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An Investigation on Levels of Psychological Wellbeing among Professed Consecrated Women in Kakamega Diocese, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Psychological well-being of consecrated is significant to both their way of life and to the ministry they are called to serve. Professed consecrated women who have dedicated themselves to serve God and humanity rely on both spiritual and community resources in sustaining their wellbeing. This study examined the levels of social support among professed consecrated women in Kakamega Diocese, Kenya. The study was grounded on social support theory and existential theory. The study utilized descriptive research design. Data was collected from 154 Consecrated women using a census approach which included all religious women working in Kakamega Diocese, Kenya. The study utilized Psychological Wellbeing Scale. The data collected was analyzed using descriptive statistics and particularly frequencies and percentages with SPSS version 25. The results showed a vast majority of the participants 145 (94.2%) fell within the moderate psychological wellbeing category. A smaller number of 8 (5.2%) participants fell under the low psychological wellbeing category, while only 1 (.6%) participant reported high levels of psychological wellbeing. The results as presented suggests that a vast majority of the professed consecrated women in Kakamega diocese experience moderate levels of psychological wellbeing, with only a handful reporting low or high levels of wellbeing. The study recommends to the Superiors of congregations to come up with strategies such as psychological and spiritual programs to enhance the psychological well-being of their consecrated religious women.

Key Words: Levels; Psychological well-being; professed consecrated women; Kakamega Diocese; Kenya

INTRODUCTION

Psychological wellbeing is a multifaceted and multidimensional construct that encompasses an individual's overall happiness, satisfaction with life and mental and emotional health. It includes key components such as positive emotions, autonomy, positive relationships, purpose in life, life satisfaction, and personal growth (Sarath & Dhanabhakym, 2022). Professed consecrated women's psychological wellbeing is necessary for them to perform their work well and live a health life. CW get involved in various activities and majorly they play vital roles in Education, religious and social sectors globally and their PWB must not be overlooked. Caroly Ryff's presents six dimensions of psychological wellbeing namely, autonomy, personal growth, positive relations with others, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and self-acceptance.

In India, a study was carried out using a mixed method by Shaji, Rema, and Rodrigues, (2023). The research sought to study the overall wellbeing among consecrated women using PERMA model and explored factors influencing happiness in nuns. The study was conducted using a mixed method. The sample size was 30 nuns between the age of 25 and 55. The study found out that the level of positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, accomplishment, overall wellbeing, and happiness among nuns were high. while engagement and accomplishment were normal. The study also revealed that the level of negative emotions and loneliness among working nuns and studying nuns were high. The gap is on the location and the population where this study addresses working and studying nuns while the current one addressed all consecrated women regardless of their apostolate in Kakamega Diocese.

Additionally, a study was carried out by Adiwena, Savienta, and Hartanti, (2016) in Indonesia aiming at understanding the psychological wellbeing dynamics of Pastors. It used a case study of two pastors who had gone through a seminary formation. The study found out that factors that supported the psychological wellbeing of the two pastors included self-satisfaction, skills and positive values acquired from the seminary, adaptive coping strategies and social support. This study was conducted on pastors in Indonesia while the current study has been conducted among consecrated women in Kakamega diocese. Another study was carried out by Francis and Village (2022) in England which sought to assess the psychological wellbeing and the source of support for the Church of England clergy and laity during the third National COVID-19 lockdown. The study found out that the mitigating effects of relevant support were evident for both the clergy and the lay Christians. Changes in the key sources of support from the 1st lockdown were evident with church-based support for clergy appearing to be more effective promoting wellbeing in 3rd lockdown. The gap is that this study was on the clergy and lay Christians while the current was among consecrated women only.

A study was conducted by Gunawan (2023) in Indonesia on collaborative preaching for collective trauma healing. Religious demographics showed that only about 10% of the population was Christian in a Muslim-majority nation. The study revealed that 80% of sisters reported that they had purpose in

life, 50% enjoyed personal growth while 45% reported that they experienced autonomy in their religious life. The study found out that there was strong intra-communal support but weak formal mental health access. Socially sisters were marginalized, had limited psychological access and depended on collaborative preaching for healing and also offered the same for others.

In a large-scale study by Templer et al. (2022), which surveyed 850 consecrated individuals across three African countries, 72% reported high levels of life satisfaction, with only 14% displaying symptoms of clinical depression. To assess the psychological wellbeing of consecrated women involved evaluating factors like life satisfaction, emotional stability, and the presence of mental health such as depression and anxiety. Additionally, there was a study carried out in Tanzania using quantitative research method by Tumain, Njiru, and Kitonga (2020) and its purpose was to analyze severity of depression and its association with spiritual coping among consecrated women. The findings revealed that 48.5% of the participants who had depression also had a problem in coping with spiritual matters. The current study sought to find out the level to which social support might reduce depression by helping individuals to think positively but found out that there could be other factors that may contribute to high levels of psychological wellbeing.

Moreover, another study was conducted by Kersteins, and Muasa (2023) in Mbarrara Archdiocese, Uganda. The study was to assess the levels of meaning of life among Catholic Priests, brothers and nuns, to establish the association between pastoral burnout and meaning in life among them. The sample size was 165 who were selected through stratified random sampling. Data was collected using Maslach burnout inventory and meaning in life questionnaire. The study used descriptive statistics and co relational analysis to analyze data with the aid of SPSS. The result came out as follows; majority of the participants (n=109; 77%) had higher presence of meaning in life. Results showed that there was no relationship between the three dimensions of burnout and presence of meaning in life. The gap between this study and the current study is that the former dealt with both men and women in the church, but the current one has dealt with only women religious.

In the local context, there were a number of studies that had been conducted that were related to the topic of the current study. A study was carried out in Kenya by Mutuku, Asatsa, and Adibo, (2021) to address the issues of consecrated women abandoning religious life after initial stages of formation caused by emotional crisis from remote disappointments due to an inauthentic religious community living. The study used census and sequential explanatory mixed research design to collect data from 138 participants. Data were analyzed using co relation and regression analysis to establish the extent to which each of the variables contributed to the adjustment in community living. The study found out that the overall emotional intelligence had a strong significant positive correlation with the overall adjustment of community living among consecrated women religious. Emotional Maturity was found to be a significant function of Self-awareness and self-management while Life satisfaction was also found to have a significant relationship with social awareness. This study addressed the issues of consecrated women abandoning religious life after initial stages of formation due to an authentic religious community living while the current study addressed the levels of PWB among the consecrated religious women.

Additionally, a study was conducted in Lodwar by Muasa, Selvam, and Ndung'u, (2021). The study was to examine the prevalence of burnout among Catholic religious' men and women working in rural areas. The study had a sample size of 131 participants. The Study findings were: respondents' level of burnout was above average, in terms of subscales, personal accomplishment had the highest (mean=30.61) followed by emotional exhaustion (mean=19.82) and level of depersonalization (mean=9.05). The gap was demonstrated on the population where this study addressed religious men and women working in rural areas as the current one addressed only Catholic consecrated religious women.

Another study was conducted by Kiplagat, Tucholski and Njiru (2019) in Nairobi County to find out the relationship between psycho-spiritual wellbeing and happiness among consecrated women. The study used a validated scale with 238 CW. The study found out that there was a significant positive correlation between psychological wellbeing and spiritual wellbeing ($r = .237, p < .01$). the study also found that the level of education positively correlated with happiness ($r = .184, p < .01$), and there was a statistically insignificant positive correlation between psychological wellbeing and happiness ($r = .033, p > .01$). The gap between this study and the current one is that the current one's variable was PWB while the former was between psychological and spiritual wellbeing. Despite the fact that there was growing literature on psychological wellbeing of consecrated individuals, there were still several gaps that remained unaddressed. It was noted that most studies primarily focused on religious populations in general and not specifically on consecrated individuals making it difficult to precisely make conclusions tailored on this particular group. It was also clear that no research had been carried out specifically on consecrated women in Kakamega Diocese, Kenya and therefore, the current study aimed to fill this gap.

METHODOLOGY

The study utilized descriptive research design to examine the levels of psychological well-being among the consecrated religious women. The study was conducted in Kakamega Diocese in the Western Region of Kenya. The study area was chosen because it is one of the oldest Catholic Dioceses in Kenya and most of the congregations are local though some are international. Most indigenous congregations were founded and formed by white nuns. These white nuns were involved in education, social work, health care and pastoral work therefore formed the consecrated African sisters who are working very hard and effectively.

This study targeted 160 professed consecrated women of different religious congregations working in Kakamega Diocese, Kenya. The age ranges from 20 to 75 years. There are 18 different religious congregations working in the Diocese. This study used census method to include the whole population of 160 religious women working in Kakamega diocese as a sample size since the population was small. The data was collected using demographic variables and Psychological Well-Being Scale. The Psychological wellbeing scale was developed by Ryff and Keyes (1995), it has 42 items meant to measure the various aspects of personal growth, relationship with self and others, purpose in life, self-acceptance, spirit of autonomy and a desirable environmental mastery. The ratings are measured on a six-point Likert scale and are assigned scores using 6 numerical values as follows; 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree Somewhat, 3 = Disagree Slightly, 4 = Agree Slightly, 5 = Agree Somewhat, 6 = Strongly Agree. The maximum possible score achievable is

252 while the lowest possible score is 42. These tools were used to facilitate the collection of comprehensive and reliable data so as to achieve the desired objectives of the study. The collected data was analyzed using descriptive statistics including frequencies and percentages with SPSS.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study aimed to investigate the Levels of Psychological Wellbeing among Professed Consecrated Women in Kakamega Diocese, Kenya. The section begins with description of the demographic characteristics of the participants followed by the findings of the study.

Demographic Characteristics of Participants

This section looks at the demographic characteristics of all participants who engaged in the study, focusing specifically on age, years in consecrated life, and level of education. A total of 154 participants took part in the study, and the demographic data is presented in Table 1:

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Participants

	Frequency	Percentage
Age		
20 - 30 years	62	40.3
31 - 40 years	27	17.5
41 - 50 years	26	16.9
51 - 60 years	21	13.6
61 and above	18	11.7
Education Level		
Certificate	62	40.3
Diploma	42	27.3
Bachelors	41	26.6
Masters	8	5.1
PhD	1	.6
Years in Religious Life		
1 – 10 Years	77	50.0
11 – 20 Years	28	18.2
21 – 30 Years	25	16.2
31 – 40 Years	8	5.2
41 years and above	16	10.4

As shown in table 1, most of the participants totalling 62 (40.3%) fell within the age bracket of between 20 to 30 years. This indicates that a large population of consecrated women in Kakamega are young. Those within the age bracket of 31 to 40 years were 27 making up 17.5% of the population, and those within the age bracket of 41 – 50 followed closely with a total of 26 (16.9%) participants. Those within the age bracket of 51 to 60 were 21 (13.6%) and 18 (11.7%) participants fell between 61 years and above making up the smaller group within the entire study population.

Regarding level of education, 62 (40.3%) participants held certificate qualifications making them the highest in the entire population followed by 42 (27.3%) participants who hold diploma qualifications. A further 41 (26.6%) participants were holders of Bachelor degrees, a smaller number of 8 (5.1%) had masters' qualifications, while only 1 (.6%) participant held a PhD qualification. In terms of years in religious life, half of the respondents totalling 77 (50%) fell within the bracket of 1 to 10 years, signalling that a majority of the study population were still young in the religious life. Furthermore, 28 (18.2%) fell within the category of 11 to 20 years, 25 (16.2%) participants fell within the 21 to 30 years category, and 8 (5.2%) participants fell within the 31 to 40 category, making them the small group in the sample. A further 16 (10.4%) respondents fell within the 41 years and above category, representing the most experienced members of the study's population.

Levels of psychological wellbeing among professed Consecrated women in Kakamega Diocese, Kenya

The aim of this study was to assess the level of psychological well-being (PWB) among professed Consecrated women in Kakamega Diocese, Kenya. To achieve this, psychological well-being was measured using the Ryff Psychological Well-Being Scale (PWBS). Descriptive statistics was run to establish the levels of psychological well-being and the results are presented in table 2.

Table 2: Levels of Psychological Well-being

Levels of PWB	Range	Frequency	Percentage (%)
High PWB	181 – 252	1	.6
Moderate PWB	121 – 180	145	94.2
Low PWB	42 – 120	8	5.2
Total	42 – 252	154	100.0

Table 2 presents the findings for the levels of psychological wellbeing among the respondents. A vast majority of 145 (94.2%) participants fell within the moderate psychological wellbeing category. A smaller number of 8 (5.2%) participants fell under the low psychological wellbeing category, while only 1 (.6%) participant reported high levels of psychological wellbeing. The results as presented suggests that a vast majority of the professed consecrated women in Kakamega diocese experience moderate levels of psychological wellbeing, with only a handful reporting low or high levels of wellbeing. Although the results indicate that more than 90% of the study population report moderate wellbeing, very few achieve high psychological wellbeing. This moderate response in the study participant might point to the presence of both resilience and the presence of challenges in religious life. These participants live in communities which might offer meaning and support, but they might be prevented from achieving higher psychological wellbeing levels as a result of stressors and unmet needs.

When compared to the studies by Shaji et al. (2023) in India, there seems to be some convergence and divergence. The study by Shaji et al. indicated high levels of wellbeing and happiness among religious nuns, especially as it relates to relationships and positive emotions. This is in contrast with the findings in Kakamega where only one (.6%) consecrated sister experienced high psychological wellbeing. While the high levels of psychological wellbeing in the Indian sample might have been attributed to their structured communities, the moderate levels in the Kakamega sample of this study suggests that structural and contextual issues might prevent the consecrated women from experiencing higher levels of psychological wellbeing. Also, there is a possibility that the reason why so many of the respondents in the Kakamega sample fell within the moderate group and only one in the high wellbeing category might point to the fact that while support systems are present, they are not being fully optimized in order to elevate wellbeing from the moderate to the high category.

Templar et al. (2022) conducted a study across three African countries measuring levels of life satisfaction among consecrated persons, a construct similar to psychological wellbeing. Their study revealed that 72% of the respondents reported high levels of life satisfaction which sharply contrasts with the less than 1% percent level of high psychological wellbeing reported among consecrated women in Kakamega diocese. This sharp contrast may suggest great contextual differences in how wellbeing is being nurtured or constrained across various regions. A study by Tumaini et al. (2020) in Tanzania among religious women, sought to assess depression and spiritual coping which are concepts of psychological wellbeing. Findings from the study reported that half of the population scored high for depression and struggled with spiritual coping, pointing to low psychological wellbeing. In light of the studies presented above, the findings from Kakamega Diocese suggests that while a majority of consecrated women experience moderate psychological wellbeing, there might be aspects that need to be addressed and resources that need to be optimized to attain higher psychological wellbeing among the respondents. However, the high number of moderate levels of psychological wellbeing could be understood from the lens of Viktor Frankl's Existential Theory. The theory postulates the human capacity to search and find meaning wherever they find themselves. The high moderate levels might signify that consecrated women in Kakamega are able to find meaning despite challenges.

CONCLUSION

The study concluded that the majority of professed consecrated women in Kakamega diocese have a moderate psychological wellbeing, only a small fraction displayed low psychological wellbeing, with only one participant reporting high psychological wellbeing. The study found that most of the participants experienced moderate levels of psychological wellbeing. Hence, religious congregations should invest in initiatives and programs that foster psychological wellbeing. These initiatives could involve structural programs like mental health awareness programs, making access to professional counselling services easy and non-judgmental, and regular retreat programs.

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