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The Effects of Family Conflicts on Psycho-Spiritual Well-Being of Students Studying in catholic secondary Schools in Kabgayi Diocese, Rwanda

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to understand the effects of family conflicts on the psycho-spiritual well-being of students in Catholic secondary schools in the Kabgayi Diocese, Rwanda. It adopted a convergent parallel design mixed method. The study was guided by Murray Bowen's family system theory. The target population of the study were 2402 students and 29 teachers. The sample size was 347 participants, selected through simple random sampling. The objective of this study is   to determine the effects of family conflict on psycho-spiritual well-being of students studying in catholic secondary schools in Kabgayi Diocese. The data was collected through a questionnaire, semi-structured interview. The results of the research objectives were analysed. For quantitative questionnaires, the researcher used frequencies, tables and diagrams. Quantitative data was analysed descriptively using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences IBM (SPSS) version 23. The qualitative data was analysed using the thematic analysis method. The findings of the study show that there is a significant negative relationship between family conflict and the Psycho-spiritual well-being of students, where Pearson's correlation coefficient of two variables r = -0.174, indicating that heightened conflict levels corresponded with diminished psycho-spiritual well-being which shows that family conflicts have effects on student's psycho-spiritual well-being. The study therefore recommended the government to augment the access to school-based counseling services, wherein students can avail themselves of support and guidance from adequately trained professionals. It is imperative that these services be easily accessible and provided without cost, thereby guaranteeing universal access irrespective of students' financial circumstances.

Key word: Psycho-spiritual wellbeing; Catholic Secondary School; Students.

Introduction

Family is often considered the primary and most influential environment for students' holistic well-being. Holistic well-being encompasses various growth aspects, including physical, cognitive, psychological, and spiritual development. Thus, a student's holistic well-being needs a secure and lovely family. Some students may come from safe and beautiful families, and others may come from dysfunctional families with different forms of conflicts which impact holistic well-being. As Jeynes (2015) argued, students who are exposed to high levels of conflict between their parents are more likely to experience psychological and emotional distress, as well as cognitive and behavioral problems.

Psycho-spiritual well-being is a concept that combines psychological and spiritual well-being in an individual's life, focusing on the integration of mental and emotional health with spiritual beliefs and practices (Pargament, 2007). Psychological well-being, as defined by the American Psychological Association (APA, 2013), refers to a person's overall mental and emotional state characterized by a sense of contentment, happiness, and life satisfaction. It encompasses various dimensions of psychological health, including emotional, cognitive, and social aspects.

Psychological well-being involves experiencing positive emotions such as joy, positive self-esteem, resilience, gratitude, and love. It is about the ability to feel and express happiness and find flow and purpose in what one does. It gives a student a sense of competence and accomplishment in their experiences. For students who find themselves experiencing family conflicts, their psychological well-being is affected in different ways because they find themselves in unsecured places, which leads them to live with fear and anxiety. Sometimes, they feel shame, which increases their low self-esteem.

According to Paragment (2013), spiritual well-being refers to the sense of inner peace, purpose, and harmony that individuals experience when they feel connected to their inner values and beliefs and something transcendent, whether it be a higher power, nature, or the universe. It involves a deep sense of

meaning in life and an alignment with one's values and principles. Parents who actively promote positive spiritual development and create supportive family environments positively impact their children's psychological health and an overall sense of purpose and meaning in life, relationships with others, and coping with stress (Jeynes 2015).However, integrating psychological and spiritual well-being results in psycho-spiritual well-being, which, according to Egunjobi (2023), is an individual's integrative emotional and spiritual health and functioning within a cultural context.

Psycho-spiritual well-being has five components, which are five domains: self-awareness, Connectedness, Meaningfulness, Compassion, and Self-Transcendence. According to Garcia et al. (2021), family conflict refers to disputes, disagreements, or tensions that arise within a family unit, involving its members and impacting the dynamics and relationships within the family system. Family conflict is created due to different factors such as financial issues and lack of job, irresponsibility of one of the partners, different expectations and rules, lack of trust, alcohol abuse and interference from the extended families. All these factors bring a lot of tension, fights, and bad feelings in the home. Sometimes, it results in divorce. These family conflicts are manifested in different forms, such as verbal conflicts. El-Sheikh et al. (2008) said that it could also be considered psychological abuse. Some partners, instead of making an effort to cooperate in solving their problem amicably, mostly use insults, verbal anger, or non-verbal expressions of anger without considering the presence of their children. These lead the students who love both parents to live in confusion and anxiety.

Patel and Paliwa (2019) argued that exposure to chronic and intense conflicts within the family could lead to emotional distress, anxiety, depression, behavioral problems, and lower self-esteem among students. In the study done in India by Agarwal and Chauhan (2020), they noted that the students who were exposed to frequent family disputes were having problems of mental health such as anxiety and even depression.

Amoako (2020), in a study conducted in Ghana, posited that family conflict can lead students to confusion, leading to strained relationships between students and their relatives, affecting their sense of belonging and social support. It is difficult for students experiencing family conflict to develop and build trust because they worry about their families. Musibi (2019) conducted a study in Kenya and affirmed that family conflict in Kenya leads students to poor academic performance. When students are not secure, they may lose concentration and spend most of the time thinking about what is going on at home, and consequently, they cannot concentrate on their studies.

In Rwandan society, numerous problems in the families affect students' well-being. These include family conflicts, which are rapidly increasing. In most cases, students are exposed to all the mentioned parents' conflicts as they witness them happening. Schools assist parents in their children's education by focusing not only on students' academic development but also on their overall development. In the Kabgayi diocese, many catholic schools aim to provide holistic education to the students. However, despite the nurturing environment, these catholic schools create, family conflict imposes challenges because it contributes to emotional distress, spiritual disconnection, and academic difficulties among students, which leads to some negative behaviors at schools, such as aggressivity, violence, substance abuse, and even some quit schools and become street children due to insecurity in their own homes. Although these alarming behaviors are becoming common in most of these catholic schools, some research that was conducted in this area emphasized more on the effects of family conflict on students' academic performance and overlooked their psycho-spiritual aspects. Thus, this study is needed to fill the noticeable gap.

Literature review

Family is the cornerstone of human society, providing a nurturing environment where individuals experience emotional, psychological, and social growth. However, within the intricate dynamics of a family, conflicts can arise, posing challenges that impact the overall psycho-spiritual well-being of students. Psycho-spiritual well-being encompasses psychological and spiritual dimensions of an individual's life, emphasizing a holistic understanding of their mental, emotional, and inner development.

Different research has shown the effects of family conflicts on the psycho-spiritual well-being of students. For instance, Roberts et al. (2019) conducted a cross-sectional study on family conflict and adolescent compulsive buying behaviour in the USA. The study investigated the mediating roles of materialism and self-esteem in explaining how family conflict leads to adolescent compulsive buying. This survey used a convenience sampling method to get a sample size of 1289 adolescents from a public school in The Midwest, USA. Regression analyses assessed the mediating roles of materialism and self-esteem on the relationship between family conflict and compulsive buying. The findings of this study show that family conflict increased adolescent materialism and lowered self-esteem. Gender moderated the relationship between family conflict and self-esteem with a more pronounced effect for females than males. Materialism and self-esteem were significantly related to compulsive buying. This study was conducted in the USA and used a cross-sectional survey research method. The current study was done in Rwanda and will use a mixed method.

Another study was conducted by Yang (2022) in China on how Destructive interparental conflict affects Chinese students' emotional and behavioural problems. This study aimed to explore the relationship between destructive inter-parental conflict and adolescents' emotional problems, focused on the role of parent-child attachment and emotional insecurity. The data for this study were collected through a questionnaire survey research design. The study used a convenience sampling method to get 524 volunteers to participate in the research, 252 girls and 272 boys. Structural equation modelling was conducted to test direct and indirect pathways between destructive interparental conflict and Chinese adolescent's emotional and behavioral problems. The findings showed that destructive inter-parental conflicts negatively predicted emotional and behavioral problems. It creates a sense of insecurity, which leads to behavioral issues.

Likewise, another study was carried out by Adong (2018) on the impacts of family conflicts on the academic performance of secondary school students in Uganda with the aim of examining the impacts of family conflict on students' performance in the Wakiso district. This study adopted a descriptive survey design to answer the research questions of this study. The target population of this study was 1000 secondary school students in the Wakiso

district. A stratified random sampling method was adopted to select a sample of 338 participants. The findings showed in table 4.28 showed that the size of their family could explain 14.3% of the students' academic performance. Further, the study conducted a correlation analysis to determine the degree of relationship between family conflicts and academic performance. The findings showed that 241 (76.5%) of the respondents said that family conflicts affected students' academic performance. This study focused on the effects of family conflicts on students' academic performance. The current study focused on the impact of family conflicts on psycho-spiritual well-being of students.

A study was conducted by Mwanza (2022) on family factors influencing the development of Juvenile delinquency among pupils in the Kabete rehabilitation centre in Nairobi, Kenya; the study employed a qualitative descriptive case study design that adopted an ex-post facto research design. Using the purposive sampling technique, a sample size of 60 respondents was selected, and the study realised a sample of 30 parents, 24 pupils, four teachers and 2 administrators. The collected data was analyzed thematically and presented in tables and charts.

The findings of the study revealed a relationship between family factors and the development of delinquency among juveniles. Lack of parental control, supervision, monitoring, discipline as well as parental warmth were found to have impacted negatively on the behavior of students and resulted in delinquency. However, the current study pays attention to the effects of family conflicts on the Psycho-spiritual well-being of students in Rwanda, while the former pays attention to such effects on psychological well-being in Nairobi, Kenya.

Ndayambaje et al. (2020) researched the impact of family conflicts on student education in the Kayonza district of Rwanda. This study aimed to first identify the factors leading to family conflicts in that region and second to determine the impacts of such disputes on students' education to improve family well-being. This study used a qualitative approach with a case study design. The purposive sampling technique was adapted to select the subjects. The sample size was restricted to 10 participants, composed of five men and five women, in Kayonza District, Kabarondo sector. The study used a convenience sampling method due to the situation in the field where it was tough to firmly fix the respondents. 30% of participants were 35-40 years old, 20% were 40-45 years old, 20% were 45-50 years old, 20% were 30-35 years old and 10% were 25-30 years old. 30% of participants were 35-40 years old, 20% were 40-45 years old, 20% were 45-50 years old, 20% were 30-35 years old and 10% were 25-30 years old. An open-ended questionnaire with eight components was used to develop the questions connected to the scope of the study, and the collected data were analyzed through thematic analysis.

The findings indicated that family conflicts have consequences on students in terms of mental illness or psychological disturbance, which affects their education and the way they perceive their future. The findings also revealed that prevailing factors in family conflicts in the region were miscommunication, mismanagement of family property, irresponsibility, and infidelity. Moreover, most of the respondents' students were quickly heading to deficient academic performance compared to their school achievements before issues arose.

The above study was conducted in the Eastern province of Rwanda on the effects of family conflicts on students' education, and it used a qualitative research method. The current study was conducted in the Southern province of Rwanda. It focuses on the psycho-spiritual well-being of students, and it used mixed methods.

Methodology

This study adopted a convergent parallel design mixed method. The target population of the study were2431 which comprised 2402 students and 29 teachers. The sample size was 347 participants, selected through simple random sampling. The data was collected through a questionnaire, semi-structured interview. The results of the research objectives were analysed. For quantitative questionnaires, the researcher used frequencies, tables and diagrams. Quantitative data was analysed descriptively using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences IBM (SPSS) version 23. The qualitative data was analysed using the thematic analysis method.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The effects of family conflicts on psycho-spiritual well-being of students studying in catholic secondary schools in Kabgayi Diocese

Table 1: *Effects of family conflicts on psycho-spiritual wellbeing of students*

STATEMENTS	SA		A		SWA		D		SD	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
I am in touch with my thought and feelings	71	22	48	14.9	34	10.6	68	21.1	100	31.1
I have a problem of understanding myself	119	37	120	37.3	18	5.6	30	9.2	35	10.9
I respect the uniqueness of others	108	35.5	72	22.4	75	23.3	34	10.6	33	10.2

I am not conscious of my spiritual, religious belief and practices	68	21.1	71	22	76	23.6	46	14.3	61	18.9
I am in touch with my cultural beliefs and values.	133	41.3	83	25.8	58	18	22	6.8	26	8.1
I have healthy relationship with myself	92	28.6	42	13	34	10.6	70	21.7	84	26.1
I have difficult to be in relationship with others	142	44.1	104	32.3	16	5	21	6.5	39	12.1
I have a strong sense of belonging	73	22.7	46	14.3	14	4	90	28	99	30.7
I feel connected with God	91	28.3	83	25.5	13	4	65	20.2	70	21.7
I feel I am part of the Universe	85	26.4	61	18.9	30	9.3	65	20.2	81	25.2
I am contended and fulfilled	78	24	45	14	24	7.5	66	20.5	109	33.9
I am in search for meaning and purpose in life	71	22	43	13.4	12	3.7	120	37.3	76	23.6
I have sense of balance my needs and others.	57	17.7	48	14.9	21	6.5	102	31.7	94	29.2
I find meaning in my spiritual and religious involvement	134	41.6	84	26.1	72	22.4	21	6.5	11	3.4
I value my socio-cultural heritage.	127	39.7	94	29.2	68	21.1	17	5.3	15	4.7
I feel connected with the sufferings of others	103	32	96	29.8	76	23.6	28	8.7	19	5.9
I attend to the needs of others	73	22.7	91	28.3	91	28.3	46	14.3	21	6.5
I am kind with my words and actions	81	25.2	71	22	105	32.6	41	12.7	24	7.5
I have the capacity to forgive	119	37	66	20.5	77	23.9	36	11.2	24	7.5
I am compassionate to myself	121	36.6	79	24.5	65	20.2	31	9.6	26	8.1
I am self-motivated	131	40.7	82	25.5	63	19.6	30	9.3	16	5
I have moments of	71	22	50	15.5	16	5	125	38.8	60	18. 6

deep joy and peace

I experience profound sense of wellbeing	67	20.8	61	18.9	46	14.3	83	25.8 65 20.2
I am not constrained by external influence	107	33.2	61	18.9	56	17.4	38	11.8 60 18.6
I am able to detach from what previously seem so important	88	27.3	68	21.1	80	24.8	36	11.2 50 15.5

The statements aimed at gauging the effects of family conflicts on the psycho-spiritual well-being of students, the findings of this study highlight the challenges students face with self-awareness since a significant portion of respondents, comprising 52.2%, indicated a lack of connection with their thoughts and feelings, while 79.9% acknowledged difficulty in understanding themselves. Furthermore, 66.7% of respondents reported a lack of awareness regarding their spiritual and religious beliefs. Moreover, there appears to be a struggle in establishing connections with others, as evidenced by 81.4% of respondents expressing difficulty in maintaining relationships and 58.7% lacking a sense of belonging. Concerning the pursuit of purpose and meaning in life, the findings indicate that 54.5% of students do not feel contented and fulfilled, 60.9% are not actively seeking meaning and purpose, and 90.9% struggle to balance their own needs with those of others. These findings are further corroborated by insights from interview respondents, affirming the challenges students face in various aspects for instance respondent 9 repported:

Engaging in interpersonal connections, particularly with peers within the academic milieu, poses a challenge for me, primarily due to apprehensions regarding the potential disclosure of my family's circumstances. Consequently, I tend to adopt a solitary disposition as a means of safeguarding this privacy. The solitude affords me ample opportunity for introspection and contemplation of my personal trajectory. Despite the criticism levied by fellow students regarding my perceived lack of sociability, I remain indifferent to their opinions. (Respondent 9, February 22, 2024).

Again respondent 3 articulated:

Can you imagine that because of conflicts between my father and my stepmother, one day, following an altercation with my father, my stepmother expelled me from the household, directing me to leave with all my belongings and explicitly expressing her refusal to have me remain in the residence? Subsequently, my father escorted me to my aunt's residence, where I stayed overnight until returning to school. During subsequent school holidays, while my peers celebrated, my heart weighed heavy with uncertainty about my familial situation. In a desperate plea, my father beseeched the school's headmistress to permit my continued residence on campus as he endeavored to mend the familial discord and facilitate my return home. Eventually, my stepmother relented, allowing me to return; however, despite this reconciliation, I continue to harbor a profound sense of displacement within what was once considered my home. The lingering ambiguity surrounding my sense of belonging persists, leaving me grappling with an existential quandary about my place within the familial unit." (Respondent 3, February 19, 2024)

This demonstrates that family conflict significantly impacts the psycho-spiritual well-being of students. To further validate this assertion, a correlation analysis between family conflict and the psycho-spiritual well-being of students was conducted. The results are presented in the table below.

Table 2

Correlation *between family conflict and psycho-spiritual well-being of Students.*

		F.C	P.S. W
F.C	Pearson Correlation	1	-.174[**]
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.002
	N	322	322
P. S. W	Pearson Correlation	-.174[**]	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.002	
	N	322	322

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The correlation between family conflict and psycho-spiritual well-being demonstrates statistical significance at the 0.01 level (p = 0.002), as indicated by the Pearson correlation coefficient. The calculated correlation coefficient, r = -0.174, signifies a negative correlation between family conflict and psychological and spiritual well-being. This negative correlation implies that as levels of family conflict escalate, the psycho-spiritual well-being of

students tends to diminish. Conversely, an increase in psycho-spiritual well-being may foster resilience to family conflict, potentially mitigating its occurrence within the family dynamic.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The findings underscored the pervasive impact of family conflicts on students' psycho-spiritual well-being, particularly evident in challenges related to self-awareness, the quest for purpose and meaning in life, and feelings of connectedness. Notably, the study revealed a negative correlation between the intensity of family conflict and students' psycho-spiritual well-being, indicating that heightened conflict levels corresponded with diminished psycho-spiritual well-being. These findings resonate with the tenets of family system theory as articulated by Murray Bowen, which emphasize the interconnectedness of family members and the profound influence of individual emotional states on the broader familial dynamic. Bowen posits that disruptions in one member's emotional equilibrium can reverberate throughout the family system, underscoring the interconnected nature of familial relationships (Kerr & Bowen, 1988).

The researcher advocates for governmental augmentation of access to school-based counseling services, wherein students can avail themselves of support and guidance from adequately trained professionals

The researcher advocates for church leaders to orchestrate marriage enrichment initiatives and workshops designed to fortify conjugal bonds, equipping couples with resources to navigate conflicts productively. Such endeavors hold the potential to foster environments conducive to the nurturing of affectionate and secure family settings, thereby facilitating the holistic development of individuals, including students.

To the schools to offer support groups tailored for students grappling with familial discord fosters a sense of camaraderie and empathy among peers facing similar challenges. The research suggests that parents take proactive measures to safeguard students from undue exposure to heightened conflicts or disputes within the household. Should discussions be unavoidable, it is advised that they be conducted in a respectful and private manner, thereby mitigating potential adverse effects on the students.

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