**Belief, Behavior, and Belonging:**
How Faith is Indispensable in Preventing and Recovering from Substance Abuse

This study reviews the voluminous empirical evidence on faith's contribution to preventing people from falling victim to substance abuse and helping them recover from it.

First published in the peer-reviewed *Journal of Religion and Health.*

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### National Health Concern?

Americans simultaneously identifying with religion less and suffering from substance abuse more. 20 million Americans suffer from substance use disorder (SUD).

- **Percent Religiously Unaffiliated**: 29%
- **Drug Deaths per 100,000**: 13.7%
- **Drug Deaths / 100,000 U.S. Population**: 6 (1998) to 22 (2017)

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### Parent Alert

- Religious youth are **three times** less likely to binge drink.
- Religious youth are **four times** less likely to use illegal drugs.
- For teens with SUD, **62%** cite staying connected with God as the top reason for staying sober after rehab.

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### A Faith Counts Study:

- 84% of studies find that faith reduces drug abuse risk.
- 86% of studies find that faith reduces alcohol abuse risk.
- Up to **82%** of clients who experience a spiritual awakening during substance abuse treatment and recovery were completely abstinent at a 1-year follow-up compared with 55% of non-spiritually awakened clients.

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### More Importantly

20,000+ lives saved every year

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### Economic Valuation

$316.6 Billion in annual savings to the U.S. Government at no cost to tax payers.

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**Vol. (012 3456789) **

Journal of Religion and Health

https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-019-00876-w

**Abstract**

This study reviews the voluminous empirical evidence on faith's contribution to preventing people from falling victim to substance abuse and helping them recover from it. We find that 73% of addiction treatment programs in the USA include a spirituality-based element, as embodied in the 12-step programs and fellowships initially popularized by Alcoholics Anonymous, the vast majority of which emphasize reliance on God or a Higher Power to stay sober. We introduce and flesh out a typology of faith-based substance abuse treatment facilities, recovery programs, and support groups. This typology provides important background as we then move on to make an economic valuation of nearly 130,000 congregation-based substance abuse recovery support programs in the USA. We find that these faith-based volunteer support groups contribute up to $316.6 billion in savings to the US economy every year at no cost to tax payers. While negative experiences with religion (e.g., clergy sex abuse and other horrendous examples) have been a contributory factor to substance abuse among some victims, given that more than 84% of scientific studies show that faith is a positive factor in addiction prevention or recovery and a risk in less than 2% of the studies reviewed, we conclude that the value of faith-oriented approaches to substance abuse prevention and recovery is indisputable. And, by extension, we also conclude that the decline in religious affiliation in the USA is not only a concern for religious organizations but constitutes a national health concern.

**Keywords**

Substance abuse · Addiction · Faith · Valuation · Religion and spirituality
The Faith Factor

Extensive evidence-based research on addiction shows that the efficacy of faith includes not only the behaviors people engage in (or don't engage in) because of their faith and the support people find in belonging to faith communities, but also people's religious and spiritual beliefs themselves.

Medical & psychological intervention is life-saving and necessary with or without faith.

Faith is significantly beneficial in prevention.

The faith community is uniquely effective in mobilizing crisis response.

Faith communities offer ongoing emotional and social support.

Faith is significantly beneficial in long-term recovery.

Perception vs. Reality

Only 46% of Americans think that religion can answer today's problems. However, religion answers one of our biggest problems—preventing and recovering from addiction.

"Belief, Behavior, and Belonging: How Faith is Indispensable in Preventing and Recovering from Substance Abuse" a 2019 study by Brian J. Grim (Baylor University) and Melissa E. Grim (Religious Freedom & Business Foundation), published in the peer-reviewed Journal of Religion and Health.

To view the full study, please visit FaithCounts.com/Research.

Study sponsored by Faith Counts, a multifaith campaign aimed at promoting the value of faith.

Faith in Action

Nearly 130,000 congregations of all faiths provide recovery assistance. A few examples:

Teen Challenge USA. Adult & Teen Challenge is a worldwide network of Christian faith-based corporations intended to help teenagers, adults, and families with problems such as substance abuse or self-destructive behavior.

Beit T’Shuvah. A 140-bed Jewish treatment center using psychology, Judaism, and a synagogue community.

The Wellbriety Movement. A 12-step program incorporating Native American cultures and spirituality.

Salvation Army. Provides the most free residential recovery programs, such as Harbor Light, a 136-bed center with 85% completion rate.

Millati Islami World Services. A 12-step program founded in Baltimore that incorporates Islamic principles.

For My Baby and Me. Launched by Trenton Catholic Charities in 2017 to meet the critical needs of pregnant, addicted women.

Training. In Tennessee alone, in a partnership with the state government, about 250 congregations have been certified to meet recovery needs.

Addiction Recovery Program. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints runs a program that is unique in that it helps those struggling with any addiction.

CHI St. Gabriel’s Health Opioid Program. A Catholic hospital network treatment and recovery program nationally recognized for leading a faith-based charge against opioid abuse.

OPIOID CRISIS BREAKTHROUGH

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