



Prevalence of Response Styles to Religious Superiors among Catholic Consecrated Men and Women within Selected Catholic Religious Communities in Karen-Nairobi, Kenya.

Joachim Tobechukwu Ikechukwu ^a, Joyzy Pius Egunjobi ^a, Uchenna Kalu Agwu ^b

^a Psycho-Spiritual Institute, Marist International University College, a constituent College of the Catholic University of Eastern Africa, Nairobi, Kenya.

^b Department of Psychology, Catholic University of Eastern Africa, Nairobi, Kenya.

ABSTRACT

Over the years, since the new dawn of spiritual and apostolic renewal and revival through the Vatican Council II, an overt attention seems to have been given to leadership styles among Catholic Consecrated men and women, while obedience seemed to be the sole focus concerning the response to the leadership styles of various Catholic religious superiors. Obedience is expected and demanded among the consecrated members to their respective superiors. The dynamic between Catholic Consecrated men and women and their respective religious superiors has garnered increased attention and significance in the domain of Catholic consecrated life. Using embedded design, this study ascertained the prevalence of response styles to religious superiors among Catholic consecrated men and women within selected Catholic religious communities in Karen-Nairobi, Kenya. The study was grounded in Egunjobi's theory of child response styles to parenting. An adapted Child Response Styles Scale (CRSS) was utilized for quantitative data collection, alongside a semi-structured interview guide to gather qualitative data from eight purposively selected respondents. The target population consisted of 288 individuals, with a sample size of 167 respondents. Quantitative data were collected via Google Forms, and their analysis employed both descriptive and inferential statistics, while qualitative data underwent thematic content analysis. The findings indicated that 85% of the respondents identified as Falsers - that, surprisingly, while a small minority identified as Rejecter (8.0%) and Nonchalant (7.0%), not a single person identified as Adherer. The study recommends the need for Catholic religious superiors and formators investigate the reasons behind the significant number of Catholic religious men and women identifying as "falsers."

Keywords: response style, child response style, Catholic consecrated men and women, religious superiors, leadership style, evangelical counsels, Karen-Nairobi, Kenya,

1. Introduction

Consecrated life in the Catholic Church is one of the vocations people choose to serve God, which according to the *Code of Canon Law of the Catholic Church*, 573 par. 1, is defined as a stable form of living by which the faithful, following Christ more closely under the action of the Holy Spirit, are totally dedicated to God who is loved most of all, so that, having dedicated themselves to His honour, to the building up of the Church and to the salvation of the world, they strive for the perfection of charity in service to the Kingdom of God (Law, 1983). It therefore follows that Catholic consecrated men and women are those men and women who respond to the divine summons to dedicate themselves to serving God and the Church through diverse forms of ministry in observing the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty, and obedience.

Furthermore, the vow of obedience is the evangelical counsel that directly connects Catholic consecrated men and women with their respective religious superiors. The conciliar document on the principles for the adaptation and renewal of religious life within the Church, *Perfectae Caritatis*, par. 14, states that in professing obedience, Catholic consecrated men and women "offer the full surrender of their own will as a sacrifice of themselves to God and so are united permanently and securely to God's salvific will. Consequently, in the spirit of faith and love for the divine will, they should humbly obey their superiors according to their rules and constitutions" (Flannery, 1996). Accordingly, with the vow of religious obedience, Catholic consecrated men and women offer God the homage of their will (Babu, 2015).

Nevertheless, the notion of obedient response to religious superiors within the context of Catholic consecrated life presents significant challenges in contemporary society. Historically, as purported by Figueroa and cited by Allen (2022), certain religious superiors within the Catholic tradition have repeatedly misused their authority, leading to the humiliation and degradation of their members. She argues that this issue arises from the fact that while religious superiors are expected to embody the representation of God, not all fulfil this role appropriately; abusive religious superiors, for instance, fail to reflect God's character. Consequently, the authority of religious superiors is contingent upon their moral integrity. This complicates the expectation of

obedience to the directives of religious superiors within Catholic religious communities, particularly in instances of abuse, error, misunderstanding, authoritarianism, or favouritism exhibited by the religious superiors (Babu, 2015).

However, in the context of Catholic consecrated life, the researcher observed, albeit these Catholic consecrated men and women are called to a life of radical discipleship in total obedience to God through the intermediary of their respective religious superiors, it avers that the way and manner they respond to the authority and leadership styles of their religious superiors depends on or is affected by various factors, such as demographic status, personality traits, individual differences, organizational structure, relational dynamism, and cultural values. Previous research has revealed that these response styles are not homogeneous (Limerick, 1976; Egunjobi, 2021). Hence, there exists a spectrum of responses among individuals towards their religious superiors. Some consecrated men and women demonstrate a compliant attitude, fully adhering to the directives of their superiors (adherer response style). Conversely, others actively contest the authority of their superiors (rejecter response style), while a subset exhibit indifference (nonchalant response style). Additionally, a notable number adopt a double-standard approach in their interactions with religious superiors (falsar response style). Therefore, the behavioural attitude and responses, expressed by Catholic consecrated men and women to their respective religious superiors, are designated as response styles to religious superiors in this present work. Consequently, this study aims to assess the prevalence of response styles to religious superiors among Catholic consecrated men and women within selected catholic religious communities in Karen-Nairobi of Kenya.

1.1 Literature

The literature on response styles is extensive, but given the paucity of literature regarding response styles to religious superiors, this section of our work primarily concentrates on the existing literature on response styles.

Nolen-Hoeksema (1991), in her response style theory of depression, propounded three child response styles - rumination, distraction, and problem solving - associated with mood depressive disorder.

Egunjobi (2021) conducted a global online survey involving individuals aged 11 and above from diverse categories such as male, female, children, adolescents, and adults of various nationalities. Employing Egunjobi's theory of child response styles to parenting and quantitative survey design, the study aimed to examine the prevalence of child response styles to parenting, identifying four distinct styles: Adherer, Rejecter, Falsar, and Nonchalant. Descriptive analysis of the 276 respondents revealed that 65.5% exhibited Adherer characteristics, 4.8% were classified as Rejecters, 17.2% as Falsars, and 12.5% as Nonchalant. Egunjobi noted that the Nonchalant style is exclusively associated with uninvolved parenting, aligning with previous research by Kharbanda (2022), indicating that individuals with uninvolved parents are more prone to developing emotional and behavioural issues. Also, although the parenting style can influence a child's behaviour, each child can react to parenting differently. Consequently, parents should not always be held accountable for their children's actions and behaviours. Concerning the present study, Egunjobi's model on child response styles to parenting was adopted to ascertain the prevalence of response styles to authority within the context of Catholic consecrated men and women.

In China, Bai et al. (2019) examined the responses of subordinates to moral and authoritarian aspects of paternalistic leadership exhibited by both direct leaders and higher-level leaders. The study involved 2,365 general employees from 15 general hospitals in Mainland China, including 270 direct leaders and 15 higher-level leaders. The findings revealed that direct leaders' moral leadership positively influenced employees' affective trust in them, while their authoritarian leadership had a negative impact on this trust. Additionally, both moral and authoritarian leadership of direct leaders had positive effects on employees' personal initiative. Furthermore, higher-level leaders' moral leadership was found to moderate the relationship between direct leaders' moral leadership and employees' personal initiative. These results highlight the influence of multilevel paternalistic leadership on subordinates' attitudes and behaviours, suggesting that managers should consider coordinating such leadership styles to achieve more favorable outcomes. This study, though significant to the present field of study, was done in China and among hospital employees. Albeit, it offers the importance of considering the nurturing factors in assessing the response styles to religious superiors within religious vocations.

Arbaiza and Guillen (2016), in Peru, carried out a research study on Subordinate responses styles to leadership: Evidence from an emerging market firm, to examine the effects of paternalistic and Western leadership styles on subordinates. The study utilized a sample of 326 subordinates from various industries in Peru. The researchers identified three significant positive responses to authority: identification, compliance, and gratitude. This indicates that benevolent leadership had a positive effect on compliance and gratitude, while transformational leadership positively influenced subordinates' feelings of gratitude. Though focused only on the marketing context, this study suggests the effect of the leader style of an authority figure on the response styles exhibited by Catholic consecrated men and women in Kenya.

In Ankara, the capital of Turkey, Özcan (2014) performed a study to examine, understand, and analyze the behavioural responses of employees towards authority. The sample population was intended to encompass employees from both public and private sectors, as well as from service and manufacturing organizations. A total of 46 respondents/interviewees were randomly selected and interviewed to gather data. The data collected from these interviews were analyzed, leading to the categorization of attitudes towards authority into seven groups. However, these were condensed into four groups due to significant similarities among three of the groups, resulting in their combination. Consequently, respondents were classified into four groups based on their responses to authority, ranging from conformist to participative: Obedient, Silent, Recommender, and Objector. The research findings indicate that employees in the public sector, particularly blue-collar workers, tend to demonstrate higher levels of obedience towards authority. This is attributed to the fact that career progression is largely contingent on compliance with authority. Conversely, in industries reliant on knowledge-based work, where individual expertise and qualifications hold significant value, employees are less inclined to submit entirely to authoritative figures. Consequently, a highly skilled workforce tends to exhibit greater autonomy compared to its less skilled counterparts. Hence, understanding the contextual factors influencing behavioural responses is essential for evaluating the response styles to religious superiors of Catholic consecrated men and women in Kenya.

In Owerri, the capital city of Imo state in Nigeria, Opara et al. (2024) carried out a research study in three selected private secondary schools with a sample size of 232 students selected from a population of 495, to investigate the relationship between children's response styles to parenting and the psychological well-being of secondary school students. The study employed the explanatory sequential design to explore the characteristics of response styles, levels of psychological well-being, and the potential relationship between these variables. Data collection for the study involved the utilization of three instruments: Egunjobi's (2021) Child Response Style Scale (CRSS), the Brief Scale of Psychological Well-Being for Adolescents (BSPWBA) developed by Viejo et al. (2018), and a qualitative focused group discussion. Descriptive analysis of the findings indicated that the majority of students ($n = 87$, 58%) exhibited an Adherer response style to parenting, followed by the Rejecter response style ($n = 30$, 20%), the Nonchalant response style ($n = 22$, 15%), and the least prevalent response style observed was the Falser response style ($n = 11$, 7%). The study's conclusion suggested that there is no significant association between children's response styles to parenting and their psychological well-being, indicating that response style to parenting does not serve as a predictor of psychological well-being. This suggests potential response styles to religious superiors among Catholic consecrated men and women in Karen, Nairobi-Kenya.

Ayako (2023) conducted a research study in Kenya, focused on examining Child Response Styles to Parenting and Mental Health among Adolescents in Embakasi East sub-county, Nairobi County, employing Bowlby's attachment theory and descriptive research design. The study involved a sample population of 250 individuals aged 15 - 18. A convenience sampling technique was employed to select respondents who were willing and met the necessary criteria for the survey. Data collection involved the use of a sociodemographic questionnaire, the child response style assessment by Egunjobi (2021) to evaluate responses to parenting, and the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale (WEMWBS) to assess mental well-being. The findings of the study revealed that the most common child response style was adherer ($M = 3.56$), followed by nonchalant ($M = 2.53$), falser ($M = 2.13$), and rejecter ($M = 2.06$). Adolescents exhibiting adherer response styles generally displayed higher mental well-being ($M = 3.14$) compared to those with rejecter, falser, and nonchalant response styles. This research study by Ayako (2023), though it lacks universality since it focused on adolescents, highlights the importance of the assessment of the response styles to religious superiors, especially among Catholic consecrated men and women in Karen, Nairobi-Kenya.

Based on the researcher's observations as a consecrated individual, the four response styles identified by Egunjobi (2021) in children are directly applicable to the response styles exhibited by Catholic consecrated men and women towards their religious superiors. This alignment serves as a rationale for the current study's adoption of Egunjobi's model to analyse the response styles of Catholic consecrated men and women. It is important to clarify that this does not imply that these Catholic consecrated men and women are equivalent to children, as Egunjobi's framework was specifically designed for a juvenile population. Rather, it suggests that the experiences and behaviours from childhood may persist into adulthood (Daines et al., 2021). This notion is further supported by continuity theory, which asserts that personality traits and behavioural patterns tend to remain stable throughout an individual's lifespan (McCrae & Costa, 2024). Also, it has been discovered that some of the factors that determines the response styles of Catholic consecrated men and women to their respective religious superiors are: the interplay between nature and nurture (Baumrind, 1967; Egunjobi 2006; Egunjobi, 2021; Uchenna et al., 2022), personality traits (Jeong et al., 2012; Musambai et al., 2023), self-identity (Eze et al., 2016), leadership styles (Yunarsih et al., 2020; Knight, 2024), and the lived experiences of the evangelical counsels, especially the vow of obedience (Allen, 2022).

The reviewed literature emphasizes the importance of evaluating response styles and behaviours across various contexts, noting variations influenced by demographical, cultural, professional, educational, and vocational factors. However, there is a noticeable research gap concerning the generality of response styles to religious superiors and their prevalence among Catholic consecrated men and women in Karen, Nairobi-Kenya. Understanding their responses to religious superiors is essential for fostering effective engagement, communication skills, and relationships within their respective apostolates. Therefore, this current study aims to fill this gap by assessing the prevalence of response styles to religious superiors among Catholic consecrated men and women in Karen, Nairobi, Kenya.

1.2 Methodology

The study employed an embedded research design, in which qualitative data played a supplementary role to the primary quantitative data framework (Creswell, 2013; Kanga et al., 2015). The sample size comprised 167 Catholic consecrated men and women, drawn from a target population of 288 (193 men and 95 women) who had professed either temporary or perpetual religious vows, representing eight randomly selected religious communities located in Karen. Karen was selected as the study site due to its significant concentration of Catholic religious communities. The inclusion of these eight communities was intended to facilitate practical data collection and to ensure that the sample adequately reflected the broader target population, thereby enhancing the generalizability of the findings and supporting robust statistical analysis. A mixed sampling method was adopted, integrating both probability (proportional stratified random sampling) and non-probability (voluntary sampling) approaches (Etikan & Bala, 2017; Suresh & Srinivasan, 2017). Proportional stratified random sampling was initially used to structure the sample by dividing the population into distinct strata and then conducting simple random sampling within each stratum, proportional to its representation in the population (Trochim, 2006). Subsequently, voluntary sampling was employed within these strata to complete the sample, as the research instrument was administered via Google Forms distributed through WhatsApp and Email. Through voluntary sampling, respondents self-selected to take part in the study (Hassan, 2023; Egunjobi, 2024). Quantitative data were collected using a self-administered, standardized questionnaire - the Child Response Styles Scale (CRSS) developed by Egunjobi (2021) - which was adapted to suit the study's target population of Catholic consecrated men and women. For the qualitative component, purposive sampling was used to select eight respondents (four men and four women) for semi-structured interviews. The data obtained were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages in tables. The study adhered to rigorous ethical standards appropriate for mixed methods research. Before data collection, approval was obtained from the Director of the Psycho-Spiritual Institute, the Kenyan National Commission for Science, Technology, and Innovation (NACOSTI), the

religious superiors of the participating communities, and the individual respondents. The research process emphasized confidentiality, non-maleficence, avoiding plagiarism, and minimization of potential harm, thereby ensuring the dignity and rights of all respondents were upheld.

1.3 Results

The response rate was 60%, and it is deemed acceptable for an online survey, consistent with Egunjobi's (2024) assertion that a 50% response rate is satisfactory for online surveys, irrespective of the sample size. This study aimed to ascertain the prevalence of response styles to religious superiors among Catholic consecrated men and women within selected Catholic religious communities in Karen-Nairobi. It employed Egunjobi's (2021) Child Response Style Scale (CReSS) to measure the respondents' response styles, comprising four subscales: Adherer, Rejecter, Falser, and Nonchalant. The respondents' response styles to religious superiors were aggregated to ascertain the prevalence of these styles within the sample population.

Table 1- Prevalence of Response Styles to Religious Superiors

Response Styles	Frequency	Percent
Falser	85	85.0
Nonchalant	7	7.0
Adherer	0	0
Total	100	100

The data provided in Table 1 illustrate the prevalence of different response styles to religious superiors among Catholic consecrated men and women in selected religious communities in Karen-Nairobi. The response styles are categorized as Rejecter, Falser, Nonchalant, and Adherer. The findings indicate that the most prevalent response style is the Falser, with 85.0% adopting this style. This suggests that a significant majority of consecrated men and women in these communities outwardly comply with religious superiors but may not necessarily agree with them internally. While a small minority are identified as Rejecters and Nonchalant. Notably, no data indicates any individuals as Adherers. So, there is no Adherer among the respondents.

Nevertheless, the dualistic approach exhibited by individuals characterized as “Falsers” allows them to maintain an appearance of propriety in the eyes of their religious superiors, which likely fosters positive relationships with these authorities. This assertion is supported by the responses gathered during semi-structured interviews, where nearly all respondents reported having favourable relationships with their respective superiors. To protect the identity of the respondents and uphold confidentiality, they were represented with numbers (R1, R2, R3, ... R8). For instance, one respondent noted, “[...] So in that, the relationship is good, because she has not objected to what I wanted to do” (R1, January 8, 2025). Another stated,

Okay, so the relationship with the superior is good. I can see it is good because being taken to school, you have to have a good relationship with your superior. Because like, I'm under scholarship, but she's the one to sign that scholarship here, so the relationship is good. (R3, January 8, 2025)

Additionally, another respondent remarked,

The relationship has been good. Actually, he has been supportive. Ever since he assigned me to be here, he has been showing support in everything that I needed as a person and also as a religious, I can say that the relationship has been very nice and without any obstacles. (R5, January 6, 2025)

1.4 Discussion of the Results

The results of this study stand in stark contrast to Egunjobi's (2021) findings on the prevalence of child response styles to parenting, where 65.5% identified as adherers and a minority of 4.8% as Rejecters. Likewise, in the findings of Ayako (2023), Adherer ($M=3.56$) was the most common response style, while rejecter ($M=2.06$) is the least represented response style. Similarly, Opara et al. (2024) in their findings reported the Adherer style (58%) as the most prevalent response style, and the Falser (7%) as the least prevalent response style. The discrepancies in these findings may be attributed to differences in population dynamics, as Egunjobi's study targeted an infinite population of anyone aged 11 and older; Ayako's study was conducted among adolescents in the Embakasi East sub-county of Nairobi County, Kenya, while Opara et al.'s research focused on secondary school students in Owerri, the capital of Imo State, Nigeria.

Moreover, the high prevalence of the falser response style suggests that many consecrated individuals may not perceive compliance with authority as problematic, even when such compliance does not align with their personal beliefs or values. This may be due to the hierarchical structure of Catholic religious communities, where obedience is a core value (Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, 1990), and the nature of religious vocation, where people may pretend to obey the constituted authorities for fear of being sent away. Its Implications for Catholic religious community dynamics could reflect a culture where open dissent is discouraged, leading to a gap between outward compliance and internal beliefs. Obedience as one of the three evangelical counsels (poverty, chastity, obedience) has some theological and canonical foundations, and is codified as follows in the Code of Canon Law (can. 601): “The evangelical counsel of obedience [...] requires a submission of the will to legitimate superiors, who stand in the place of God when they command according to the proper constitutions.”

Inasmuch as the prevalence of the Falser style might suggest that obedience is valued, there is room for more open dialogue and understanding between superiors and members. The religious superiors need to foster deeper spiritual engagement and internalization of values among community members. This could involve more participatory and relational models of governance (Okonkwo, 2025). The presence of Rejecters and Nonchalants highlights the need for religious superiors to address underlying issues of dissatisfaction or disengagement. This might involve creating spaces for open dialogue and discernment, ensuring that obedience is understood as a collaborative process rather than blind submission, even when it contradicts divine law or harms others. (Code of Canon Law, 1983, can. 618; Wooden, 2019)

2. Conclusion

The study examined the prevalence of response styles to religious superiors among catholic consecrated men and women within selected Catholic religious communities in Karen-Nairobi. It collected data from 100 respondents out of a sample size of 167 individuals from eight distinct Catholic religious communities in the area, facilitated by using the Child Response Style Scale (Egunjobi, 2021) and a semi-structured interview guide for representatives from each of the eight communities. Based on the result obtained, the response styles of the study population are: falser, rejecter, and nonchalant. The analysis revealed that the study population's most prevalent response style was the "Falser". Therefore, it is recommended for Catholic religious superiors and formators to investigate the reasons behind the significant number of Catholic religious men and women identifying as "Falsers.". This phenomenon suggests potential deficiencies within Catholic religious communities and formation processes, particularly concerning the authenticity of their experiences. Given that response styles represent a relatively new construct, this study suggests that more research be conducted across diverse populations and contexts (including among lay individuals, within educational institutions, in social and economic organizations, and within familial settings) to ascertain its prevalence and its correlation with various factors. Further scientific exploration and inquiry into the reasons behind individuals identifying as Falsers, as well as the notable prevalence of Falsers within religious vocations, is necessary.

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