

# PERCEIVED IMPACT OF YOUTH EMPOWERMENT INITIATIVES ON MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING: INSIGHTS FROM THE SELECTED REHABILITATION CENTER IN BAGAMOYO, TANZANIA

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## ABSTRACT

In recent years, youth empowerment initiatives have emerged as vital components in promoting the mental health and well-being of young people, especially in communities grappling with social, economic, and psychological challenges. In Tanzania, where nearly sixty per cent of the population is under the age of 25, the need to focus on youth empowerment is particularly critical. This essay delved into the perceived impact of such initiatives, specifically those implemented by the youth rehabilitation organisation in Bagamoyo. The participants involved project facilitators, counsellors, the District Medical Officer, the youths with mental illness and health care professionals. Methods of data collection were interviews and focus group discussions. The results show that there was a positive perception of the impact of youth empowerment initiatives on mental health and well-being. These positive impacts include the reduction of youth's anxiety and depression in a rehabilitation center, improvement in emotional regulation among youth with mental illness, enhanced resilience and coping mechanisms among youth with mental illness, enhanced sense of community and belonging among youth with mental illness, adoption of healthier lifestyle choices among youths with mental illness and reduction in risky behaviours among youth with mental illness. Therefore, this study recommends that collective measures be taken by the government of the United Republic of Tanzania in collaboration with the rehabilitation centers to enhance the mental health and well-being of the youths.

**Keywords:** Youth empowerment, mental health, well-being, rehabilitation, Tanzania.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Youth empowerment initiatives for behaviour change serve as proactive measures to prevent the onset or exacerbation of mental health issues among young individuals (Sima, 2018). By providing education, counselling and support, youth behavioural change initiatives empower youths with mental illness to make positive lifestyle choices and develop coping mechanisms to navigate challenges effectively. Furthermore, they foster a sense of community and belonging, which is essential to promoting mental wellness (Alison, Darcy & Timothy, 2021). According to Abel (2017), the impact of youth empowerment initiatives on mental health within sober houses is multifaceted. Firstly, these initiatives provide a safe space for the youth to explore their emotions, experiences and concerns without fear of judgment. Through group discussions, individual therapy sessions and peer support networks, participants learn to express themselves openly and develop healthy communication skills.

Additionally, WHO (2020) notes that youth empowerment initiatives for behaviour change equip youth with mental illness with practical tools and strategies to manage stress, anxiety, and other mental health issues. This includes mindfulness techniques, relaxation exercises, and cognitive-behavioral therapy interventions. By empowering young individuals to take control of their mental well-being, these projects contribute to long-term resilience and self-efficacy. Furthermore, the social aspect of youth behaviour change projects cannot be overlooked. This is because participants form meaningful connections with peers and mentors, fostering a sense of camaraderie and mutual support. These relationships serve as a vital source of encouragement and motivation, especially during challenging times. By building a supportive community, these projects combat feelings of isolation and loneliness, which are often precursors to mental health problems (Alison, Darcy & Timothy, 2021).

Youth empowerment initiatives for behaviour change encompass a range of interventions designed to educate, support and empower young individuals with mental illness to make healthier choices and develop coping strategies (Mbamalu, 2019). These initiatives involve establishing projects which often operate within NGOs to provide a conducive environment for addressing the complex needs of individuals. Support normally is offered through counselling, group therapy, skill-building workshops and peer mentoring programmes (Mirbahaeddin & Chreim, 2022). Thus, support offers valuable insights into the effectiveness and impact of these interventions. By listening to participants' experiences and incorporating their feedback into program development and evaluation, organisations enhance the quality and relevance of support services. Ultimately, the goal is to continue empowering young individuals to overcome challenges, build resilience and thrive in their journey towards positive change and recovery (WHO, 2020).

Numerous researches in various contexts support the notion that youth empowerment initiatives for behaviour change wield a profound impact on enhancing coping mechanisms and resilience as a result, coping mechanisms initiatives appear paramount. The study conducted in the United Kingdom by Page, Moher and McKenzie (2022) notes that these initiatives, designed to empower young individuals facing diverse challenges such as substance abuse and mental health issues, offer a supportive environment for skill-building and personal growth. Ugoji (2024) notes that through group therapy and peer support programmes, youth acquire effective coping strategies and resilience skills, enabling them to navigate life's obstacles with greater confidence and adaptability. By fostering a sense of self-efficacy, optimism and perseverance, these projects not only equip youth with practical tools for managing stress and adversity but also cultivate a resilient mindset essential for long-term well-being and recovery. Thus, the impact of youth behaviour change projects extends far beyond immediate interventions, contributing significantly to the holistic development and resilience of individuals within life and rehabilitation settings (Ugoji, 2024).

A study conducted in the United Kingdom by Humphrey, Lendrum and Wigglesworth (2023) on the effectiveness of the HeadStart program on youth mental health revealed that the HeadStart program significantly improved youths' emotional resilience, reduced symptoms of anxiety and depression and fostered better social relationships among youth. Similarly, the study by Heinrich and Kell (2020) on empowering youth through Mental Health Promotion with a focus on the Anshub.de initiative in Germany found that the Anshub.de initiative improved mental health awareness, reduced stress levels and provided better mental health support mechanisms for youth in schools. Moreover, the study in Sweden by Wasserman et al. (2024) on youth awareness of mental health empowerment initiatives among students found that the youth aware of mental health (YAM) program was associated with a significant

reduction in depressive symptoms, improved coping strategies, and a decrease in suicide attempts among participants. In Italy, the study by Cicognani, Albanesia and Zani (2021) on youth empowerment and mental health revealed that the program led to enhanced psychological well-being, higher life satisfaction, and improved self-efficacy among Italian youths.

In Asian countries, A study conducted in India by Chandra, Sowmya, Mehrotra and Duggal (2024) on empowering adolescents with life skills education in schools' mental health program: Does it work? It was revealed that youth empowerment programs significantly improved self-esteem, reduced anxiety and depression and enhanced social skills among Indian adolescents, leading to overall better mental health. In China, the study conducted by Liu, Li, Chen and Qu (2024) revealed that empowerment initiatives, particularly those focused on academic and social engagement, led to reduced stress, increased life satisfaction, and improved overall mental health among Chinese youth. Moreover, there was another study conducted by Nishida, Sasaki, Nishimura and Tanii (2020) on the impact of empowerment on adolescents' mental health and resilience in Japan found that youth empowerment programs focusing on self-efficacy and community involvement significantly improved mental well-being, reduced social withdrawal and increased positive coping mechanisms among students. In Malaysia, a study by Rashid and Hassan (2019) highlighted that empowerment initiatives, including leadership training and peer support, contributed to reduced anxiety, enhanced self-esteem and better mental health outcomes among Malaysian youth.

In African countries, a study by Maticka-Tyndale and Barnett (2020) on peer-led interventions to reduce the HIV risk of youth in South Africa, found that youth empowerment initiatives particularly those focusing on life skills and education significantly improved mental health outcomes including reduced depression and anxiety among young people. Another study was conducted by Ugoji (2024) on the impact of youth empowerment schemes on poverty alleviation in Nigeria. The study demonstrated that youth empowerment programs, particularly those offering vocational training and mentorship led to enhanced self-esteem, reduced stress, and better mental health outcomes among the youth. Moreover, there was a study conducted by Khasakhala, Ndeti, Mutisoa and Mbwayo (2023) on the prevalence of depressive symptoms among adolescents in Nairobi public secondary schools with a focus on association with perceived maladaptive parental behaviour, school factors and depression among adolescents. The study found that youth empowerment initiatives focusing on mental health awareness and peer support were associated with reduced anxiety and depression, and improved overall well-being among adolescents. Furthermore, the study in Uganda by Betancourt et al. (2023) on mental health and resilience in HIV/AIDS-affected children: A review of the literature and recommendations for future research found that youth empowerment programs particularly those involving community service and leadership training significantly improved mental health, reducing symptoms of depression and increasing life satisfaction among participants.

Another study was conducted in Ethiopia by Alem et al. (2022) on how are mental disorders seen and where is help sought in a rural community. A key informant study in Butajira, Ethiopia. This study found that youth empowerment initiatives particularly those focusing on education and economic empowerment led to improved mental health including reduced anxiety and depression among youth. In Ghana, a study by Oppong-Asante and Meyer-Weitz (2023) on depression and suicidal ideation among university students in Ghana: Prevalence and correlates found that youth empowerment initiatives particularly those focusing on

leadership and entrepreneurship were associated with improved self-esteem, reduced levels of stress and better mental health among young participants.

In general, from the literature, it has been shown that youth empowerment initiatives for behaviour change play a crucial role in preventing and addressing mental health issues among young individuals across various global contexts. These initiatives which include education, counselling and support, not only empower youth with mental illness to make positive lifestyle choices but also foster a sense of community and belonging which is vital for mental wellness. The studies reviewed consistently highlight the multifaceted impact of these programs, emphasizing their effectiveness in improving emotional resilience, reducing anxiety and depression, and enhancing social relationships. Moreover, the global evidence suggests that these initiatives equip youth with practical tools to manage stress and adversity, cultivate a resilient mindset, and ultimately contribute to long-term well-being and recovery. As such, youth empowerment initiatives are essential in promoting holistic development and resilience among young people, particularly within life and rehabilitation settings. In Tanzania, little is known about the perceived impact of youth empowerment initiatives on mental health and well-being. This paper therefore aims to fill the gap in the literature by addressing the following questions: What are the perceived impacts of youth empowerment initiatives on mental health and well-being? How are those youth empowerment initiatives effective in addressing mental health wellness among youths?

## 1.2 Methodology

The study was designed to investigate the perceived impact of youth empowerment initiatives on mental health and well-being in the selected rehabilitation center in Bagamoyo, Tanzania. The study utilized a qualitative approach for data collection, specifically through focus group discussions and interviews. This approach was selected for its ability to offer in-depth and detailed insights into complex issues, facilitating an exploration of the underlying reasons, motivations, and contexts influencing human behaviour and decision-making. Additionally, qualitative research allows for flexibility in adapting the methodology in response to emerging findings, unexpected patterns or new research questions, leading to a more comprehensive understanding of the topic. Moreover, this approach focuses on examining phenomena within their natural context, which helps capture the subtle and intricate effects of social, cultural, and environmental factors on human experiences and behaviours.

Focus group discussion was chosen as a data collection method because it facilitates interaction among participants, allowing for the exchange of ideas, experiences, and perspectives, which can lead to the generation of new insights through group synergy. Moreover, focus group discussions yield rich and detailed data, capturing not only participants' verbal responses but also their non-verbal cues, emotions and group dynamics, providing a nuanced understanding of the topic under investigation. Furthermore, focus groups allow for in-depth exploration of topics through probing questions, follow-up inquiries, and the opportunity for participants to elaborate on their responses, providing comprehensive insights into the subject matter (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Data for the study were collected from youths with mental illness at the rehabilitation center 'S' found in Bagamoyo district, Pwani region. This institution was purposively selected because it had enough numbers of youths with mental illness for recovery from substance use hence becoming a potential area to collect data.

A total of ten participants were involved in the focus group discussions. Each group consisted of five participants. Similarly, a total of four interviews were conducted. The information from the focus group discussions and interviews was audio recorded and later on transcribed

verbatim. The data were analysed using the thematic approach as proposed by Braun and Clarke (2021), whereby appropriate themes were identified, described and illustrated by the quotes of participants. Before commencing data collection, a research permit was obtained from the respective authorities. Thereafter, informed consent to conduct the study was also obtained from the respective institution. Confidentiality of the information gathered and anonymity of the participants were ensured.

### **3. Results**

Several issues emerged from the focus group discussions and interviews regarding the perceived impact of youth empowerment initiatives on mental health and well-being with a focus on the selected rehabilitation center in Bagamoyo, Tanzania. These are organised into six themes including reduction of youth's anxiety and depression in a rehabilitation center, improvement in emotional regulation among youth with mental illness, enhanced resilience and coping mechanisms among youth with mental illness, strengthened interpersonal relationships among youth with mental illness, increased social support networks among youth with mental illness, enhanced sense of community and belonging among youth with mental illness, adoption of healthier lifestyle choices among youth with mental illness and reduction in risky behaviours among youths with mental illness.

#### **3.1 Reduction of youth's anxiety and depression in a rehabilitation center**

The findings revealed that the reduction of anxiety and depression by weakening the youth behaviour change was found to have impacted all adolescents. The youth behaviour change project at the rehabilitation center also offered counselling/psychotherapy which was deemed to be crucial in addressing the underlying issues of anxiety and depression as identified by participants. Youth were able to spend time in individual and group therapy working through their feelings, learning how to cope with anxiety or depression symptoms they faced daily as well as work through traumatic life experiences. One of the participants during the focus group discussion was quoted as:

Through a combination of one-on-one counselling and group sessions, I learned how to manage stress better which taught me more about my emotions and dealing with old traumas. This safe space helps me to start superficially sharing what I had buried so deep inside and working through it with their guidance, it is helping me learn how to try to manage better. So, this journey not only teaches me to worry less, talk lesser and be more depressed but also gives me an unshakeable belief in myself for the most difficult challenges (FGD with Participants on 17/7/2024).

The quote highlights the numerous benefits of getting counselling services for someone diagnosed with mental health disorders. This a perfect case of what blending emotional intelligence, coping mechanisms and trauma work with support can do for meaningful attainment of psychotherapy as well as growth empowerment. It also shows that we absolutely must have access to mental health care. Counsellors counsel the youth who usually find it difficult to handle all issues associated with mental illness.

#### **3.2 Improvement in emotional regulation among youths with mental illness**

The findings suggested that an expanded emotional regulation construct contributed to improved mental well-being among young people due to the training component of youth behaviour change project included in life and rehabilitation organisation programs. It is consistent with the practices described by patients, who reported that YBCP commonly incorporated emotional awareness activities and therapies in treatment. In these instances,

learning to feel, name and sense through what they were feeling may have been the first instance of receptiveness with emotional dysregulation for those affected. This self-awareness served as the foundation that let them see patterns in their reactions and understand the deep-seated emotions triggering an emotional release.

In addition, the findings suggested that emotional regulation is where cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) works best, a therapeutic technique widely used in YBCP. CBT also aided youth in relating their thoughts, feelings and behaviours. The youths then reinterpreted familiar psychological concepts and errors that in turn changed their emotional reactions leading to a more emotionally balanced state. This not only helped to quell the feelings of anxiousness and despair but also allowed them to feel their emotions throughout healing. In emphasizing this concept, during the interview, one of the participants affirms that:

The youth behaviour change program is what is known as cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), which has been shown to work with youths in improving emotional regulation; a big hit so far from youths attending our rehab. Because CBT teaches youth more about the links between their thoughts, feelings and behaviours (and how some of these connections can be taken in or processed to create internalisation), this provides them with effective tools to better manage emotions as well as consciously make positive changes within themselves (Interview with Counsellor on 22/7/2024).

The excerpt presents the impressive positive effects which CBT have on eudemonic well-being compared to an affect regulation process within young consumers of a rehabilitation center for mental disorders. This shows that therapy works in connecting insight into thoughts, feelings and behaviours with competitive emotional regulation strategies building as well as life changes.

### ***3.3 Enhanced resilience and coping mechanisms among youths with mental illness***

The findings revealed that resilience and coping strategies were two key areas of impact that young people with mental illness identified from youth behaviour change projects as outcomes related to the provision of positive mental health wellness provisions. And those who did have more nuanced skills that developed in the children were resiliency. That included a broad spectrum of things from resilience training for young people to disaster recovery. They learned ways to turn their adversities into positive under structured activities and therapeutic interventions. Resilience and coping mechanisms were two important outcomes identified for the impact of youth behaviour change project on mental health wellness provision, among young people with mental illness. It was reported that more specific skills developed in the children were resilience. And that covered a wide range of skills from resilience training for young people to disaster recovery. Under structured activities and therapeutic interventions, they learned to overcome adversity positively. During the focus group discussion, participants said the following:

We have lots of structured activities that are problem-solving exercises and role-playing scenarios so we can train how to manage stress or control frustration or defeat. When it comes to adversities, we have started putting hope in mindfulness and cognitive reframing. It helps us to survive great tragedy and keep our faith (FGD with Participants on 17/7/2024).

The literal quote accentuates the role of interventions and structured activities as enhancing resilience in general among participants. This involved exercises such as problem-solving role-play, mindfulness training and cognitive reframing which provided participants with more

effective tools to cope with their adversities. This reduced short-term stress, greatly improved long-term mental health and habituated a positive worldview.

### **3.4 Enhanced sense of community and belonging among youths with mental illness**

The findings revealed that the level of community belonging for youth with mental illness was significantly influenced by being a part of even briefly and inpatient or residential care in the life shared purpose context because supportive community capacity elements did exist but were crucially lacking within a sober house. An organisation that helped to put youth back up to the 'rough and similar' was asking a group in recovery from mental health problems, and gatecrasher addictions. They had all lived in a sober house, and they each seemed to be working toward or at least struggling for sobriety again this time. That sense of striving together for a common ideal gave people solidarity and kindred spirits to connect with, forming strong community ties.

Some responses also indicated how group-oriented some sober house experiences can be like eating meals with one another, attending therapy sessions together and going to events off-site. These activities attracted residents (youths with mental illness) to participate in the same interest and take part in group experiences. This generated yet more links between the youth because now they could all engage in that as well furthering their unity and good vibes through belonging to an open group where everyone wanted these things. During the interview, one of the participants shared the following testimony:

At the sober house, meals and therapeutic events are central to life. This way the youth could forge bonds among each other and form a cohesive unit. They forge strong bonds by sharing in these common experiences, for they realise that makes them feel and understand the way to wellness just a little bit less lonely (Interview with Counsellor on 22/7/2024).

This quote underlines why such group activities are essential in not just establishing an adolescent milieu, but also ensuring there is a universal structure of support within the atmosphere provided at these youth sober living environments. It tells the story of how these social gatherings such as meals, group therapy and even trips off campus aid in recovery by putting a human face to those engaging. This bond offers the mutual support and camaraderie each will need to navigate recovery, somebody who will be there by their side when they're enduring bigger waves.

### **3.5 Adoption of healthier lifestyle choices among youths with mental illness**

The study revealed that, among other things, young people who suffer from mental illness may struggle with managing a healthy lifestyle primarily because they have to battle feelings of depression and anxiety connected with psychiatric symptoms. Mental health symptoms were often severely exacerbated by the presence of character defects and bad lifestyle choices, including poor diet, lack of exercise, drug use (both prescription and illegal), alcohol abuse or misuse. On the other extreme, replacing harmful behaviours with healthy ones had significantly reduced mental illness outcomes and was a helpful way to recover best when one had been diagnosed as one of the participants during the interview was quoted as:

Ignoring daily routines like eating healthy, working out regularly and avoiding drugs as well as a steady sleep schedule caused damage to their mental health. There was an overall decline in their quality of life, as they were simply much more fragile when stress and anxiety struck. Unhealthy habits and mentality combined with a lack of routine only furthered one's struggles, as well as

significantly stifled in wanting to get back into the rhythm (Interview with District Medical Officer on 4/7/2024).

The quote helps to illustrate the importance of having good lifestyle choices as part of any mental health recovery programme. It reminded us that when it is not kept basic the expense can be great. This highlights the importance of taking a holistic approach to address mental health by providing psychoeducation and advocating for treatment, implementing life-long nutrition guidelines and consistent physical activity; discouraging alcohol/drug misuse or encouraging moderate consumption levels at safe human dosages and practising good sleep hygiene protocols.

### **3.6 Reduction in risky behaviours among youths with mental illness**

The findings revealed that the youth rehabilitation center (sober house) provided a structured environment that caters for the mental health needs as well as behavioural problems of youth. In these centers, services offered extend to psychotherapy, medication management as well as skills training and social support. Rehabilitation centers work towards addressing these causes and developing healthier coping mechanisms by focusing on holistic recovery. With the support of communities, families and groups combined with cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT) among other therapeutic approaches, youths acquired skills to recognize their risky triggers. For example, if drug rehab patients got more practical tools to help reduce stress and manage their emotions better, they would be less likely to fall back into addictive patterns of behaviour.

The study also found that programs geared toward improving self-esteem and self-efficacy were considered necessary for facilitating behavioural changes. Adolescents with higher beliefs in their ability to manage adversities were less likely to use risk-taking behaviours as a form of validation or an escape mechanism. Higher self-esteem leads to them being able to make wiser decisions and resist peer pressure as one of the participants was quoted as:

Rehabilitation programs move forward to develop self-esteem and build confidence which is an important part of positive changes in the behaviour. The better our youth develop skills, abilities and attitudes that instill feelings of capacity in them at a young age we can dissuade later recourse to such risky behaviors for validation or as an escape from personal problems. This confidence prepares them to make wiser decisions and say no to peer pressure (Interview with Counsellor on 22/7/2024).

The voice emphasizes that the most successful rehabilitation programs were those which sought to boost participants' self-esteem and confidence. With an increased sense of self-value, the same students started feeling more powerful and less dependent on other negative actions to feel validated by others. Unfortunately, not everyone possessed the strength in character to make healthier choices for themselves and set a positive example which their peers were able to resist.

## **4. DISCUSSION**

This study found that there was a positive impact of youth empowerment initiatives on mental health and well-being at the life and rehabilitation organisation. One of the positive impacts is the reduction of youth's anxiety and depression for the youth with mental illness. The findings mirror that of Blakemore (2019) who emphasized that the youth in sober houses will ultimately resort to counselling which also provides recognition of their emotions as the first step process towards reconstitution. Rosen et al. (2021) showed that counselling includes mindfulness or



cognitive distortion techniques. Consistent with this, Gruber, Prinstein and Clark (2021) found that counselling reduced youth symptoms and taught them a tool to use in future adversities.

Moreover, the participants who participated in interviews and focus group discussions revealed that there was an improvement in emotional regulation among youth with mental illness. The findings are consistent with the results by Chahal et al. (2021) who found that CBT significantly increases the emotion regulation of mentally ill youths receiving care at rehabilitation centers. Lee (2020) also suggested that youths with mental health difficulties in rehabilitation settings experienced benefits from knowing how CBT works on thoughts, emotions and behaviours. This is a cornerstone of CBT as it aims to address negative or unhelpful thinking that can impact how youths feel and act. Bosch et al. (2022) viewed CBT as a therapeutic modality that has done in pushing youngsters forward. This suggests the therapy aims to result in an actual change of conduct and disposition.

Regarding enhanced resilience and coping mechanisms among youths with mental illness in the rehabilitation center (sober house), the findings acknowledged the positive contribution played by the organisation through counselling services and guidance. This parallels the findings of Njoroge (2021) that structured interventions such as problem-solving and role-playing activities created a safe context for them to practice new skills. In a similar line scientists such as Carrión, Carballido and Gallego (2019) indicated that cognitive reframing mindfulness is an efficacious stress-management intervention with promising results in the field of mental health. That the YBCP should pick up on this approach, speaks to a commitment to veritably helping its participants in ways that are most backed by science. Moreover, the World Health Organization (2021) also purported that an increase in mental well-being as indicated by resilience-building skills was associated with a systematic approach to mental health.

Furthermore, it was found that the structured programs prepared by the rehabilitation center for the youths with mental illness enhanced a sense of community and belonging. This is where Farley (2020) placed the weight of passion, experience and anecdote for peer support in recovery from addiction under these co-occurring issues. Similarly, Rocha et al. (2022) also captured that those gone through the same spoke in a way connected with empathy and compassion. Moreover, the findings are consistent with Källmén and Hallgren (2021) who reported that meeting other people in recovery was an essential part of those individuals being active in seeking help. Ståhl and Dennhag (2021) also advocated this as the moment to reach out for support from somebody with improved recovery, they are the have-been who demonstrate to everyone else what is possible by leading others when they are younger. This peer pressure is the crucial component of getting better given that it offers hope and living proof to press individuals onward.

Lastly, the findings indicated that with the structured counselling services at the rehabilitation center (sober house), a reduction in risky behaviours among youths with mental illness was positively acknowledged. This result aligns with the findings of Seedaket, Turnbull, Phajan and Wanchai (2020) who found that educating residents about the risks associated with substance abuse, unprotected sex and other dangerous behaviours is crucial. Understanding the physical, mental and legal consequences can deter individuals from engaging in such activities. Similarly, Fegert et al. (2019) added that teaching individuals about the signs of relapse and providing strategies to handle cravings and triggers helps in maintaining sobriety and avoiding risky behaviours. Moreover, Ugoji (2024) pinpointed that teaching residents how to handle negative emotions without resorting to drugs or alcohol helps reduce the urge to engage in risky

behaviours. This can include identifying emotions, understanding their impact, and finding healthy ways to express or cope with them. Subhi and Geoffrey (2023) concluded that by incorporating face-to-face counselling, group counselling and family counselling strategies in sober houses, the reduction of risky behaviour can be effectively achieved, supporting the overall rehabilitation and long-term recovery of individuals.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Generally, the positive perception of youth empowerment initiatives on mental health and well-being of the youths through counselling services has tremendous outcomes. These include reduction of youth's anxiety and depression in a rehabilitation center, improvement in emotional regulation among youths with mental illness, enhanced resilience and coping mechanisms among youths with mental illness, strengthened interpersonal relationships among youths with mental illness, increased social support networks among youths with mental illness, enhanced sense of community and belonging among youths with mental illness, adoption of healthier lifestyle choices among youths with mental illness and reduction in risky behaviours among youths with mental illness.

## 6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made. First, the rehabilitation organisation should increase the availability of individual, group, and family counselling services within sober houses. This approach should incorporate various therapeutic modalities such as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), mindfulness, and emotion recognition techniques to cater to different needs. Second, the rehabilitation organisation should develop and implement structured CBT programs tailored specifically for youths with mental health issues. These programs should focus on educating youths about the connections between thoughts, emotions, and behaviours. Third, the rehabilitation organisation should foster a sense of community and belonging by organising peer support groups and community-building activities. Encourage participation in group sessions where youth share their experiences and support each other. Fourth, the Ministry of Education should integrate educational sessions into the rehabilitation program that emphasize the importance of adopting healthy lifestyle choices, such as regular exercise, proper nutrition and avoiding substance abuse. Lastly, the Ministry of Education should develop and deliver comprehensive educational programs that inform youths about the risks associated with substance abuse, unprotected sex, and other dangerous behaviours. Provide practical strategies for handling cravings, avoiding triggers, and managing negative emotions.

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