



Psycho-Spiritual Wellbeing among Priests after Genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda

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ABSTRACT

The genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda, which occurred in 1994, had profound and enduring effects on the psycho-spiritual wellbeing of priests, who witnessed unimaginable atrocities and faced complex challenges in the aftermath of mass violence. This study explores the psycho-spiritual wellbeing of priests in post-genocide Rwanda, focusing on the lingering effects of trauma, the challenges of reconciliation and forgiveness, and the role of faith in healing and rebuilding communities. Drawing on a review of the literature, including studies on trauma, resilience, pastoral challenges, and supportive interventions, this research examines the unique factors shaping the psycho-spiritual wellbeing of priests in the aftermath of genocide. From the regression analysis, the genocide against Tutsi experience explained 14.6% of the psycho-spiritual wellbeing of the priests in the catholic dioceses in Rwanda. The genocide against Tutsi experiences had a positive and significant effect on the psycho-spiritual wellbeing of priests in the selected Catholic Dioceses of Rwanda ($p=0.00$). From the coefficients table, physical experience and psycho-spiritual wellbeing of priests had strong positive and significant ($b=.649$, $p=.004<0.05$). Emotional experience and psycho-spiritual wellbeing had a strong negative but significant effect on the psycho-spiritual wellbeing of priests ($b=-1.347$, $p=.000<0.05$). Economic experience and psycho-spiritual wellbeing of priests had a positive but insignificant correlation ($b=.312$, $p=.339>0.05$). Key themes include the profound trauma experienced by Rwandan clergy, the complexities of providing spiritual leadership in communities deeply scarred by violence, and the role of faith and spirituality in coping with suffering and fostering healing. The study underscores the importance of holistic approaches to supporting the wellbeing of priests, including trauma healing programs, pastoral training, and psychosocial support services. By shedding light on the experiences of priests in post-genocide contexts, this research informs efforts to promote their healing, resilience, and effectiveness in ministry, contributing to a deeper understanding of the psycho-spiritual dimensions of clergy wellbeing in the wake of mass violence. The study recommended that there is need for the Church administration to ensure that resources are readily available to support the psycho-spiritual wellbeing of priests.

Key words: *Post-genocide Rwanda, Psycho-Spiritual wellbeing, mass violence, priests, trauma, healing, challenges, faith.*

Introduction

The psycho-spiritual wellbeing of priests is a multifaceted aspect of their overall health and functioning. As spiritual leaders within religious communities, priests often shoulder significant responsibilities, including providing pastoral care, leading worship services, and offering guidance to their congregants. These duties can bring both fulfillment and stress, impacting their psychological and spiritual wellbeing.

Priests are expected to navigate various challenges, including managing their own spiritual struggles, supporting parishioners through difficult times, and balancing personal and professional responsibilities. Additionally, the changing landscape of society and shifts within religious institutions can further influence the experiences of priests and their wellbeing. Understanding and addressing the psycho-spiritual wellbeing of priests is crucial for supporting their ability to fulfill their roles effectively and sustainably, as well as promoting their own personal growth and flourishing.

Background

The genocide in Rwanda in 1994 was a devastating event that resulted in the loss of hundreds of thousands of lives and left deep scars on Rwandan society. This genocide was perpetrated primarily against the Tutsi ethnic group but also targeting moderate Hutus and others who were not for the politics of the time. It unfolded over a period of approximately 100 days, during which time widespread violence, mass killings, and systematic rape occurred. The aftermath of the genocide left Rwandan society shattered, with communities torn apart by trauma, grief, and distrust.

Amidst this devastation, religious institutions, including the Catholic Church, played a significant role both during and after the genocide. Many priests, as spiritual leaders within their communities, faced unimaginable challenges during the genocide, including witnessing the deaths of congregants,

grappling with moral dilemmas, and risking their own lives to protect others (Court, 2019). In the aftermath of the genocide, priests were called upon to provide spiritual guidance, pastoral care, and support for reconciliation efforts in communities deeply scarred by the atrocities.

The psycho-spiritual wellbeing of priests in post-genocide Rwanda is a multifaceted and complex issue. The genocide inflicted profound trauma not only on individual priests but also on the collective psyche of Rwandan society (Carney, 2015). Priests were confronted with the challenge of reconciling their faith with the horrors they witnessed and experienced, as well as navigating the complexities of forgiveness, justice, and reconciliation in communities deeply divided by violence (Banyanga & Björkqvist, 2017).

Understanding the psycho-spiritual wellbeing of priests in post-genocide Rwanda requires examining the interplay between psychological and spiritual dimensions of their experiences. This includes exploring the lingering effects of trauma, the role of faith in coping and healing, the challenges of providing pastoral care in traumatized communities, and the potential for resilience and growth amidst adversity (Jacob, 2022).

Genocide against the Tutsi had many psychological, emotional, behavioural, and spiritual effects on the lives of the affected people. Liu *et al.*, (2023) defined Psycho-spiritual well-being as the integration of psychological and spiritual well-being, with emphasis on the spiritual dimension of human development. It involves a holistic approach to inner growth, integrating methods from both areas (Anka, 2019). Key outcomes include self-awareness, effective coping with stress and loss, satisfying relationships, faith, empowerment, and hope (Egunjobi, 2024). Understanding one's psycho-spiritual well-being requires a holistic view of healing and inner growth. All dimensions are interconnected. People who have been victims of war and genocide have difficulty integrating these dimensions. However, as they have been explained by different authors and researchers, they remain necessary and inseparable for the psycho-spiritual well-being of the human being.

In their review, Carden *et al.* (2022) defined self-awareness as the ability to see ourselves clearly and understand our impact on our environment. It encompasses internal and external components, including affect, beliefs, cognitions, interests, goals, personality, values, and meaningful life patterns. The content of self-awareness has internal and external components (Eurich, 2018). External self-awareness includes perceptions of physical appearance and behaviour, as well as a social aspect, such as self-evaluations in relation to feedback, perceptions of how people relate to us, and the impact of our behaviour on others. Internal components are evident in concepts like self-insight, self-knowledge, self-image, and self-identity (Eurich, 2017). Both internal and external components influence our behaviour and the type of person we want to become.

Eurich (2017) states Self-awareness is a developable skill, and its insight leads to understanding and observing the truth. Internal self-awareness involves gaining insight by looking inward, while external self-awareness involves turning our gaze outward to understand how we are seen. Learning how others see us is often hindered by reluctance to share such information. Even close friends may not share the truth about us, leading to blissful ignorance. The world is often filled with people not telling us the truth about ourselves, and the mere thought of finding out how others see us can conjure up fears and insecurities for many people.

Connectedness refers to the sense of connection one has with oneself, others, and the wider world, including their senses, body, emotions, friends, family, community, nature, and global humanity, highlighting purpose, and meaning (Watts, et al., 2022). Good interpersonal relationships are essential for one's emotional and physical health as well as their sense of purpose in life. Human bodies and minds suffer from prolonged loneliness or isolation, which puts a person's long-term wellbeing at least as at risk as serious health issues like obesity and air pollution.

According to Yaden *et al.* (2017), self-transcendent experiences (STEs) are psychological anomalies that can be both positive and negative. Losing one's sense of self can be terrifying, and pathological manifestations like depersonalization disorder exist. However, positive instances of STEs are common and warrant further investigation. Intense STEs, like peak or mystical experiences, can have long-lasting positive effects on well-being and altruistic behaviour, making them potent sources of wellbeing and prosocial behaviour. These experiences provide life's most positive and meaningful experiences.

Wong (2016) proposes three levels of self-transcendence: the search for situational meaning, the search for our calling, and the search for ultimate meaning. Seeking meaning in a situation involves looking beyond personal constraints toward spiritual values, maintaining an attitude of openness, curiosity, and compassion. Seeking our calling involves committing to a higher purpose, mission, or calling related to or in service of a higher good, such as concrete life goals in direct service to others. This level of transcendence will reflect an individual's unique talents, personal temperament, or experiences. The search for ultimate meaning involves looking beyond the current context, physical limitations, time and space, to a transcendental realm, reflecting an individual's assumptions about the world, philosophy, points of view and beliefs (Wong & Reilly, 2017). Wong (2016) further suggests that self-improvement at each level involves a continuous process of self-improvement to develop our potential, not based on self-reference but on service to others (Worth & Smith, 2021).

Adeeb and Bahari (2017) indicated that in most clinical and psychological cases, the psycho-spiritual elements of therapy have been neglected by health practitioners, managing mental problems, such as human emotional, cognitive and behavioural problems, in order to achieve holistic well-being of people. Erikson's (1959) model of ego development included stages of continuing growth, none of which invoked spirituality. However, his final stage of ego integrity encompassed several things: emotional integration, acceptance of one's past life, feeling of camaraderie with distant times, and loving humanity more than love self (Ryff, 2021).

Traumatic experiences can have deep spiritual consequences. Ryff (2018) posits that the new model of psychological wellbeing explores how adult life experiences relate to people's perceptions of themselves, such as autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose, connection, personal growth, and self-acceptance. He emphasizes that finding meaning and purpose in traumatic events is crucial for healing, as it leads to better adjustment and a lower severity of post-traumatic stress symptoms (Ryff, 2021). Forgiveness, on the other hand, is a way of coping with the effects of human-made trauma

(Kleber, 2019), shifting from an automatic ego reaction to a conscious empathic response (Cerci & Colucci, 2017). Thus, holistic understanding of trauma requires a blend of religion and spirituality, as humans are multifaceted beings with interconnected physical, psychological, social, and spiritual capacities. Therefore, traumatic events can impact spiritual well-being, especially if they threaten sacred aspects of life (Harper & Pargament, 2015).

Research has shown that forgiveness leads to lower levels of PTSD, while failure to forgive one's perpetrators exacerbates psychological suffering. According to Toussaint *et al.*, (2016), forgiveness is a complex process that involves shedding negative emotions towards an offending person or experience. It can be a state or trait, with trait forgiveness being particularly significant. High trait forgiveness individuals are more likely to forgive adversity. However, forgiveness dispositions vary across situations, such as sociocultural traumas involving intergroup violence, which can be challenging due to negative feelings and lack of positive contact. Another study by Toussaint *et al.*, (2017) found that individuals with greater meaning in their lives had fewer traumatic stress symptoms, with the association being stronger for those with higher forgiveness of others, suggesting that forgiveness can help alleviate traumatic stress in challenging social and economic situations.

Spiritual wellbeing is a complex concept that encompasses the human need for meaning, purpose, and connection to something greater than us (Vaineta, 2016). It can be achieved through religious faith, connection to nature, or passion for a professional vocation (Kaftanski & Hanson, 2022). According to Bhosale (2015), Spirituality is the aspect of human existence that gives it its 'humanness' and encompasses dimensions such as the quest for meaning, purpose, self-transcending knowledge, meaningful relationships, love, commitment, and a sense of the Holy amongst people.

Layard (2010) asserts that well-being encompasses the positive functioning of individuals through their ability to gain resilience in times of distress, strength, and good health. Mental well-being refers to a positive state of emotional, psychological, and social health, characterized by a feeling of contentment, resilience and the ability to effectively cope with life's challenges (Gautam, et al., 2024).

Suffering and well-being are integral aspects of human life, and psychology should focus on both. Human strengths, excellence, and flourishing are authentic, and people strive to cultivate their best selves and live meaningful lives (Kaftanski & Hanson, 2022). However, suffering can lead to positive change, known as posttraumatic growth, which involves individuals developing new psychological constructs or a new way of life after a traumatic event that is perceived as superior to their previous one (Jayawickreme, et al., 2021). This growth is essential for fostering a more fulfilling and meaningful life.

During genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda the Catholic Church in Rwanda failed to condemn clearly the genocide massacres and legitimized the government's actions, encouraging popular submission to governmental authority (Court, 2019). This is due to the Church's involvement in political struggles and its deep integration into Rwanda's power structures since the colonial era (Denis, 2019). Uwineza (2022) reported a parish priest refusing him refuge during genocide against the Tutsi, while priests witnessed Christians being killed in the church or on its premises. Christians also saw shepherds denying their flock due to fear or zeal to protect church infrastructures. The involvement of some priests in the violence during the genocide raises ethical concerns. Understanding the moral dilemmas faced by priests and examining the extent of potential complicity is crucial for assessing the ethical challenges within religious leadership during times of conflict.

In this sense some priests or clergy members may suffer moral wounds from being betrayed or from having lacked assistance on one side; and on the other side, from not preventing in time the danger of failing to rescue the people in their care. Murray and Ehlers (2021) described moral injury as the profound psychological distress that can arise after perpetrating, failing to prevent, or witnessing events that transgress an individual's moral or ethical code, including experiences of "betrayal of 'what is right'" by leaders. Unlike post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), moral injury is not a mental disorder, but it can occur alongside or contribute to the development of PTSD and other mental health problems. However, moral injury is not limited to professional groups and these types of traumas. In clinical practice, moral injury reactions associated with various types of traumas have been encountered. What these traumas have in common is that the actions or failure to act violated an important code of moral behaviour, caused harm or betrayal to another, or failed to prevent harm. Committing and being subjected to these actions or omissions may result in moral harm.

The psycho-spiritual wellbeing of priests in post-genocide Rwanda represents a complex and understudied area of research. While there have been efforts to address the psychological and spiritual needs of genocide survivors, including clergy, there remains a gap in understanding the specific experiences and challenges faced by priests in the aftermath of such a traumatic event.

This study aims to explore the following questions: How has the genocide in Rwanda impacted the psycho-spiritual wellbeing of priests, both individually and collectively? What are the unique challenges faced by priests in providing spiritual leadership and pastoral care in communities affected by genocide? How do priests navigate issues of forgiveness, reconciliation, and justice in the aftermath of mass violence? What role does faith and spirituality play in coping with trauma and fostering healing among priests and their congregations? What are the implications for supporting the psycho-spiritual wellbeing of priests in post-genocide contexts, both within the Church and through broader community interventions? By addressing these questions, this study seeks to shed light on the experiences of priests in post-genocide Rwanda and inform efforts to promote their healing, resilience, and effectiveness in ministry.

Methodology

This study aims to explore the psycho-spiritual wellbeing of priests in Rwanda following the genocide against the Tutsi. An embedded research design is employed. It combines quantitative and qualitative methods within a single framework (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). The quantitative component provides statistical data on various aspects of psycho-spiritual wellbeing, including self-awareness, connectedness, compassion, meaningfulness and self-transcendence. The qualitative component offers a deeper exploration of priests' lived experiences, coping mechanisms, and spiritual perspectives.

The quantitative component involved conducting structured surveys using validated scales and items relevant to psycho-spiritual wellbeing. Psycho-Spiritual wellbeing scale (P-SWS) developed by Egunjobi et al, (2024) was adopted. Random sampling techniques are used to select a representative sample of priests from selected catholic Dioceses in Rwanda. Data collection was done through paper-and-pencil methods, ensuring anonymity and confidentiality. Statistical analysis techniques such as descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and regression analysis were used to examine relationships between variables and identify predictors of psycho-spiritual wellbeing among priests.

The qualitative component offers a deeper exploration of priests' lived experiences, coping mechanisms, and spiritual perspectives in the aftermath of the genocide. Interviews were conducted with a subset of priests selected purposefully from the target population (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011), using open-ended questions to encourage rich narratives and explore themes related to trauma, resilience, faith, and community support. Purposive sampling ensures diversity in participants' experiences, and data collection was done through audio-recording and transcription. Thematic analysis was employed to identify patterns, themes, and sub-themes within the qualitative data (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

Throughout the research process, the integration and triangulation of quantitative and qualitative data are employed to complement and enrich each other. This integrated design enables a holistic understanding of psycho-spiritual wellbeing among priests, offering valuable implications for mental health interventions, religious support systems, and societal healing processes.

Presentation and Discussion of the Results

Psycho-Spiritual Well-Being Levels of Priests

This study sought to assess the psycho-spiritual well-being level of priests in selected Catholic Dioceses in Rwanda. To assess the psycho-spiritual wellbeing, there are several areas that were examined, and they included self-awareness, connectedness, compassion, meaningfulness, and self-transcendence. Most respondent revealed that they are progressing and continue to strive for a balanced life. They reported that they are grateful for the steps they have taken. This is how they expressed themselves:

I give thanks to God and thank everyone who supported me. I went through difficult times where I doubted God, I felt disappointed and betrayed by people, but I developed psychologically and spiritually; suffering opened my horizons and made me grow. I would say that the level of my psychological and spiritual well-being is to be congratulated, I didn't think about it. I'm still progressing (Respondent R001, 3rd March 2024).

Another respondent added.

Physically I feel diminished, spiritually I have learned to be patient and not to feel sorry for myself, I have learned more through my suffering. I have grown and developed psychologically and spiritually. I feel well balanced, don't accuse me of anything, I didn't participate in everything that happened. However, I feel the duty to repair the mistakes made, I do not want this to happen again. I strive to live a life that is meaningful and can benefit others (Respondent R004, 4th March 2024).

This other respondent voiced.

It is difficult to evaluate myself, but it is necessary to know yourself with your faults and qualities. I prefer to have a strong personality open to others, to have a good relationship with God and my fellow human beings, a relationship that grows and is nourished every day. Our growth requires human maturity and trust in God (faith) because life is a precious gift that God gives us and God always remains the source, meaning and purpose of our life. After a tragedy like the genocide, it is difficult to heal completely, healing is a slow process. It is very important to recognize our weaknesses, confront them and find possible solutions to our illness so that tomorrow we will be completely healed individually and as a community (Respondent R014, 16th March 2024)

The psycho-spiritual wellbeing of priests in Rwanda post-genocide is a complex issue that requires a comprehensive understanding of their psychological and spiritual experiences. Despite facing profound trauma, many priests in Rwanda demonstrate remarkable psychological resilience and spiritual coping mechanisms. They draw strength and guidance from their faith and religious community through practices like prayer, meditation, and religious rituals (Graça & Brandão, 2024). Spiritual coping strategies, such as finding meaning and seeking support from religious beliefs, can enhance psychological resilience and promote overall wellbeing among trauma survivors.

The genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda significantly impacted the identities and psychosocial well-being of priests, challenging their beliefs, values, and sense of purpose. The centeredness theory suggests that traumatic events can become central to individuals' identities, influencing their psychological functioning and adjustment. Priests who perceive the genocide as central to their identity may experience symptoms of PTSD, depression, anxiety, and existential despair. Despite these challenges, many priests in Rwanda have demonstrated resilience and adaptive coping strategies, contributing to the healing and rebuilding of communities.

Self-awareness level of the Priests

This section presents a summary of the responses obtained from the respondents on the self-awareness aspect of psycho-spiritual wellbeing. The indicators of self-awareness include being in touch with thoughts and feelings, having a full understanding of self, respecting the uniqueness of others, being conscious of spiritual, religious beliefs, and practices and being in touch with cultural beliefs and values.

As shown in Table 1, The self-awareness scores of the priests were analysed, revealing a high mean score of 4.28, indicating a strong perception of their self-awareness. This indicates a strong understanding of their thoughts, feelings, and behaviours, indicating a sense of introspection and mindfulness. The low standard deviation of 0.77 suggests minimal variability in the priests' self-awareness perceptions, with most responses clustering around the mean score. This suggests a high level of consensus among the priests, with little divergence in opinions or interpretations. The high mean score and low standard deviation suggest a generally positive perception of self-awareness, highlighting the importance of introspection and self-reflection in personal and professional lives. Self-awareness is valued within the priesthood, and it may be seen as integral to their roles as spiritual leaders and counsellors. Overall, the data suggests that the priests possess a strong sense of self-awareness, which may serve as a foundation for personal growth, emotional intelligence, and effective pastoral care within their communities.

Majority of the priests who participated in the study agreed that they were in touch with their thoughts and feelings, had a full understanding of self, respected the uniqueness of others, were conscious of their spiritual, religious beliefs, and practices and were in touch with their cultural beliefs and values.

Table 1. Self-awareness

Statement	SD	D	SWA	A	SA	M	Std.
a. I am in touch with my thoughts and feelings	0	6.2%	10.5%	43.2%	40.1%	4.17	.853
b. I have full understanding of myself	0	7.5%	14.8%	47.5%	30.2%	4.00	.867
c. I respect the uniqueness of others	.6%	2.5%	13.0%	40.7%	43.2%	4.23	.815
d. I am conscious of my spiritual and religious beliefs, and practices	0	0	3.7%	25.5%	70.8%	4.67	.546
e. I am in touch with my cultural beliefs and values	0	1.2%	14.2%	31.5%	53.1%	4.36	.770
Average						4.28	0.77

Key: SD- Strongly Disagree, D-Disagree, SWA – Somewhat Agreed, A- Agree, A- Strongly Agree, M- Mean, Std.- Standard Deviation

Connectedness Level of the Priests

During the genocide against the Tutsi, priests' actions varied significantly, with some facing accusations of complicity. This fractured the priesthood, leading to suspicion and mistrust. The respondents in this study highlighted the consequences of this suspicion as they live a delicate and reluctant life. They find themselves always alert so that they avoid hurting nobody.

I strive to have good relations with my colleagues, I avoid hurting them in words and actions. I do my best to be welcoming and understanding. I share with them their joys and sufferings; I visit them if necessary. In short, I do not want anything that, on my part, could hurt my colleague, because I know how injuries can destroy a person (Respondent R001, 3rd March 2024).

Respondent R007 concurred with him saying:

About the relationship with my colleagues, I understand them in three senses: those with whom we have a deep friendship, my close friends; those who are indifferent to what is happening in my life and those with whom we have had disagreements and about whom I have not had the opportunity to reconcile with it. This affects our relationships positively or negatively and we experience reluctance with each other. Often, I feel unsympathetic towards them, but when a priest suffers or has a problem it affects me. I care about our relationship as priests (Respondent R007 5th March 2024).

Another respondent showed that living with priests necessitate to be careful.

Priests are also human beings with a weak nature. I am often afraid of them, some are resentful, others jealous, they are even racist. There are those who do not like the truth and their way of living can traumatize rather than relieve. They may exclude you from their group because you do not share the same ideas with them that it is even difficult to pray with them. Living with priests requires being reluctant (Kwigengesera) and it is difficult because of many wounds, however I cannot forget to say that there are righteous priests who were able to overcome human nature and understand our history, there are few of them and they are productive in their parishes (Respondent R009, 7th March 2024).

Wulf (2019) confirmed that trauma occurs when the essence of a human being is threatened, affecting essential traits such as self-identity, freedom, responsibility, morality, body, individuality, and dignity. Dignity is accessible through emotional maturity, feeling of value, transcendence, and religiosity. The spirit seized by the spirit expresses value through language, while the search for meaning indicates transcendence or religiosity. All essential traits are experienced and developed in sociality, which in its deepest form is love. Trauma in relationships affects the human being as a whole, as it experiences and develops these traits in love.

Respondent R0010 added.

In my relationships, I strive to have a healthy relationship with myself by remaining aware of who I am and what I do (my identity). Then I turn to God who is everything to me, all that I am and what I have is the grace of God. Finally, I engage in a relationship with my colleagues. The value and dignity

I recognize in myself are equally applicable to them. My goal is to stay connected to them, which requires me to be careful and somewhat reluctant so that I avoid hurting anyone rather than to bring joy and happiness to others (8th March 2024).

Despite this, the respondents revealed that the relationships among priests and their connectedness is based on mutual forgiveness, trust, and fraternal relation (*Isano*).

For my relationship with my colleagues, I find myself obliged to put into practice what I preach, which pushes me to be patient, to listen and understand others; above all not to judge him: our relationship is based on mutual forgiveness. I prefer to live with everyone in peace, avoiding anything that is against peace (Respondent R006, 7th March 2024).

However, they showed that there is a need to understand one another, the background the experience that can influence one's behaviour and way of living.

The relationship with my colleagues is of another aspect, it is not so simple, and it is problematic: it does not lack categorization, identification and possessive attitude. We still need to heal from within to better heal our brotherly relationship. I have to be reluctant so as not to hurt anyone. But above all, the essential thing in my relationship with others is to understand everyone with their story. "*Fraternitas in Christo*" is the summary of how I want my relationship with my confreres. To be a brother to all and to overcome what can separate us; not go far from my brother whether he is well or not (Respondent R015, 12th March 2024).

This relationship needs to be welcoming, tolerant and cultivated in everyday life.

In my relationship with God and my colleagues, God is not a boss to whom I owe accounts, he is a loving father who expects love in return. I strive to live a relationship of trust with my God because He controls everything for my well-being and my salvation. With my colleagues, I prefer a welcoming attitude. Mutual knowledge will serve to build bonds of love and service. We are all servants of one master. The relationship with others is a relationship that I must always cultivate and maintain. There is no shortage of existences of sympathy and apathy, but I recognize that I am there to represent someone else; we need a relationship of mission and presence, of being and love. I reserve myself and remain reluctant in relationships with others, so as not to hurt anyone. I can live with everyone even if it is a gift from God, I must be comfortable with others (Respondent R008, 7th March 2024)

All these has helped may priests attempting to reconcile and heal the wounds, engaging in interfaith dialogues, community reconciliation initiatives, and addressing the root causes of the conflict. Their actions aimed to promote forgiveness, understanding, and unity among themselves and Rwandans in general. The genocide may be over, but reconciliation between the two sides remains challenging due to resentment and acceptable feelings of entitlement and bitterness about the past. To achieve reconciliation, individuals must humanize the perceived enemy and understand their feelings of loss and betrayal. This understanding is crucial for forgiving the entire ethnic class and fostering reconciliation (Stover & Weinstein, 2004).

These findings from interviews were supported by the quantitative data. Table 2 presents a summary of the responses on the connectedness aspect of psycho-spiritual wellbeing. The indicators of connectedness include having healthy relationship with self and others, having a strong sense of belonging, feeling connected to something greater than self, and being part of the universe.

Table 2. Connectedness

Statement	SD	D	SWA	A	SA	M	Std.
a. I have healthy relationship with myself	0	4.3%	9.3%	42.0%	44.4%	4.26	.802
b. I have healthy relationship with others	0	4.3%	21.0%	45.1%	29.6%	4.00	.826
c. I have a strong sense of belonging	1.3%	4.9%	14.8%	48.8%	30.2%	4.01	.873
d. I feel connected to something greater than myself	2.5%	3.0%	6.8%	34.0%	53.7%	4.33	.919
e. I feel I am a part of the universe	0	1.2%	5.6%	32.7%	60.5%	4.52	.661
Average						4.22	0.816

Key: SD- Strongly Disagree, D- Disagree, SWA - Somewhat Agreed, A- Agree, A- Strongly Agree, M- Mean, Std.- Standard Deviation

Regarding the connectedness, the study found that respondents generally perceive their level of connectedness as relatively high, with an average score of 4.22. This indicates a strong sense of belonging, social support, and interpersonal connection in their lives. The respondents also reported a low standard deviation of 0.816, indicating minimal variability or dispersion in their perceptions of their connectedness explained by their reluctance. The low standard deviation suggests a high level of consensus among respondents, with little divergence in opinions or interpretations. The respondents have a generally positive perception of their level of connectedness, recognizing the importance of social relationships and support networks in their lives. This consensus underscores the value of connectedness as integral to their overall well-being and quality of life. The data suggests that respondents feel a strong sense of connectedness, which may serve as a source of resilience, belonging, and emotional support in their personal and professional lives.

Compassion Level of the Priests

The Compassion Level among priests in Rwanda after the genocide is crucial in understanding their response to the suffering and trauma experienced by their brothers and survivors in general. The study emphasizes the significance of compassion in psycho-spiritual wellbeing, highlighting the importance of having tender feelings for others, understanding their needs, and valuing them highly. Many priests found their satisfaction in being compassionate and providing emotional support, spiritual guidance, and practical assistance to survivors.

My sources of happiness are first and foremost compassion. Given what happened, we are called to be compassionate. On the one hand we have the victims of the genocide who suffered so much and on the other hand we have the genocidaires who bear the weight of the genocide and the misery that results from it. Then I find my happiness in being united with others, especially by seeking the good and avoiding the evil. Finally, I feel fulfilled when I accomplish my mission of being an apostle of peace by preaching the dignity of the human person, kindness and mercy (Respondent R008, 7th March 2024).

However, some priests faced challenges in effectively addressing the complex needs of survivors and navigating the dynamics of post-genocide Rwanda, such as limited resources, institutional constraints, and ongoing tensions within the clergy.

We have all been affected, there are points on which we agree and others which give rise to disagreements such as political subjects. To live in harmony, you need to know what you agree on and avoid controversies. In addition to this we avoid living a double and hypocritical life. Compassion is necessary, we must listen and understand others and give them time to listen and understand. This is only possible in a climate of mutual trust and based on evangelical values (Respondent R005, 4th March 2024).

Sasmito and Lopez (2020) stated that compassion as an attitude towards others that consists of three components: tender feelings (feeling), understanding others (cognition), and putting others before self (behavioral intention). Tender feelings involve emotional engagement in giving love, demonstrating a heartfelt and merciful heart. Understanding others involves allowing space for others to choose their own notion of the good, demonstrating non-judgmental behavior and putting oneself in others' shoes. Lastly, behavioral intention involves putting others before oneself, focusing on self-giving and caring love that values the other highly. Compassion is a self-giving and caring attitude that encourages others to prioritize the well-being of others.

Quantitative data reveal that priests were highly compassionate in Rwanda post genocide. Table 3 presents a summary of the responses on the compassion aspect of psycho-spiritual wellbeing. The indicators of compassion included being contented and fulfilled, being in search for meaning and life purpose, having a sense of balance between personal needs and others, finding meaning in spiritual and religious involvement, and valuing social-cultural heritage. Regarding the compassion aspect, the study reveals that respondents generally exhibit empathy, kindness, and concern for others, particularly those in need. This high mean score suggests a deep-seated commitment to understanding and alleviating the suffering of others. The low standard deviation of 0.820 indicates that responses to the statements assessing compassion were relatively consistent, with most responses clustering closely around the average score of 4.36. This suggests a high level of consensus among respondents regarding their compassion levels. In the context of the Psycho-Spiritual scale, the high mean score suggests that compassion is an integral aspect of their psycho-spiritual well-being. Compassion is often viewed as a fundamental spiritual value, rooted in empathy and altruism, and associated with spiritual growth and fulfilment. Cultivating compassion is not only a moral imperative but also a spiritual practice that enhances one's sense of purpose, meaning, and interconnectedness with others. Overall, the data suggests that respondents possess a strong sense of compassion, which may serve as a cornerstone of their psycho-spiritual well-being, guiding their attitudes, behaviours, and relationships in alignment with their spiritual values and beliefs.

This is because majority of them agreed that they were contented and fulfilled, were in search for meaning and life purpose; had a sense of balance between personal needs and others, found meaning in spiritual and religious involvement, and valued social-cultural heritage.

Table 3. Compassion

Statement	SD	D	SWA	A	SA	M	Std.
a. I am contented and fulfilled	1.2%	1.9%	13.0%	45.7%	38.2%	4.17	.818
b. I am in search for meaning and purpose in life	.6%	6.2%	13.0%	34.0%	46.2%	4.19	.929
c. I have a sense of balance between my needs and others'	1.2%	1.9%	14.8%	44.4%	37.7%	4.15	.830
d. I find meaning in my spiritual and religious involvement	0	1.2%	6.2%	32.1%	60.5%	4.51	.670
e. I value my socio-cultural heritage	1.2%	3.7%	11.1%	45.7%	38.3%	4.16	.855
Average						4.36	0.820

Key: SD- Strongly Disagree, D-Disagree, SWA - Somewhat Agreed, A- Agree, A- Strongly Agree, M- Mean, Std.- Standard Deviation

Trauma occurs when the essence of a human being is threatened, affecting essential traits such as self-identity, freedom, responsibility, morality, body, individuality, and dignity. Dignity is accessible through emotional maturity, feeling of value, transcendence, and religiosity. The spirit seized by the

spirit expresses value through language, while the search for meaning indicates transcendence or religiosity. All essential traits are experienced and developed in sociality, which in its deepest form is love.

Meaningfulness Level of the Priests

The meaningfulness level of priests in Rwanda post-genocide is a crucial aspect of their psycho-spiritual wellbeing, reflecting their ability to find purpose, significance, and coherence in the aftermath of profound trauma and loss. They engage in faith and existential meaning-making through prayer, meditation, and theological reflection, seeking to reconcile their own experiences of trauma with their religious beliefs and values. This process promotes psychological wellbeing and resilience among trauma survivors. Serving others and bearing witness to the suffering of their communities also shape their meaningfulness level. Priests continue to fulfill their pastoral duties, providing spiritual care, comfort, and support to survivors and perpetrators.

Table 4. presents a summary of the responses on the meaningfulness aspect of psycho-spiritual wellbeing. The indicators of meaningfulness included feeling connected with the sufferings of others, attending to the needs of others, being kind with words and actions, having capacity to forgive and being compassionate to self.

Table 4. Meaningfulness

	Statement	SD	D	SWA	A	SA	M	Std.
a.	I feel connected with the sufferings of other	0	0	6.2%	37.0%	56.8%	4.51	.612
b.	I attend to the needs of others	0	1.2%	13.0%	45.7%	40.1%	4.24	.722
c.	I am kind with my words and actions	0	0	14.8%	56.2%	29.0%	4.14	.648
d.	I have the capacity to forgive	0	0	11.7%	47.6%	40.7%	4.29	.665
e.	I am compassionate to myself	0	0	6.2%	46.9%	46.9%	4.40	.605
	Average						4.31	0.65

Key: SD- Strongly Disagree, D-Disagree, SWA - Somewhat Agreed, A- Agree, A- Strongly Agree, M- Mean, Std.- Standard Deviation

The study reveals that respondents have a high sense of meaningfulness, with an average score of 4.31. This indicates a strong perception of finding significant meaning and purpose in their lives, which contributes to their overall well-being and satisfaction. The low standard deviation of 0.65 suggests that responses to the statements assessing meaningfulness were relatively consistent, with most responses clustering closely around the mean score. This suggests a high level of consensus among respondents regarding their perception of meaningfulness.

Meaningfulness is often associated with a sense of purpose, coherence, and transcendence, and is considered a central component of spiritual fulfillment (Krok, 2015). The consensus among respondents underscores the importance of finding meaning and purpose in life as a pathway to spiritual growth and fulfillment. Those who perceive their lives as meaningful are more likely to experience a deeper sense of connection, resilience, and inner peace. Overall, the data suggests that respondents possess a strong sense of meaningfulness, which may guide their beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours in alignment with their sense of purpose and significance in the world.

Spiritual well-being is a personal and individual experience that goes beyond religious beliefs. It involves a sense of meaning, purpose, and connection to oneself, others, and the transcendent. Recognizing and addressing spiritual needs is crucial for overall well-being, including physical, emotional, and psychological health. It includes the search for meaning, values, and inner peace (Daniel, Halima, & Luz, 2024).

Priests in communities affected by genocide face a complex set of challenges, including moral and existential anguish, collective grief and trauma, reconciliation and forgiveness, and ethical dilemmas. Priests often grapple with their own moral and existential anguish, which can challenge their faith and sense of purpose. Studies have found that many clergy experienced symptoms of trauma, such as intrusive thoughts, hypervigilance, and emotional numbing, which could impair their ability to provide effective pastoral care (Jacobsen & Egelman, 2012; Plante & Gilden, 2012).

Self-transcendence Level

A comprehensive strategy, including intra-church efforts, training, healing liturgies, and community-based interventions, is necessary to support the psycho-spiritual wellness of post-genocide priests (Johnson, 2019). While training programs provide priests with the essential skills, pastoral care, counseling, and support groups are provided via interchurch programs. While community-based solutions include trauma counseling, psychological support, and advocacy services, healing liturgies give comfort and purpose.

Table 5 presents a summary of the responses on the self-transcendence aspect of psycho-spiritual wellbeing. The indicators of self-transcendence included being self-motivated, having moments of deep joy and peace, experiencing profound sense of wellbeing, not being constrained by external influence, and ability to detach from what previously seemed so important.

Table 5. Self-transcendence

Statement	SD	D	SWA	A	SA	M	Std.
a. I am self-motivated	0	2.5%	12.3%	43.8%	41.4%	4.24	.762
b. I have moments of deep joy and peace	0	1.2%	10.5%	43.8%	44.5%	4.31	.709
c. I experience profound sense of wellbeing	0	2.5%	11.1%	53.7%	32.7%	4.17	.716
d. I am not constrained by external influence	3.2%	4.9%	16.0%	50.0%	25.9%	3.91	.944
e. I am able to detach from what previously seem so important	.6%	3.1%	14.8%	58.0%	23.5%	4.00	.752
Average						4.12	.777

Key: SD- Strongly Disagree, D-Disagree, SWA- Somewhat Agreed, A- Agree, A- Strongly Agree, M- Mean, Std.- Standard Deviation

Many priests surveyed exhibited self-transcendence, with an average mean score of 4.12 and a standard deviation of 0.777. This indicates a strong perception of their capacity for self-transcendence, which suggests they can transcend personal limitations and connect with spiritual ideals, universal values, or others. However, there were some variations in the intensity or frequency of self-transcendent experiences. The high mean score suggests that self-transcendence is an integral part of their personal and spiritual lives, often associated with interconnectedness, altruism, and spiritual awakening. The moderate standard deviation suggests that while there was consensus among the priests about self-transcendence, there were variations in the depth or frequency of self-transcendent experiences. Despite these differences, the data suggests that self-transcendence is prevalent among the priests surveyed, contributing to their spiritual well-being, resilience, and sense of purpose.

During the interviews, the key informants were asked to indicate how they evaluated their psychological and spiritual wellbeing. This was in terms of Self-awareness, Relations with others and God, forgiveness and reconciliation, Sense of faith and Confidence, Personal Growth, meaning and Purpose in life. Most of them congratulated the level of wellbeing they have achieved and reported that they are still progressing. Their comments are as presented here.

The psycho-spiritual wellbeing of priests who have experienced the genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda is a complex issue that requires a comprehensive approach that considers both psychological and spiritual dimensions. One way to examine this is through the psycho-spiritual wellbeing scale (Egunjobi, Habimana, & Onye, 2023), which integrates psychological aspects such as emotional health and resilience with spiritual dimensions such as meaning and connection to a higher power.

Emotional health and resilience are crucial aspects of the psycho-spiritual wellbeing of priests in post-genocide Rwanda. Many priests in Rwanda demonstrate resilience and emotional strength in the face of adversity, coping with distressing emotions while maintaining a sense of hope and purpose. Research suggests that individuals who can process and integrate traumatic experiences into their lives tend to exhibit higher levels of psychological wellbeing (Egunjobi, 2024).

A sense of meaning and purpose is central to the psycho-spiritual wellbeing of priests, particularly within the context of their faith and vocation. By actively engaging in pastoral care, community outreach, and reconciliation efforts, priests in Rwanda demonstrate a commitment to serving others and contributing to the greater good, which can enhance their sense of purpose and fulfillment. Studies have shown that individuals who perceive their lives as meaningful are more likely to experience higher levels of subjective wellbeing and psychological flourishing (Frankl, 1963; Seligman, 2011).

Connection to a higher power or transcendent reality is also a key aspect of psycho-spiritual wellbeing. For priests in Rwanda, their faith in God and religious practices play a central role in fostering this connection. Through prayer, meditation, and spiritual rituals, priests cultivate a deepening relationship with the divine, providing solace and inspiration in times of distress (Egunjobi, 2019). The psycho-spiritual wellbeing of priests is influenced by their relationships with others, including fellow clergy, congregants, and the wider community (Steger & Frazier, 2005). Social support networks provide opportunities for mutual encouragement, shared reflection, and collaborative action, buffering against the negative effects of trauma and promoting psychological resilience.

The PERMA model (Seligman, 2018) was a framework that can be applied to assess this well-being. Positive emotions, such as happiness, joy, gratitude, and contentment, can serve as a buffer against distress and contribute to the overall well-being of priests. Engagement, which involves being fully immersed in meaningful and challenging activities, can be found in pastoral duties, prayer rituals, and community involvement. Relationships, which refer to the quality of interpersonal connections and social support networks, can provide strength and solace to priests. Meaning, which pertains to the sense of purpose, significance, and coherence in one's life, is central to the psycho-spiritual well-being of priests in Rwanda.

Accomplishments, whether big or small, contribute to priests' sense of self-worth, confidence, and satisfaction in their ministry. By considering the presence of positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment in priests' lives, insights into their resilience, fulfillment, and overall flourishing can be gained. Supporting priests' psycho-spiritual well-being through interventions that promote positive emotions, meaningful engagement, supportive relationships, a sense of purpose, and accomplishments can contribute to their holistic healing and flourishing.

Overall, from the observations made on the psycho-spiritual wellbeing, it is evident that the priests have tried their level best to be in check with their psychological and emotional wellbeing. Evidently from the findings, majority of them checked to have positive ratings on self-awareness,

connectedness, compassion, meaningfulness, and self-transcendence. This is also evident from the average mean scores for each item which were above 4.00. Additionally, the key informants' rating on their psycho-spiritual well-being was 8/10 on average. According to an observation made by Bagereka *et al.* (2023), both resilience and mindfulness promote health and well-being at physical, psychological, and spiritual levels. Additionally, Lin and Bauer-Wu (2003) also expressed that people with high levels of psycho-spiritual well-being report having better coping skills and the ability to find meaning and hope in their experiences.

Converging with the findings of this study, Tajonera and Madrigal (2022) highlighted that psychological well-being (PWB) encompassed a person's positive psychological states and enthusiasm about life, encompassing both positive and negative emotions. The findings of this study were able to reveal that the priests were in a positive psychological state. Moreover, they also felt that despite being emotionally affected, they found meaning and significance of life.

Self-transcendence is moderate, suggesting that priests experience moments of spiritual transcendence but may not be as consistently experienced as other dimensions. However, there is some variability in self-transcendence levels, with some experiencing higher levels than others. There was variability in well-being levels among priests, with some exhibiting resilience and others struggling with ongoing challenges. Coping mechanisms employed included prayer, meditation, religious rituals, and seeking support from fellow clergy members, religious communities, and mental health professionals. The study highlights the complex interplay between psychological distress and spiritual well-being among priests in post-genocide Rwanda, suggesting that spirituality often serves as a vital resource for coping and resilience.

Role of Psycho- Spiritual Resources on the Wellbeing of Priests

This study was set to examine how psycho-spiritual resources influenced the well-being of priests in selected Catholic Diocese of Rwanda who may have had genocide against the Tutsi experiences. Qualitative data from the interview guide had a lot to say regarding the psycho-spiritual resources and their role in the psycho-spiritual wellbeing. Some acknowledged the availability of psycho-spiritual resources based on the spiritual direction received during seminary formation. Other considered workshops and formation sessions organized in the diocese after genocide. First, the key informants were asked to indicate and list if there were any of these resources provided in the diocese. Respondent R001 declared:

Yes, there were some interventions in the field of spirituality such as retreats and recollection and few about psychology like training on healing wounds, accepting, and overcoming our history, and experiencing mourning. However, psycho-spiritual interventions itself were lacking (Respondent R001, 3rd March 2024).

Another respondent echoed:

Yes, there were various sessions and workshops on healing from trauma. The genocide broke out while I was preparing for diaconal ordination in a year. After ordination I participated in sessions on reconciliation and the updating of vital forces. There are sessions that I followed and others that I led, though I did not have a deep psycho-spiritual intervention. We combined what was coming from spiritual direction and psychological intervention was rudimentary (Respondent R002, 3rd March 2024).

Respondent R004 added that they need an intervention that can combine the psychological and the spiritual, he declared:

I cannot say that there were psycho-spiritual sources. What we had includes a session on healing wounds; bereavement/Trauma Healing and training workshops on healing supported us in our apostolate. There was no proper intervention to process our inner wounds. We had some awareness sessions about our wounds and healing. Other means are retreats and recollections as well as prayer. Most of the time, the workshops were oriented to helping others rather than processing our own healing. Another resource is recollections and retreats which are held quarterly and annually. We still need the intervention that may combine the psychological and the spiritual for a holistic healing (R004, 4th March 2024).

Most of these interventions were oriented to the spirit of the synod and jubilee. This is how respondent R013 explained.

Of course, the synod was for us the only framework for dialogue and mutual understanding. We talked in truth, we helped each other. This is where we tried to understand the problematic of our situation and our society. We were able to understand our brotherhood. However, nothing has been done to heal our memory and our soul. We still need it for a holistic healing (R013, 12th March 2024).

Having identified the different resources and interventions put in place, the key informants were further asked to explain the role that these resources played in supporting their psycho-spiritual wellbeing. Respondent R015 witnessed:

All this contributed to the healing of wounds and trauma, to understanding the meaning of life, awakening consciousness, and the hope of living with dignity as well as enhancing performance. I was able to accept my suffering, especially the loss of a parent, so that I understood the suffering of others. I know the value and respect for life on the one hand and on the other how to use well the things that pass to attach to the things that remain (R014, 15th March 2024).

This was clarified by respondent R001 in these words:

Sessions on forgiveness and reconciliation in the diocese and according to the initiative of Mushaka, the meeting of various Christians at the parish of Mibilizi as part of the preparation for the 100-year jubilee and various testimonies reassured me that forgiveness and reconciliation are possible. As a pastor who has been hurt morally, psychologically and spiritually I should first heal, forgive myself and then help others on the path to forgiveness. It

took time but we journeyed together. Remember that these Christians with whom we walk together, some attacked us, with others we were together victims and candidates for death. We started a new life (Respondent R001, 3rd March, 2024).

The qualitative results were supported by the quantitative findings. There were several statements provided and the respondents asked to indicate their extent of agreement or disagreement. Table 6 presents the acquired responses.

Table 6. Role of Psycho-Spiritual Resources on the Wellbeing of Priests

Statement	SD	D	SWA	A	SA	M	Std.
a. Involvement in the pastoral work improves the psycho-spiritual wellbeing of priests.	1.2%	0.7%	4.9%	38.3%	54.9%	4.45	.731
b. Spiritual exercises	.6%	0	8.0%	39.5%	51.9%	4.41	.693
c. By engaging in the sacrament of reconciliation, I am able to improve on my wellbeing as a priest.	0	0	4.3%	31.5%	64.2%	4.59	.573
d. I often attend counselling sessions.	3.1%	1.2%	29.0%	37.7%	29.0%	3.88	.948
e. The counselling sessions are conducive in support the psycho-spiritual welling being of priests.	0	1.9%	8.6%	37.0%	52.5%	4.40	.726
f. We have access to adequate resources for supporting the psycho-spiritual wellbeing of priests in the diocese.	8.6%	13.0%	30.9%	30.9%	16.6%	3.33	1.16
g. The diocese has a counselling department that specifically caters to the psychological needs of the priests.	29.6%	27.8%	13.6%	22.2%	6.8%	2.48	1.30
Average						3.93	.876

Key: SD- Strongly Disagree, D- Disagree, SWA- Somewhat Agreed, A- Agree, A- Strongly Agree, M- Mean, Std.- Standard Deviation

Most priests (54.9% strongly agreed and 38.3% agreed) believe that pastoral work improves their psycho-spiritual well-being. This high level of agreement suggests a widespread perception that pastoral activities contribute significantly to their spiritual and emotional health. The transformative power of pastoral work, which often involves providing spiritual guidance, support, and care to others, is acknowledged by many priests.

However, a small percentage of priests disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement, suggesting a minority perspective. This may stem from factors such as burnout, stress, or disillusionment with their pastoral responsibilities. It is essential to acknowledge these perspectives, as their experiences may highlight areas where support and intervention are needed to address challenges or barriers to the positive effects of pastoral work on psycho-spiritual well-being.

The high level of agreement among the majority of priests underscores the significance of pastoral ministry in their lives, suggesting that engagement in pastoral activities is not only a professional duty but also a source of personal fulfilment, spiritual growth, and emotional resilience. The consensus among the majority underscores the importance of supporting and promoting pastoral engagement to enhance the psycho-spiritual well-being of clergy.

Regarding spiritual exercises, the results revealed a strong consensus that spiritual exercises significantly improve the psycho-spiritual well-being of priests. Most priests (91.4%) strongly agreed that these practices, such as prayer, meditation, and reflection, enhance their emotional, mental, and spiritual health. This reflects a deep appreciation for the transformative power of spiritual exercises in nurturing a sense of connection with the divine, fostering inner peace, and promoting personal growth and resilience. A small percentage (8.0%) somewhat agreed, indicating a degree of ambivalence or uncertainty about the relationship between spiritual exercises and psycho-spiritual well-being. A very small percentage (0.6%) disagreed, indicating a minority perspective. The consensus highlights the importance of incorporating spiritual practices into daily routines to nurture holistic well-being and sustain spiritual vitality. Supporting priests in their spiritual journeys, providing opportunities for spiritual formation and renewal, and creating environments conducive to spiritual flourishing can contribute to their overall health and effectiveness in ministry.

When asked to indicate whether engaging in the process of reconciliation improved the wellbeing of priests, most priests (64.2%) strongly agree that reconciliation activities significantly improve their emotional, mental, and spiritual health. This belief is based on their deep conviction in the transformative power of reconciliation, both personally and within their communities. They experience fulfilment, healing, and spiritual growth through their participation in reconciliation efforts, enhancing their overall well-being. A smaller percentage (31.5%) also agreed, indicating recognition of the value of reconciliation in promoting personal growth, relational healing, and community cohesion. However, a smaller percentage (4.3%) somewhat agree, indicating a degree of ambivalence or uncertainty regarding the relationship between engagement in reconciliation and their well-being. This suggests a nuanced understanding of the complexities involved in reconciliation processes, including emotional, relational, and societal dynamics. The

high levels of agreement underscore the significance of reconciliation in priests' lives and ministries, highlighting its role in promoting personal healing, relational restoration, and community resilience. The consensus emphasizes the importance of prioritizing reconciliation as a pathway to greater emotional, spiritual, and communal well-being.

The study reveals that 66.7% of priests frequently attended spiritual direction as requirement in major seminary, indicating a proactive approach to mental and emotional well-being. 29% somewhat agree with counselling, suggesting a willingness to engage in therapeutic interventions. However, 4.3% disagree, suggesting a small segment may not prioritize or see the value of counselling. The mean score of 3.88 indicates moderate agreement, with some variability in responses. The high percentage of priests in need to attend counselling sessions reflects a positive trend towards prioritizing mental and emotional well-being within the clergy community. Seeking counselling support can help address stress, burnout, and other psychological challenges faced by clergy members. However, individual attitudes and experiences may differ, with some having more positive experiences and attending more frequently. The data underscores the need for promoting mental health awareness and destigmatizing help-seeking behaviours within the clergy community. Providing accessible, culturally sensitive counselling services, addressing barriers to counselling uptake, and fostering a supportive environment for clergy members to prioritize their mental and emotional well-being can contribute to the overall health and resilience of priests in their ministry. However, the researcher observed a confusion in the respondents of counselling session and spiritual direction.

The data shows that 78.4% of respondents strongly agreed or somewhat agreed that they had access to adequate resources for supporting the psycho-spiritual well-being of priests in the diocese. This indicates a significant portion of respondents feel confident in the availability and adequacy of resources. However, 21.6% disagreed, indicating a significant minority perspective that there are insufficient or inadequate resources available. This suggests that a substantial portion of respondents perceive gaps and deficiencies in the availability or accessibility of resources, which may hinder effective support for the psycho-spiritual needs of priests. The presence of both strong agreement and disagreement underscores the importance of assessing and addressing the availability and accessibility of resources for supporting the psycho-spiritual needs of priests. Thus, it can be noted that whereas some diocese may be having resources available to support psycho-spiritual wellbeing, others may not have those resources.

Efforts to enhance resource accessibility may include increasing funding for mental health services, expanding access to counselling and spiritual guidance, providing training and education on psycho-spiritual support, and fostering partnerships with community organizations and mental health professionals.

The study reveals a low mean score of 2.48, indicating scepticism among respondents about the existence of a counselling department specifically designed to address the psychological needs of priests. The standard deviation of 1.30 suggests a wide range of opinions, with some expressing stronger agreement or disagreement than others. The low mean score suggests that respondents were not strongly convinced of the existence of a dedicated counselling department, suggesting a perceived gap in support services for priests' mental health. The high standard deviation suggests that opinions regarding the existence of such a counselling department varied significantly among respondents respectively to Dioceses. The data underscores the importance of assessing and addressing the availability and effectiveness of mental health support services tailored to the unique needs of priests within the diocese. Enhancing the visibility, accessibility, and quality of counselling and psychological support can promote the mental health and well-being of clergy members and strengthen their capacity for effective ministry and service.

The study found that respondents generally agree with the availability and adequacy of psycho-spiritual resources within the diocese. This high mean score suggests that there are sufficient resources to support the psycho-spiritual well-being of priests, including counselling services, spiritual retreats, educational programs, and pastoral support. However, there is moderate variability in responses around the mean score, suggesting that there may be differences in opinion among respondents regarding the effectiveness, accessibility, or relevance of these resources. Some respondents may feel that additional resources or improvements are needed to better meet the diverse needs of priests. Overall, the data suggests a positive perception of psycho-spiritual resources within the diocese, indicating that efforts to support the psycho-spiritual well-being of priests are generally recognized and appreciated. Continued evaluation and enhancement of these resources can further strengthen support systems and promote the overall health and resilience of clergy members within the diocese.

The genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda had a profound psychological and spiritual impact on both survivors and Catholic priests. The key informants further gave their comments regarding the preferred psycho-spiritual resources to cope with the consequences of genocides. Coping with the aftermath required a combination of psychological and spiritual resources. Some of the comments given by the key informants are as presented below in verbatim.

Actually, my favourite strategies include not judging others, understanding people especially the common people and their actions; they are often manipulated. They must not be burdened with the burden and crimes that are not theirs. I avoid closing in on myself, I strive to approach people and share with them. Though the situation was complicated, after genocide I continued to visit the Christians in the villages, and I still accepted what they offered me to drink and eat without thinking that they could kill me with poison. Another strategy is faith and hope in God who is our protector (Respondent R001, 3rd March 2024).

Another respondent added that:

My preferable strategies are sharing my suffering so as not to close in on myself or give up but let myself be helped; so, I must not fight for myself alone. I must therefore come out of my suffering and allow myself to be loved by others; otherwise, I would know how to live a double life. Another strategy is to rehabilitate and restore dignity to the victims of the genocide wherever they are. Our government is doing its best, but we need openness right down to the grassroots level. Finally, I salute the initiative of the Church in *gacaca nkirisitu* which has become a place of meeting and dialogue, of

reconciliation on a human level and a space of intimacy and exchange. Pay attention to the experiences of others is very crucial to understand our history (Respondent R010, 6th March 2024).

The preferable strategy is to clearly understand that the relationship “*Isano*” that binds us is deeper than the blood relationship considering the relationship between us and God. We have to be faithful to this relationship. Our relationship as Rwandans must extend to our source which is humanity, we were created in the image of God. “*Ubukristu butubyarire ubuvandimwe, Twarabiyemeje*” which means “Let Christian life be the source of our brotherhood, we commit ourselves”. (Respondent R013, 10th March 2024).

Relation known as *Isano* is a Rwandan cultural concept that emphasizes solidarity, mutual assistance, and reciprocity within communities. It is deeply rooted in Rwandan society and serves as a foundation for social support networks and community resilience. According to Haim-Litevsky et al. (2023) *Isano* fosters strong bonds of solidarity among community members, promoting a sense of belonging and interconnectedness. It contributes to maintaining social cohesion and harmony by promoting positive social interactions and mutual respect among members. *Isano* is deeply rooted in Rwandan cultural identity and heritage, reflecting traditional values and norms passed down through generations. It serves as a powerful coping mechanism for overcoming challenges and adversity by pooling resources, sharing burdens, and offering emotional support. *Isano* also plays a crucial role in facilitating community development and progress by mobilizing collective efforts towards common goals and objectives. Through collaborative initiatives and community-led projects, *Isano* enables communities to address pressing issues such as poverty, healthcare, education, and infrastructure development. By harnessing the collective potential of its members, *Isano* contributes to sustainable development and the improvement of living standards within Rwandan communities. One of the respondents explained that:

To deal with genocides and its consequences, one of the strategies was to be a complete and balanced man with values that protect and respect life. The other is to listen, understand and share your pain and the suffering of others; to have a good interpretation of events and things, purify your memory and transform them into good lessons. Understanding genocide generates a preventive and curative strategy of never again. Finally, the genocide must be fought by promoting sessions on forgiveness and avoiding favouring divisionism and its anti-values (Respondent R015, 12th March 2024).

Many priests in Rwanda underwent training in trauma-informed care to understand the psychological impact of the genocide on survivors and themselves. This approach emphasized creating a safe and supportive environment for individuals to process their trauma, acknowledging the interconnectedness of psychological and spiritual well-being. By integrating psychological insights with spiritual principles, priests were better equipped to address their complex needs and of those affected by the genocide.

Whereas there were some variations among the respondents regarding the availability of psycho-spiritual resources, it is evident that different resources used played an integral role in supporting the psycho-spiritual wellbeing of the priests. The key informants indicated that they received counselling sessions, attended retreats and recollections, received training on healing processes and reconciliations among others. It was also explained that engaging in church activities were also essential in supporting the psycho-spiritual wellbeing. In converging with these findings, Rogowska and Dolega (2022) indicated that engaging in spiritual practices, such as exercising spiritual openness may also facilitate better health. Similarly, Ellwood (2022) observed that Roman Catholic clergymen and nuns experience better mental health than the general population. This could be attributed to the findings of this study whereby it was evident that majority of the priests had a positive psycho-spiritual wellbeing. As such, engaging in church services could be a contributory resource. Notably, the respondents highlighted that they received training on forgiveness and reconciliations. This aspect according to Toussaint, *et al.*, (2017) is essential in promoting psycho-spiritual wellbeing. According to the authors, engaging in forgiveness reduces traumatic levels whereas on the other hand, failure to forgive one's perpetrators exacerbates psychological suffering. These observations have also been supported by other authors such as Cerci and Colucci (2017), Kleber (2019) and Krok and Zarzycka (2021).

The study aimed to assess the psycho-spiritual well-being of priests in selected Catholic dioceses in Rwanda. The study reveals that priests generally have a high level of self-awareness, connectedness, compassion, meaningfulness, and self-transcendence. This indicates a strong understanding of their thoughts, feelings, motivations, and behaviors. However, there may be variability in individual scores. Priests also have a strong sense of connectedness with others, the divine, and the world around them. They have meaningful relationships and feel a sense of belonging within their faith community.

Compassion is high, indicating empathetic and caring attitudes towards others. However, there may be variability in individual scores. Priests derive a strong sense of meaning and purpose from their beliefs, values, and experiences, finding fulfillment in their vocation as spiritual leaders and guides.

To sum up, priests possess strong levels of self-awareness, connectedness, compassion, meaningfulness, and self-transcendence, with self-transcendence being slightly lower on average. These qualities suggest deep engagement in their vocation, commitment to serving others, and spiritual fulfillment.

Conclusion

This study explores the psycho-spiritual wellbeing of priests in Rwanda following the genocide against the Tutsi. It focuses on the clergy, a group whose experiences and coping mechanisms are relatively underexplored. The study aims to uncover how the genocide has affected their mental health, spirituality, and overall wellbeing, and identify factors that have facilitated or hindered their healing and resilience. The study's unique focus on the intersection of trauma, spirituality, and priesthood offers insights that can inform support systems and interventions for this unique demographic.

The study found that many priests experienced symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and anxiety due to the atrocities witnessed and the loss of loved ones. Spirituality and faith played a critical role in coping with the trauma of genocide, as many priests turned to prayer,

meditation, and communal rituals as sources of solace and strength. Their faith not only provided a framework for understanding suffering but also served as a catalyst for healing and reconciliation within their communities.

The findings underscore the importance of institutional support and mental health resources for clergy members affected by trauma. While some participants expressed gratitude for pastoral care provided by bishops and fellow priests, others lamented the lack of formalized support structures and the stigma associated with seeking professional help for mental health concerns. Comparing these findings with existing literature on trauma and resilience among clergy in post-conflict settings, the unique socio-political context of Rwanda presents distinct challenges and opportunities for psychospiritual recovery.

Limitations

Despite its originality and importance, this study may face several limitations. Firstly, there could be challenges in accessing and recruiting a representative sample of priests who served during the genocide, as some may be hesitant to participate or revisit traumatic memories. This could potentially introduce selection bias and limit the generalizability of findings. Additionally, there may be complexities in assessing psycho-spiritual wellbeing, as it involves subjective experiences and interpretations that may vary among individuals. Moreover, the study's reliance on self-report measures may be susceptible to social desirability bias.

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