EFFECT OF RELIGIOUS BELIEFS ON SUBSTANCE USE AMONG SOUTH AFRICAN HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

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Abstract. Substance use is a common problem among South African youth. We conducted this study to determine whether religious beliefs influenced substance use among South African youth. We conducted a cross sectional study of 704 students from five high schools in South Africa. We used a questionnaire to assess self reported substance use and religious beliefs among the study subjects. We used binary logistic regression analysis to evaluate the relationship between the subjects’ religious beliefs and substance use. Thirty-six point six percent of students reported being very religious. More female students reported being very religious than male students (p=0.039). Fifty-four percent of students had ever consumed alcohol. Comparing alcohol and drug use between religious and non-religious students, it was found that alcohol and drug use were more common among non-religious students (28.3%, 30.4%) than very religious students (8.4%, 11.5%) (p<0.05). Those who considered themselves religious had lower odds of substance use. Religious beliefs had an influence on substance use among South African youth in our study.

Keywords: students, protective factor, religiosity, substance use, South Africa