prevention efforts (Maton & Pargament, 2014). Through moral education, youth engagement, and community-based programs, the Church can provide guidance and support to help young people make healthy choices and avoid the dangers of alcohol abuse.

In response to this growing problem, various sectors of society including families, schools, and health institutions have implemented strategies to address underage drinking. However, one often overlooked yet potentially powerful institution in this effort is the Church. As a moral and spiritual guide for many communities, the Church holds a unique position to influence youth behavior through religious teachings, community engagement, and structured youth programs (Smith, 2003). Religious institutions often emphasize values such as self-discipline, respect for the body, and moral responsibility, which can serve as protective factors against substance abuse (McCullough & Willoughby, 2009). Moreover, the Church often provides a support system through counseling, mentorship, and social activities that can help youth resist peer pressure and find purpose and identity in healthier ways.

One of the primary reasons the Church is relevant is its strong influence on moral and ethical values. Through teachings, sermons, and scriptures, the Church promotes principles such as self-control, responsibility, respect for the body, and care for others values that directly counter the behaviors associated with alcohol abuse. Youth who are actively involved in Church activities are often taught from an early age to view their bodies as sacred and to avoid substances that can cause harm (Crawford et al., 2006). This moral foundation can serve as a protective factor against the temptation to engage in alcohol consumption, especially when reinforced through consistent spiritual education. Moreover, the Church has extensive outreach to young people through youth ministries, Sunday schools, church camps, and fellowship activities. These programs not only provide religious education but also create safe and supportive environments where young people can form friendships, discuss their challenges, and find mentors. In these spaces, the Church can play a proactive role in educating youth about the dangers of alcohol, building resilience, and promoting healthy coping strategies (Kahn & Graham, 2020).

Another reason for the Church's relevance is the high level of trust and respect it commands within many communities. In areas where government institutions or formal health systems may be less accessible or distrusted, the Church often serves as a trusted intermediary between individuals and broader social systems (Gilson, 2003). Community members, especially parents, may be more receptive to guidance coming from religious leaders than from external sources. This trust gives the Church a unique platform to address sensitive issues like substance abuse in a way that is culturally and spiritually appropriate. In addition to its spiritual role, the Church often engages in social and pastoral services, such as counseling, addiction recovery support, and family outreach (Franklin & Fong, 2011). These services can complement public health initiatives and fill gaps where professional help is lacking. For example, a pastor or church counselor may be the first person a young person confides in about their struggles with alcohol, and their response can be pivotal in guiding that individual toward recovery.

Furthermore, the Church operates across varied social, economic, and geographic backgrounds, allowing it to reach youth in both urban and rural areas, from different walks of life. This wide reach makes the Church a strategic partner in creating community-based interventions that are inclusive, sustainable, and rooted in local values (Duff & Buckingham, 2015). Over the past decade, a growing body of research has explored the intersection between religion, youth development, and substance abuse prevention. Numerous studies have highlighted the significant role that religious institutions, particularly the Church, play in shaping youth behavior and providing support systems that help prevent harmful habits such as alcoholism. A recurring theme in recent literature is the protective influence of religious values and practices on youth behavior. According to a study published in the *Journal of Adolescent Health* (2015), adolescents who regularly attend religious services and participate in faith-based activities are less likely to engage in risky behaviors, including drinking alcohol. The study suggests that this correlation stems from both internalized moral teachings and the presence of strong social support networks within religious communities.

In the African context, research by Osei-Bonsu and Boateng (2018) in Ghana examined the role of Christian youth groups in alcohol prevention. Their findings indicated that church-based youth programs, which promote moral guidance, community involvement, and mentorship, can serve as effective platforms for discouraging alcohol use. The study emphasized the importance of including spiritual education and faith-based peer support as part of youth intervention strategies. In the Southeast Asian region, particularly in Indonesia and the Philippines, several studies have addressed the role of religious and cultural values in youth resilience against substance abuse. For instance, a study by Nasution et al. (2020) in *Jurnal Ilmu Sosial dan Ilmu Politik* analyzed how religious teachings influence adolescent choices in predominantly Christian communities in North Sulawesi. It found that the Church significantly contributes to building moral awareness and strengthening youth identity, which in turn reduces the appeal of alcohol and other harmful substances.

A 2021 study in *BMC Public Health* also explored the role of religious leaders in health promotion, noting that pastors and youth ministers often serve as informal counselors and role models. In areas with limited access to formal health and psychological services, churches fill critical gaps by offering faith-based guidance, prayer sessions, and family outreach programs to prevent and respond to alcohol-related problems among youth. Despite these positive findings, some studies also point to challenges and gaps in church-based approaches. Research conducted by Malau and Siagian (2017) in North Sumatra noted that while churches provide moral instruction, not all congregations have structured programs or trained personnel to address youth addiction. Moreover, there is a need for more collaboration between churches, schools, and public health institutions to ensure a holistic approach to prevention. Despite the Church's potential role, there is a need for a deeper understanding of how effectively it contributes to the prevention of alcoholism among youth. This study aims to analyze the role of the Church in addressing this issue, explore the methods it uses, assess their impact, and identify areas for improvement. By examining the Church's involvement, this research seeks to contribute to the development of more holistic and collaborative approaches to preventing youth alcoholism.

## METHOD

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach to explore and analyze the role of the Church in preventing alcoholism among youth (Muhammad et al., 2017). The qualitative method is appropriate for this research because it allows for a deep understanding of social phenomena through the perspectives and experiences of individuals directly involved in Church activities, especially in relation to youth development and substance abuse prevention. The research will be conducted in selected Christian communities in Indonesia, particularly in regions with strong Church influence such as North Sulawesi and East Nusa Tenggara, where the youth population is actively engaged in church-based programs (Poplawska, 2020). These areas are chosen purposively due to their high youth participation in religious activities and the increasing concern over youth alcohol consumption.

Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with various stakeholders, including church leaders (such as pastors, youth ministers, and catechists), youth members actively involved in church activities, parents, and community health workers (Ayaga, 2015). These interviews aim to gather insights into how the Church addresses issues of alcoholism among youth, what programs or teachings are implemented, and the perceived effectiveness of such efforts. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) will be held with groups of youth who are actively involved in Church communities (Aja et al., 2012). This method is intended to capture diverse perspectives, personal experiences, and attitudes toward alcohol, peer influence, and the role of the Church in guiding behavior. FGDs will also explore the kinds of support systems the Church provides and how they impact youth decision-making.

Relevant church documents, such as youth program outlines, pastoral letters, religious education materials, and community outreach reports, will be analyzed to understand how the issue of alcoholism is addressed structurally and theologically within the Church context (Unruh & Sider, 2005). Participant observation will be carried out during youth events, church services, and seminars to directly observe the interaction between Church leaders and young congregants, as well as to assess the incorporation of anti-alcohol messages in spiritual teachings or youth mentoring sessions. The collected data will be analyzed using thematic analysis, which involves identifying recurring themes, patterns, and categories that emerge from the interviews, FGDs, and document reviews (Guest et al., 2011). The focus will be on understanding the strategies used by the Church to educate, counsel, and empower youth to resist alcohol use and build positive lifestyles.

To ensure the credibility and reliability of the findings, the study will employ triangulation by comparing information gathered from different sources and methods (Moon, 2019). Member checks will also be conducted, where participants are asked to validate the accuracy of the recorded information and interpretations. Ethical considerations will be observed throughout the study. All participants will be informed of the research objectives, and their consent will be obtained before data collection (Flory & Emanuel, 2004). Anonymity and confidentiality will be maintained, especially given the sensitive nature of discussing alcohol use and personal behavior. The findings of this study reveal that the Church plays a significant and multifaceted role in preventing alcoholism among youth. Based on interviews, focus group discussions, observations, and document analysis conducted in selected Christian communities, several key themes emerged that highlight how the Church contributes to reducing the risk of alcohol abuse among its younger members.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The First, the research found that moral and spiritual teachings are central to the Church's efforts in guiding youth away from alcohol consumption. Church leaders frequently use sermons, Bible studies, and youth catechism classes to emphasize values such as self-control, discipline, and respect for the body as a temple of God. These teachings are reinforced with scripture-based warnings about the dangers of intoxication and the importance of living a clean, righteous life. Youth participants expressed that regular exposure to these messages helped shape their personal attitudes and decisions regarding alcohol use.

Second, the Church was observed to provide structured youth programs and activities that keep young people engaged in positive, community-centered environments. These include youth fellowships, choir groups, volunteer work, retreats, and spiritual camps. Such programs serve not only as recreational alternatives to social environments where alcohol is present, but also as avenues for mentoring and peer support. Many youths reported that being involved in these programs gave them a sense of belonging and purpose, which reduced the appeal of harmful behaviors such as drinking.

Another important result was the role of pastoral counseling and emotional support. Church leaders, particularly youth ministers and pastors, often act as mentors and counselors to young people struggling with peer pressure, family issues, or early signs of alcohol experimentation. In some congregations, informal counseling sessions and prayer meetings are provided to help guide individuals back to healthier paths. This pastoral approach was appreciated by both youth and parents, who described the Church as a trusted space for emotional and spiritual guidance.

In addition, the research identified community outreach and collaboration as an emerging strategy among some churches. For example, in one community, the Church worked together with local health workers and schools to conduct seminars on substance abuse, integrating faith-based and medical perspectives. This collaborative model was seen as effective in raising awareness and reaching youth both within and outside of the congregation.

Despite these positive findings, the research also noted several challenges and limitations. Not all churches have well-developed youth ministries or trained personnel to address addiction prevention comprehensively. Some churches rely heavily on spiritual messages without integrating practical education on the health risks and social consequences of alcohol use. In areas with limited resources, youth programs are often underfunded or infrequent, reducing their potential impact.

### **The Effectiveness of Faith-Based Prevention Strategies**

Faith-based prevention strategies have increasingly been recognized as effective tools in addressing complex social issues such as youth alcoholism. Rooted in spiritual and moral values, these strategies go beyond conventional methods by offering a holistic approach that addresses the physical, emotional, social, and spiritual dimensions of individuals (Canda et al., 2019). This makes them particularly impactful for young people, who are in a critical phase of identity formation and are highly influenced by their environment and support systems.

One of the core strengths of faith-based prevention lies in its emphasis on moral education and personal values. In religious communities, youth are taught to view their bodies and lives as sacred gifts, encouraging them to avoid substances like alcohol that may cause harm. This internalization of faith-based principles fosters self-discipline and a strong moral compass, which can serve as protective factors against peer pressure and risky behaviors. Religious teachings often provide clear ethical frameworks that distinguish right from wrong, helping young people make healthier life choices.

Another effective aspect of faith-based strategies is the provision of positive peer environments. Youth groups, spiritual retreats, and church-based social activities offer safe spaces where adolescents can connect with like-minded peers who share similar values (Sinha, 2004). These environments not only reduce exposure to situations where alcohol may be present but also promote friendships rooted in mutual support and accountability. Research shows that when youth feel a sense of belonging and purpose within their faith communities, they are less likely to seek validation through substance use.

Role models and mentorship are also vital components of faith-based approaches (Williamson & Hood, 2015). Church leaders, youth pastors, and older members of the congregation often serve as mentors who guide young people through life's challenges. Their influence can have a lasting impact, as they provide spiritual advice, encouragement, and real-life examples of how to navigate adolescence without resorting to alcohol or other harmful behaviors. These relationships foster trust and open communication, allowing youth to seek help when they feel vulnerable.

Moreover, faith-based strategies are effective in mobilizing family and community involvement. Many churches actively engage parents and caregivers in youth development programs, reinforcing consistent messages at home and within the community. This integrated support system strengthens prevention efforts and enhances the sense of accountability and care surrounding the youth (Guerra & Bradshaw, 2008). The Church, as a respected institution, is also well-positioned to collaborate with schools, healthcare providers, and local governments to deliver coordinated prevention initiatives that are both culturally relevant and spiritually grounded.

However, it is important to acknowledge that the effectiveness of faith-based strategies depends on several factors, including the capacity and commitment of religious institutions, the quality of youth programming, and the ability to adapt spiritual teachings to contemporary social realities. In communities where faith-based programs are well-organized and inclusive, the outcomes are generally more positive. Conversely, in churches with limited resources or rigid approaches, the impact may be less significant.

### **Implications for Policy, Church Leadership, and Youth Ministry**

From a policy standpoint, the role of religious institutions should be recognized and integrated into broader public health strategies aimed at reducing substance abuse among youth. Government agencies, particularly those in health, education, and social welfare, should consider formal partnerships with churches and other faith-based organizations to design and implement community-based prevention programs (Levin, 2016). Faith-based groups have strong local networks and community trust, making them valuable allies in outreach, education, and early intervention.

Moreover, policies that support capacity building for faith-based initiatives through training, resources, and grants can significantly strengthen their ability to deliver impactful prevention programs. Government support could include workshops for church leaders on addiction counseling, funding for youth outreach projects, and inclusion in national anti-drug campaigns (Gitonga, 2015). Collaborative policies can ensure that the spiritual and moral support offered by churches complements the psychological and medical efforts of state institutions.

For Church leadership, this research underscores the need for a proactive and informed approach in addressing the issue of alcoholism among youth. Church leaders, pastors, priests, and elders must not only continue to preach spiritual values but also educate themselves on the psychological and social factors that lead to alcohol abuse. They should adopt a compassionate and non-judgmental stance when dealing with affected individuals, positioning the Church as a place of healing and restoration rather than condemnation.

Leadership should also invest in the development of structured prevention programs, including regular seminars, counseling services, and collaborations with addiction specialists. Creating a culture of openness where youth feel safe to discuss their struggles is essential. The involvement of church leadership in community outreach also strengthens the Church's presence as a moral compass and agent of change in society.

### **Challenges and Limitations**

One of the primary challenges encountered in this study is the diversity in the level of engagement and capacity among different churches. Not all churches possess the same resources, leadership strength, or commitment to youth programs. In some cases, youth ministries may be underfunded, understaffed, or lack structured prevention strategies. This variability affects the consistency and effectiveness of church-based interventions, making it difficult to generalize the findings across all church communities.

Collecting accurate and comprehensive data on youth alcoholism especially within religious settings proved to be another challenge. Stigma surrounding alcohol use in religious communities can lead to underreporting or reluctance among respondents to openly discuss their experiences. As a result, the study may not fully capture the extent of alcohol misuse among youth who are active in church environments or those who have disengaged due to such struggles.

Another significant limitation lies in the difficulty of quantifying spiritual growth and moral influence, which are central components of faith-based prevention (Groce, 2019). While behavioral changes and participation in church activities can be observed, the internalization of spiritual values and their long-term impact on lifestyle choices are harder to measure objectively. This makes it challenging to draw direct causal links between church involvement and reduced alcohol use.

The study was also limited by the socio-cultural and denominational differences within the Church community. Different denominations may have varying doctrinal teachings, levels of conservatism, or approaches to addressing social issues like substance abuse. These differences can influence both the strategies used and the outcomes achieved. Furthermore, cultural factors such as local norms, family structure, and community values play a significant role in shaping youth behavior, making it difficult to isolate the Church's influence from other variables.

In many cases, the timeframe for observing the effects of church-based prevention programs was relatively short. Long-term studies are needed to assess the sustainability of behavioral change among youth and to

understand whether faith-based interventions have enduring effects as young people transition into adulthood. Without longitudinal data, conclusions about long-term effectiveness remain tentative.

Lastly, the geographic scope of the research may not fully represent the broader national context. This study may have focused on urban or semi-urban church communities where access to resources and trained leaders is more available. In contrast, rural or underserved areas may face different challenges, including limited access to mental health services, fewer structured youth programs, and cultural taboos that hinder open discussions on alcoholism.

### **Contribution to Holistic Public Health Approaches by Involving Religious Institutions**

The Church contributes to public health by embedding prevention efforts within the fabric of daily life. Unlike hospitals or clinics, which are often visited only in times of need, religious institutions maintain consistent and ongoing relationships with individuals and families. This continuity allows for the early identification of risky behaviors, such as underage drinking or signs of addiction, and enables timely intervention. By offering regular educational programs, sermons, support groups, and counseling services, churches can serve as frontline institutions in deterring alcohol abuse before it becomes a chronic issue.

Holistic health is incomplete without considering a person's spiritual and moral development. The Church encourages values such as self-discipline, personal responsibility, compassion, and purpose elements that are often missing in secular health campaigns. These spiritual teachings not only discourage harmful behaviors like excessive alcohol use but also foster a sense of meaning and resilience that can protect young people from turning to substances during difficult times. By guiding youth to build their identity around faith, hope, and community, the Church contributes to their overall psychological and emotional wellness.

Religious communities can also help reduce the stigma surrounding addiction and mental health challenges. When faith leaders openly acknowledge issues like alcoholism and encourage open dialogue and compassion, they create an environment where individuals feel safe to seek help. This destigmatizing role is critical in societies where shame and secrecy often prevent youth from accessing support. The Church's emphasis on forgiveness, redemption, and transformation provides a powerful narrative that supports recovery and reintegration.

The Church often functions as an extended family, offering social support systems that are crucial for preventing and recovering from substance abuse. Youth ministry programs, peer mentorship, and small-group fellowships create spaces where young people can form healthy, supportive relationships. These networks reduce the sense of isolation that can lead to substance misuse and offer positive alternatives to social environments where alcohol is normalized or encouraged.

Religious institutions, when properly engaged, can become strategic partners in national or local public health campaigns. They can help disseminate accurate health information, promote access to treatment services, and reinforce community-wide behavior change. Their influence can extend to advocacy and policy, pushing for healthier environments through school programs, family outreach, and substance abuse legislation. When churches work hand-in-hand with health professionals, educators, and policymakers, the result is a more coordinated and effective public health response.

### **CONCLUSION**

This research highlights the significant and multifaceted role that the Church can play in addressing the growing concern of alcoholism among youth. As a moral and spiritual institution deeply embedded in the fabric of Indonesian society, the Church has the capacity to influence young people's values, behavior, and lifestyle choices in a way that complements public health and education efforts. Through spiritual guidance, moral teachings, youth outreach programs, and community-based support, the Church can serve as a protective environment that discourages alcohol abuse and promotes healthy living. Findings from this study show that faith-based approaches when implemented intentionally and consistently can have a meaningful impact in raising awareness, reducing risky behaviors, and supporting recovery among young people. The Church's trusted position in the community allows it to reach not only its members but also

broader groups of youth who may not otherwise have access to support systems. However, challenges remain. These include differences in church capacity, denominational approaches, and the difficulty in measuring spiritual impact. Furthermore, collaboration between churches and public institutions is still limited and needs to be strengthened to create a more integrated approach to youth alcohol prevention. Ultimately, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of how religious institutions, particularly the Church, can be actively involved in holistic public health strategies. By leveraging their influence, values-based teachings, and strong community networks, churches can play a key role in fostering a generation of youth who are not only informed about the dangers of alcoholism but are also empowered to live with purpose, self-control, and resilience.

#### AUTHORS' DECLARATION

##### Authors' Contributions and Responsibilities

The author was responsible for the entire research process, including the formulation of the research topic, design of the study, data collection, analysis, and interpretation.

##### Competing Interests

The author declares that there are no competing interests or conflicts of interest related to the conduct, findings, or publication of this research. This study was conducted independently, without any financial or personal relationships that could influence the outcomes.

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