

The Future of Alternative Treatment for Substance Abusers among Secondary School Students

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ABSTRACT

Background: Substance abuse among secondary school students is a growing concern, and conventional treatment methods such as counselling, rehabilitation, and support groups have shown limited success due to stigma, restricted access to treatment facilities, and high relapse rates. These shortcomings highlight the urgent need to explore innovative and holistic interventions tailored to adolescents' unique developmental needs. **Aim:** The purpose of this research is to examine the effectiveness and future potential of alternative treatments—including mindfulness-based interventions, art therapy, and outdoor experiential programs—in addressing substance abuse among secondary school students. **Method:** This study adopted a qualitative research design that combined a literature review, expert interviews, case studies, and analysis of institutional programs. Data were examined thematically, focusing on patterns of treatment outcomes, barriers to implementation, and the role of school and community environments in supporting recovery. **Results and Discussion:** The findings reveal that mindfulness-based interventions enhance emotional regulation, reduce stress, and lower substance use tendencies; art therapy facilitates self-expression, identity formation, and coping mechanisms; and outdoor experiential programs foster resilience, teamwork, and problem-solving skills. These approaches not only mitigate the limitations of traditional methods but also provide personalised, non-stigmatising, and engaging support mechanisms for adolescents. Effective adoption requires systemic integration into school curricula, professional training for staff, and collaboration among educators, mental health practitioners, and community stakeholders. **Conclusion:** The study concludes that the future of alternative treatment for secondary school students struggling with substance abuse lies in the integration of evidence-based alternative therapies alongside traditional interventions. By addressing stigma and accessibility barriers while promoting holistic well-being, schools can create supportive environments that empower students to recover from substance abuse and achieve both academic and personal growth.

Keywords: Alternative Treatment, Substance Abuse, Secondary School Students, Mindfulness-Based Interventions, Adolescent Rehabilitation



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INTRODUCTION

Substance abuse among secondary school students is a pressing issue that requires comprehensive and innovative solutions. Traditional intervention methods, such as counselling and medication, have had varying degrees of success in addressing this problem. However, there is growing interest in alternative treatments that harness the power of self-expression and emotional processing to help students overcome substance abuse issues (Adedoyin et al., 2014; Cook-Cottone, 2015; Malchiodi, 2020). Art therapy, music therapy, mindfulness practices and outdoor experiential therapies are all approaches that can be explored from the theory of self-expression and emotional processing (Byrd et al., 2020). Art therapy involves creative self-expression, which helps students externalise their internal struggles and gain insight into their thoughts and feelings. Music therapy uses the expressive nature of music to facilitate emotional processing

and self-exploration, allowing students to engage in activities such as songwriting, improvisation and lyric analysis (Konieczna-Nowak, 2016; Santiago, 2022). Mindfulness practices, including meditation, breathing exercises and mindful movement, are recognised for their potential to promote emotional regulation and stress reduction. These practices can help break habitual patterns of substance abuse, foster resilience, and enhance overall well-being.

Outdoor experiential therapies, such as hiking, camping and adventure-based challenges, can provide students with opportunities to build resilience, self-efficacy and interpersonal skills. Nature-based interventions can offer a sense of freedom and connection to something greater than oneself, instilling a renewed sense of purpose and perspective. By harnessing the power of creative expression, emotional exploration and holistic well-being, these approaches offer promising avenues for supporting students in their recovery and fostering long-

term resilience. Art therapy is a promising alternative treatment for substance abuse among secondary school students based on the theory of self-expression and emotional processing (Stepney, 2022). This therapy helps individuals express their emotions without verbal communication, reducing the need for addictive substances as a coping mechanism.

Through artistic mediums like painting, drawing and sculpting, students can externalise their internal struggles, traumatic experiences and emotional turmoil, fostering a sense of accomplishment and self-empowerment (Bailey, 2021). Art therapy also allows students to psychologically distance themselves from their problems by externalising them onto the artwork. Through symbolic representation, students can explore their struggles, fears and aspirations, gaining insight into their psychological processes. This distancing effect helps them gain clarity and perspective on their substance abuse issues, leading to meaningful introspection and personal growth (Bernstein et al., 2015). Art therapy promotes the integration of mind and body, fostering holistic well-being. Engaging in creative activities can help experience a sense of mindfulness and presence in the moment, counteracting impulsive and compulsive tendencies associated with substance abuse (Fortuna & Vallejo, 2015). This mind-body integration aligns with the principles of holistic healing, addressing the underlying emotional, psychological and spiritual aspects of addiction. As schools and treatment centres increasingly recognise the value of alternative therapies, integrating art therapy into comprehensive treatment programs can offer new hope and healing for students on the path to recovery.

The issue of Substance abuse among secondary school students is a pressing concern that requires innovative solutions. Traditional treatment methods, such as counselling, support groups and residential rehabilitation programs, have limitations that hinder their effectiveness, especially when dealing with secondary school students (Hogue et al., 2014; Lipsey & Wilson, 2017; Pedrelli et al., 2015; Schmidt, 2013). One of the primary limitations of traditional treatment methods is the stigma associated with seeking help for substance abuse (Bielenberg et al., 2021; Stringer & Baker, 2018). Adolescents often face significant social and emotional barriers when it comes to acknowledging their struggles with substance abuse and seeking treatment. Traditional methods may perpetuate this stigma, making it challenging for students to access the help they need. Conventional treatment methods often lack a tailored approach to address the unique needs of secondary school students (Hughes et al., 2020). Adolescents experiencing substance abuse require tailored interventions that consider their developmental stage, peer influences and familial dynamics. Traditional methods may not fully account for these individualised needs, potentially limiting their impact on this demographic. Limited engagement and retention can be challenging for secondary school students in traditional treatment methods, as their peers highly influence them and

may resist or disengage from conventional treatment approaches. Insufficient technology integration in treatment methods can improve accessibility, offer continuous support, and encourage students to actively participate in their recovery process.

There is a growing need to explore alternative treatment approaches that can better address substance abuse among secondary school students. Alternative treatments can encompass various modalities, including Art and Music Therapy, Mindfulness and Meditation, Adventure Therapy, Peer Support Programs and Digital Interventions (DiFulvio, 2021). These alternative approaches offer the potential to address the limitations of traditional treatment methods by providing tailored, engaging and accessible interventions for secondary school students struggling with substance abuse. Alternative treatment methods, such as mindfulness, meditation, art, music therapy, adventure, wilderness therapy, peer support programs, and holistic wellness practices, offer a holistic and personalised approach to substance abuse. Technology, such as mobile apps, online support communities, and virtual counselling services, can provide accessible, personalised support to secondary school students struggling with substance abuse. These digital platforms offer educational resources, self-help tools, and remote counselling sessions, breaking down barriers to seeking help. By embracing innovative therapies, peer support, holistic wellness practices, and leveraging technology, we can create more effective and tailored interventions to support the well-being and recovery of young substance abusers.

This study explores the potential of alternative treatments for substance abuse among secondary school students, addressing the gap in research on their effectiveness. Traditional methods like counselling and support groups have been the primary approach, but there is a need for more research on alternative treatments for this demographic. This research focuses on art therapy, music therapy, mindfulness practices, and outdoor experiential therapies to understand their effectiveness in helping students overcome substance abuse issues. Factors such as socioeconomic background, familial support and school environment may influence the success of these treatments. The findings are expected to make significant contributions to the field of substance abuse treatment among secondary school students. It should provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of alternative therapies, offering a new approach to addressing substance abuse in this demographic. The research findings may also inform the development of tailored intervention programs that incorporate alternative treatments, diversifying available options for addressing substance abuse among secondary school students. By understanding the role of socio-economic background, familial support, and the school environment, stakeholders can better support students in their journey towards recovery from substance abuse. These research findings have the potential to shape the future of substance abuse treatment among secondary school students,

offering new hope and opportunities for those in need of support.

METHOD

This research focuses on alternative treatment for substance abuse among secondary school students using a comprehensive approach. The study includes a literature review, interviews with experts, case studies and a review of institutional programs. The review examines existing literature on alternative treatments, their efficacy, and their applicability to the target demographic. Interviews with experts in substance abuse treatment, psychology, and education provide valuable insights into the potential effectiveness of alternative therapies. Case studies provide real-life examples of the impact of alternative treatments and offer insights into factors contributing to successful outcomes. The review of institutional programs includes a review of school policies, counselling services and integrated substance abuse treatment programs. Statistical data related to substance abuse prevalence, treatment outcomes, and demographic trends among secondary school students is analysed to provide a broader understanding of the scope and impact of substance abuse and the potential effectiveness of alternative treatments. Observational research within secondary school environments offers a deeper understanding of the social and cultural dynamics related to substance abuse and treatment-seeking behaviours among students. By employing a diverse range of research methods, this discussion on alternative treatment for substance abuse among secondary school students aims to provide a comprehensive and evidence-based analysis of the topic. Each technique contributes unique perspectives and data points, enhancing the understanding of the challenges and opportunities in addressing substance abuse within the secondary school demographic.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Challenges in Treating Substance Abuse Among Secondary School Students

Substance abuse among secondary school students is a growing concern, and addressing this issue requires a comprehensive approach that includes alternative treatment options. Traditional treatment programs have been the primary method. Still, there are challenges to overcome, such as the stigma associated with seeking help, limited access to appropriate treatment facilities in secondary schools and the high tendency for relapse after traditional treatment programs. To address these challenges, creating a supportive and non-judgmental environment within schools where students feel comfortable seeking help is crucial.

The stigma surrounding substance abuse among secondary school students is a growing concern that requires urgent attention. This stigma is deeply rooted in societal attitudes and perceptions and often leads to judgment, discrimination and social exclusion when students openly seek help. This creates

barriers to treatment, as the fear of being stigmatised can prevent students from acknowledging their substance abuse problems and seeking professional help. This reluctance can worsen the negative impact of substance abuse on their physical and mental health, academic performance and overall well-being. Stigma negatively impacts students' mental health, leading to feelings of shame, guilt and isolation, which can worsen substance abuse issues and co-occurring mental health disorders (Earnshaw, 2020; Miles, 2021).

To effectively address the stigma surrounding substance abuse among secondary school students, comprehensive strategies that prioritise education, awareness, and destigmatisation efforts must be implemented. School administrations, mental health professionals and community organisations must collaborate to create a supportive and non-judgmental environment for students to seek help and receive treatment. Educational programs and awareness campaigns can play a crucial role in challenging misconceptions and reducing the stigma associated with substance abuse. By promoting open discussions about mental health and substance abuse, students can be empowered to seek help without fear of judgment or discrimination. Schools and communities must also prioritise creating supportive environments that promote empathy, understanding and access to confidential support services. By implementing comprehensive strategies, we can work towards breaking down barriers and ensuring all students have access to the treatment and support they need to overcome substance abuse challenges.

Furthermore, another challenge associated with the limitation of the traditional method is the limited access to appropriate treatment facilities within schools. Schools often lack resources for substance abuse counselling, limiting comprehensive support for students. Alternative treatment approaches like peer support groups, mindfulness-based practices, art therapy, and outdoor experiential programs are gaining traction due to traditional facilities' limitations, which offer early intervention and ongoing holistic well-being support. However, stigma surrounding substance abuse and mental health issues can hinder the adoption of these strategies. To promote alternative treatment programs for substance abuse among secondary school students, it is essential to educate administrators, parents, and students about their effectiveness. Collaboration between educators, mental health professionals, and policymakers is crucial. Resources should be allocated for staff training in identifying and supporting struggling students, and partnerships with community-based organisations and mental health providers can enhance the availability of alternative treatment options. Expanding access to innovative interventions and overcoming barriers can help students recover.

Substance abuse among secondary school students is a pressing issue requiring innovative solutions, as traditional treatment programs struggle to address the high relapse rate, necessitating the development of alternative treatments

(Bowen et al., 2021). These include holistic and integrated interventions that address various aspects of a student's life, such as mental health support, academic guidance, family therapy and community involvement. The treatment program incorporates mindfulness practices and stress management techniques to teach adolescents coping strategies and emotional regulation skills to prevent substance use. Peer-based support programs can effectively treat substance abuse among secondary school students by creating a supportive environment for open discussions and sharing coping mechanisms. However, barriers to successful implementation include limited funding, the stigma surrounding adolescent substance abuse, and the need for specialised training for professionals. Collaboration between educational institutions, mental health professionals, policymakers, and community organisations is crucial to overcome these barriers and integrate alternative treatment approaches into the existing support framework. Holistic, integrated, and youth-centric interventions can pave the way for a future where secondary school students receive comprehensive support to overcome substance abuse and build healthy, fulfilling lives. Stakeholders must work together to prioritise developing and implementing these alternative treatment approaches.

Limitations of Traditional Treatment Methods in Treating Substance Abuse Among Secondary School Students

Substance abuse among secondary school students is a significant issue that requires effective intervention strategies. Traditional treatment methods, such as counselling and rehabilitation programs, have been the cornerstone of addressing this issue. However, these methods have limitations, such as stigma, fear of judgment and lack of tailored interventions for the unique needs of secondary school students. Statistics on the effectiveness of traditional methods reveal mixed results, with some students benefiting from these programs but not having consistently high success rates (Becker et al., 2016; Jo et al., 2024; Ongwae, 2016; Prendergast et al., 2017; Tanner-Smith et al., 2013). Relapse rates remain a concern, indicating that these methods may not always provide sustainable solutions. The long-term impact of traditional treatment methods on students post-recovery is another aspect that needs critical examination. The future of alternative treatment for substance abusers among secondary school students hinges on embracing a holistic approach that recognises the limitations of traditional methods.

By acknowledging the need for alternative treatment options and incorporating diverse therapeutic modalities, educational institutions and healthcare providers can chart a more comprehensive and tailored path towards supporting students in overcoming substance abuse. Adolescent substance abuse treatment approaches must adapt to the changing landscape, ensuring the well-being and prospects of secondary school students. Alternative treatments, which consider individual needs and offer a sustainable path to recovery, can promote

self-expression, emotional regulation, and social connection. Combining traditional methods with innovative treatments can create a more inclusive system. Schools, communities, and policymakers should invest in these methods, prioritising individual needs and providing the necessary tools for students to overcome substance abuse issues. Integrating technology and digital platforms offers a promising method for tailored adolescent interventions. Mobile applications and online support networks offer discreet, accessible solutions, providing educational resources, coping mechanisms, and personalised support. A holistic approach incorporating expressive therapies, mindfulness practices, and community involvement is promising. This approach aligns with secondary school students' diverse experiences and challenges, empowering them to overcome substance abuse through innovative, effective interventions.

Potential for Alternative Treatment Options in Treating Substance Abuse Among Secondary School Students

Substance abuse among secondary school students is a significant issue that requires innovative treatment methods. Mindfulness-based interventions, such as meditation and breathing exercises, help manage cravings, regulate emotions, and cope with stress more effectively. Art therapy, which involves non-verbal expressions of emotions, experiences, and struggles, can be a catharsis for students. Engaging in artistic activities like painting, drawing, and sculpting can foster creativity and self-expression, providing alternative outlets for emotional release and stress management and reducing the likelihood of substance abuse as a coping mechanism. Overall, these treatments offer promising solutions to this pressing issue. Outdoor experiential programs in secondary schools use nature and outdoor activities to address substance abuse. These programs, including wilderness expeditions and environmental conservation projects, foster personal growth, resilience, and self-discovery while developing skills like teamwork and problem-solving. The sense of accomplishment and connection with nature contribute to students' well-being and resilience against substance abuse temptations.

Mindfulness-based interventions

The prevalence of substance abuse among secondary school students has increased, leading to a growing interest in alternative treatment options. Mindfulness-based interventions, rooted in ancient Eastern traditions, have shown promise in addressing the psychological and emotional factors contributing to addictive behaviours (Singha & Singha, 2024). These practices focus on present-moment awareness and non-judgmental acceptance of thoughts, emotions and sensations. Mindfulness practices reduce stress and enhance emotional regulation, which is crucial for preventing and treating substance abuse among adolescents (Priddy et al., 2018). Secondary school students often face academic pressure, peer

interactions, and familial expectations, increasing stress levels. Mindfulness techniques can help manage stress and regulate emotions, reducing substance use as a coping mechanism. Engaging in mindfulness fosters self-awareness, enabling students to understand the triggers and motivations behind substance abuse and enabling informed decisions regarding behaviour and substance use choices.

Mindfulness-based interventions aim to manage cravings and prevent relapse by cultivating non-reactivity and non-attachment to thoughts and sensations. They can be introduced in secondary school through curriculum integration, teacher training, and collaboration with mental health professionals. Schools can integrate mindfulness practices into health education programs, extracurricular activities and counselling services, providing students with opportunities to learn and apply mindfulness techniques. Training educators and school counsellors in mindfulness-based approaches can facilitate the effective delivery of these interventions. Mindfulness-based interventions, rooted in mindfulness meditation, focus on present-moment awareness and non-judgmental acceptance of thoughts, emotions, and sensations, equipping students with coping skills to resist substance abuse temptations and make healthier choices. Several studies have demonstrated the positive impact of mindfulness-based interventions on substance abuse outcomes among secondary school students.

Peri et al. (2024) found that mindfulness-based emotion-regulation interventions significantly improved emotion-regulation outcomes in individuals with substance dependence. The study found no significant impact of demographic or study-design variables on substance use reduction from ER interventions, emphasising the importance of cost-effective methods like mindfulness-based interventions in addressing maladaptive substance use. García-Rubio and Andreu's (2022) study on mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) in preventing depression in children and adolescents reveals that they reduce risk factors and increase protective factors. The study examines MBIs aimed at children, adolescents, teachers, and parents, finding that implementing MBIs individually and from a community and systemic perspective, involving students, teachers, and parents, may be more effective. Saunders and Kober (2020) suggest combining the NCCIH's "Framework for Developing and Testing Mind and Body Interventions" with the National Institute of Health's "Stage Model of Intervention Development" to address the lack of evidence on mindfulness in pediatric populations, offering specific recommendations for its design, evaluation, implementation, and dissemination.

Twum-Antwi et al. (2020) emphasise the significance of fostering child and youth resilience by enhancing home and school environments. They propose a multisystemic model of resilience, arguing that a system's ability to handle atypical stress enhances the capacity of co-occurring systems. Research indicates that more resilient caregivers lead to children experiencing necessary growth and development factors in

both settings. The authors suggest a new perspective focusing on children, promoting the well-being of parents and teachers, and creating more supportive and stable environments. Mindfulness-based interventions in secondary schools can help tackle adolescent substance abuse by creating a supportive environment. By incorporating mindfulness practices into the curriculum or extracurricular activities, educators and mental health professionals can create a supportive environment that promotes emotional well-being and resilience. This can help students navigate peer pressure and academic stress, fostering self-awareness, emotional regulation, and healthy coping mechanisms. Furthermore, integrating mindfulness into existing counselling and support services can enhance the effectiveness of interventions aimed at addressing substance abuse among students.

Mindfulness-based interventions can enhance emotional regulation and self-awareness among adolescents, leading to greater emotional resilience and reduced impulsive behaviours, including substance abuse. These interventions help adolescents understand their thought patterns, triggers, and habitual reactions, addressing the root causes of substance abuse. Mental health interventions also prevent relapse by equipping students with coping skills to cope with stress, cravings, and triggers. Implementing mindfulness-based interventions in secondary schools can be particularly impactful due to the potential for early intervention. However, challenges such as qualified instructors, cultural sensitivity, and integrating mindfulness practices into a comprehensive treatment approach must be addressed. Despite these challenges, mindfulness-based interventions offer a unique approach to addressing the complex challenges of substance abuse among adolescents, providing them with the necessary tools to navigate the complexities and cultivate healthier, more resilient futures.

Art therapy

Art therapy is a promising alternative to traditional methods of treating mental health issues, such as substance abuse. It offers a non-verbal means of expression for individuals to communicate their emotions, experiences and struggles in a safe and supportive environment (Council, 2015). Art therapy can be particularly beneficial for secondary school students who may struggle to articulate their feelings verbally. Creating art can be therapeutic, enabling students to channel their thoughts and emotions into tangible forms (Malchiodi, 2020). This can serve as a cathartic outlet for those grappling with substance abuse.

Art therapy is a form of therapy that promotes mindfulness, self-awareness and understanding of thoughts and behaviours related to substance use. It fosters a sense of belonging among students, allowing them to share experiences and develop empathy. This community can help combat feelings of isolation and alienation associated with substance abuse. Art therapy also allows the exploration of underlying issues contributing to substance abuse, such as trauma, stress, or low self-esteem.

Students can process complex emotions driving their substance use by delving into the subconscious through artistic expression. Art therapy can develop coping skills and enhance resilience, helping students manage stress and find healthy self-expression outlets. Incorporating art therapy into a comprehensive treatment approach can offer unique benefits that may not be fully addressed through conventional methods. Art therapy is a promising treatment option for secondary school students struggling with substance abuse. It uses creative processes like drawing, painting, and sculpting to help students explore their emotions, reduce anxiety, and improve self-esteem. Numerous case studies and research data have shown the positive impact of art therapy on adolescent substance abuse, highlighting several key benefits of incorporating art therapy into the treatment of substance abuse. These include:

1. **Emotional Expression and Coping Skills:** Art therapy provides students with a creative outlet to express their emotions and experiences, reducing their reliance on substance abuse as a coping mechanism (Bosgraaf et al., 2020).
2. **Self-Exploration and Identity Development:** Art therapy encourages students to explore their inner thoughts and feelings, facilitating a journey of self-discovery and identity development (Kelemen & Shamri-Zeevi, 2020).
3. **Stress Reduction and Relaxation:** Art therapy offers a therapeutic space for students to unwind, relax and alleviate stress. Creating art can be inherently calming and meditative, providing a healthy outlet for managing the pressures and anxieties that often accompany the adolescent experience.
4. **Building Supportive Relationships:** Participating in art therapy sessions fosters students' sense of community and belonging, providing validation and support from others facing similar challenges.

Art therapy is a valuable tool in substance abuse treatment, as it allows adolescents to express their emotions and experiences in a tangible form, providing insight into their internal world. This process also enhances emotional regulation, as adolescents often face distress and instability during adolescence. Engaging in artistic activities helps individuals constructively identify, understand, and manage their emotions, reducing their reliance on substances as a coping mechanism. Art therapy is a powerful tool for self-awareness and introspection, helping students to confront and address issues related to substance abuse. Through group-based sessions, students can feel understood, accepted, and connected to their peers, which can combat feelings of isolation and alienation often associated with substance abuse. This integration of art therapy holds great potential for addressing the complex needs of secondary school students, as it fosters a sense of accomplishment, self-efficacy, and a sense of belonging.

Outdoor experiential programs

Traditional methods have shown limitations in engaging and retaining students in substance abuse treatment programs

(Madson et al., 2016; Pedrelli et al., 2015). Outdoor experiential programs involving nature and adventure-based activities are promising interventions for secondary school students. These programs aim to foster self-discovery, interpersonal skills, and emotional regulation by immersing individuals in natural environments and challenging physical activities. They create a relaxed atmosphere, promoting freedom and autonomy. The natural environment and physical challenges can develop coping mechanisms and emotional resilience, positively impacting mental health, including reducing stress and anxiety, which are often underlying factors in substance abuse.

Outdoor experiential programs are a promising alternative to traditional therapeutic approaches for substance abuse treatment. However, they face several challenges, including ensuring participant safety, integrating them into existing treatment frameworks, and tailoring activities to address specific needs and challenges. Risk-based research and evaluation are necessary to assess the effectiveness of these programs, and long-term studies measuring their impact on substance abuse behaviours, mental well-being, and academic performance can provide valuable insights. Feedback from program participants can also contribute to refining and improving the approach. Outdoor experiential programs have been proven to positively impact substance abuse treatment outcomes, especially for secondary school students who may not respond well to traditional therapeutic approaches. They offer a break from routine, a fresh perspective, and a sense of accomplishment, boosting self-esteem and fostering personal growth, social skills, and emotional regulation. Experiential nature-based activities can help reduce stress, anxiety, and depression, which are common factors in substance abuse. These activities can also contribute to students' recovery by providing a sense of calm and well-being. Outdoor experiential programs also offer a unique platform for substance abuse education and prevention, helping students understand the consequences of substance abuse and develop resilience. However, their effectiveness depends on careful planning, qualified staff, and safety measures. Further exploration and investment in these programs could significantly support secondary school students struggling with substance abuse.

Outdoor experiential programs for secondary school students aim to promote personal growth, self-awareness and positive behavioural change. Outward Bound is a successful example of such a program, offering wilderness expeditions that foster resilience, leadership skills and self-confidence through rock climbing, backpacking and rafting (Vosloo, 2021). These experiences provide physical challenges and encourage teamwork and problem-solving, building students' confidence to overcome obstacles. Evoke Therapy Programs utilise the wilderness as a therapeutic setting for adolescents struggling with substance abuse and mental health issues (Martin, 2023). Through hiking, camping and group therapy sessions, students

learn to confront their issues, develop coping strategies and build healthier relationships with themselves and others. Outdoor experiential programs provide a therapeutic environment that fosters personal growth and life skills, which is particularly beneficial for adolescents struggling with substance abuse. These programs offer a fresh perspective and introspection, fostering a connection to the natural world and a sense of awe, wonder, and appreciation for the world around them. Outdoor experiential programs are a unique therapy approach that promotes personal growth, self-esteem and healthy behaviours among secondary school students. These programs combine physical activity, teamwork and exposure to nature to address underlying issues contributing to addictive behaviours. Adolescents often turn to drugs and alcohol as a coping mechanism for stress, anxiety or trauma. Participating in outdoor activities and adventure therapy can help students confront these issues in a supportive environment. Challenges like rock climbing, hiking or wilderness survival skills can develop resilience, problem-solving skills and a sense of accomplishment. Outdoor experiential programs also focus on students' physical, emotional, and psychological well-being. Physical activity releases endorphins, which can reduce cravings for drugs and alcohol. Spending time in nature has been linked to decreased stress, anxiety, and depression, all common triggers for substance abuse.

CONCLUSION

The future of alternative treatment for substance abuse among secondary school students is promising due to its potential to provide a comprehensive and personalised approach. Traditional methods, such as counselling and support groups, often fail to address underlying factors contributing to substance abuse, such as trauma, mental health issues, and social determinants of health. Alternative treatments, such as art therapy, mindfulness practices, and outdoor experiential programs, can complement traditional methods by providing self-expression, stress reduction, and coping mechanisms for sustained recovery. These treatments can fill critical gaps in current support systems for secondary school students struggling with substance abuse, offering a more inclusive and accessible form of care that resonates with students who may not respond well to traditional interventions. By embracing diverse modalities that cater to different learning styles and preferences, alternative treatments can engage a broader spectrum of students and foster a sense of empowerment and self-efficacy in their recovery journeys. However, further research and implementation of alternative treatment approaches are necessary to validate their long-term impact and effectiveness. Additionally, efforts to integrate alternative treatments into school-based support programs and community initiatives must be pursued to ensure their availability and integration into the continuum of care for secondary school students. By recognising the limitations of traditional methods and embracing the potential of alternative

treatments, we can better support the well-being and recovery of students facing substance abuse challenges.

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