

The Relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Psycho-Spiritual Well-being among Nuns in Umuoji Monastery, Anambra State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Emotional intelligence serves as a critical bridge between cloistered nuns' spiritual callings and their emotional lives. The main focus of this study was to establish the relationship between emotional intelligence and psycho-spiritual well-being among nuns in the Umuoji Monastery, Anambra State, Nigeria. Grounded in Daniel Goleman's Emotional Intelligence Theory and Egunjobi's Psycho-Spiritual Theory, the study utilized a correlational research design. A census approach was adopted, engaging the entire target population of 101 resident nuns. Quantitative data were gathered via Google Forms using the Modified Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire (MEIQ) and the Psycho-Spiritual Well-being Scale (P-SWBS). Quantitative analysis was performed using descriptive statistics and Pearson's correlation coefficient via SPSS version 27. The findings revealed moderately high emotional intelligence scores and consistently high psycho-spiritual well-being among the participants. Notably, a moderately strong positive correlation was established between emotional intelligence and psycho-spiritual well-being, indicating that the development of one directly enhances the other. The study concludes that deliberately nurturing emotional competencies, such as empathy and compassion, fosters holistic psycho-spiritual growth. Based on these findings, it is recommended that monastic leadership integrate emotional intelligence training into formation programs, while superiors provide institutional support through psychological workshops and community-building activities to balance spiritual inwardness with relational well-being, thereby offering ongoing psychological support and sustaining the nun's holistic well-being.

Keywords: Emotional intelligence, psycho-spiritual well-being, cloistered nuns, monastic formation, Umuoji Monastery.

INTRODUCTION

Emotional intelligence (EI), conceptualized as the capacity to recognize, comprehend, manage, and convey emotions (Trifonova, 2020), is foundational to holistic psychological and spiritual well-being (Goleman, 1995). For nuns in cloistered monasteries, EI transcends basic psychological health, serving as an intrinsic requirement of the spiritual life itself. The monastic commitment to sacrifice, obedience, and strict silence demands profound emotional maturity. Because these communities comprise members from highly diverse backgrounds, personalities, and emotional traits (Anand & Bharti, 2021), navigating interpersonal relationships, communal loneliness, and periods of spiritual dryness requires significant emotional resilience. Fortunately, emotions are cultivable and shapeable by the individual (Sales & Santos, 2021), forming the bedrock of a religious practitioner's internal development.

Goleman (1995) operationalized EI through four core competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management. Individuals possessing high EI are better equipped to cultivate empathy, manage systemic stress, resolve internal conflicts, and sustain healthy relational bonds (Tung & Rong, 2022), all of which are critical for functional survival in religious communities (Di Fabio & Kenny, 2021). Within monasticism, EI operates as an essential psychological mechanism that enables practitioners to sustain daily ascetic disciplines and achieve spiritual growth (Long, 2022). Conversely, EI deficits lead to acute emotional instability, chronic interpersonal friction, and communal maladjustment (Goleman, 1995).

This emotional framework directly underpins psycho-spiritual well-being, an integrated construct that balances psychological stability with spiritual vitality to achieve inner peace, transcendence, and continuous growth (Egunjobi et al., 2023). This integrated state dictates how internal and external life events shape cognitive and behavioral responses while intentionally fostering connections with God, self, and the surrounding community (Egunjobi, 2024). Encompassing self-transcendence, purposeful meaning, compassion, empathy, and holistic self-awareness, this integration is necessary to sustain a religious calling, thereby facilitating critical spiritual processes such as vocational discernment and divine contemplation (Seanburan, 2025).

Global empirical research underscores the severe psychological and vocational consequences that arise when EI is lacking within religious communities. In Europe, lower EI among monastic cohorts correlates with heightened emotional rigidity, maladaptive coping strategies, and diminished spiritual insight, ultimately culminating in existential confusion and adaptation difficulties (Collazos Ugarte et al., 2024). Within the African context, these systemic deficits manifest with severe psychological and mental health outcomes.

In East Africa, emotional intelligence deficiencies and poor emotional regulation among consecrated women are heavily linked to anxiety, emotional withdrawal, burnout, severe depression, suicidal ideation, and complete vocational abandonment (Kiplagat et al., 2023; Machogu et al., 2022; Mutuku et al., 2021). Similarly, West African studies demonstrate that weak EI among women religious causes pervasive emotional instability, relationship strain, poor stress management, and deep psycho-spiritual dissatisfaction (Udechukwu et al., 2024). Consequently, empirical evidence suggests that EI serves as a more powerful determinant of operational success and spiritual longevity in religious leadership than traditional intelligence metrics (Agwu et al., 2023).

Despite this growing body of literature, a significant gap remains. Most existing studies examine general psychological or social well-being independently, largely neglecting the integrated psycho-spiritual dimensions of cloistered, monastic populations. Furthermore, localized empirical research within African and specifically Nigerian monasteries is critically scarce.

The present study addresses these empirical, conceptual, and contextual gaps by investigating the relationship between EI and psycho-spiritual well-being among cloistered nuns at the Umuoji Monastery in Anambra State, Nigeria. By providing a culturally grounded framework that explicitly bridges psychological and spiritual domains, this study generates empirical data to enrich global understandings of religious life. Ultimately, these findings offer actionable insights for designing targeted spiritual formation initiatives, counseling services, and community support strategies aimed at fostering emotional health, vocational satisfaction, and communal harmony.

Theoretical Framework

Goleman's Emotional Intelligence Theory (1995) and the Psycho-Spiritual Theory (PST) developed by Egunjobi et al. (2023) serve as the theoretical foundations for this study. Daniel Goleman's model of emotional intelligence (EI) consists of four dimensions: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management. PST, as conceptualized by Egunjobi et al. (2023), refers to the combination of contemporary psychotherapy with spiritual direction within a culturally responsive context to enhance holism.

METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted using a correlational research design. According to Thomas and Zubkov (2023), a correlational design examines the strength and direction whether positive or negative of a relationship between two or more variables. Consequently, this approach provided a thorough understanding of the relationship between emotional intelligence and psycho-spiritual well-being.

The study site was St. Scholastica Benedictine Abbey (Umuoji Monastery), an enclosed Benedictine women's monastery located in the Idemili North Local Government Area of Anambra State, southeastern Nigeria. This site was ideal due to observed instances of emotional instability and relational woundedness which are increasingly affecting the nuns' psycho-spiritual well-being. The target population comprised all 101 nuns residing in the Umuoji Monastery. A census approach was utilized to sample the entire population ($N = 101$). This approach was justified given the small, manageable population size, which ensured full representation, eliminated sampling error, and captured the heterogeneous backgrounds and varied everyday challenges of the community.

The data were gathered using standardized instruments administered via Google Forms. The Modified Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire (MEIQ) by Suzanne Farmer et al. (1995) to assess EI, and the Psycho-Spiritual Well-being Scale (P-SWBS) by Egunjobi et al. (2023) to measure P-SWB. To establish validity, assess procedural feasibility, and refine logistical timing, the research instruments were pre-tested at the geographically separate Ozubulu Monastery among nuns excluded from the primary study.

The P-SWBS exhibits robust face, content, and criterion validity, with every item demonstrating statistical significance ($p < 0.05$). Internal consistency and reliability were verified via Cronbach's alpha using SPSS version 27, a method chosen because both the P-SWBS and MEIQ are multi-item scales. The P-SWBS demonstrated strong psychometric properties, yielding a Cronbach's alpha of .916, a Spearman-Brown coefficient of .876, and a Guttman split-half coefficient of .850. Scores were interpreted holistically rather than diagnostically.

Data collection commenced following formal institutional authorization from the Psycho-Spiritual Institute of the Lux Terra Leadership Foundation and written consent from the Mother Abbess of St. Scholastica Benedictine Monastery. A trained research assistant conducted pre-study briefings to outline the research objectives, voluntary participation, and confidentiality protocols.

The questionnaires were distributed to all 101 nuns in the monastic directory. Complete anonymity was maintained to promote truthful responses, and the research assistant provided technical support using communal laptops and phones for participants with limited digital literacy or access, facilitating data integration into SPSS. Strict ethical safeguards were maintained throughout, with all data securely stored and restricted to authorized research personnel.

The resulting dataset was systematically organized, cleaned, and coded, yielding a complete database with no missing parameters. The data were analyzed using SPSS version 27. Descriptive statistics, including mean, standard deviation, frequency, and percentage, were computed to determine baseline levels of EI and P-SWB, while a Pearson correlation analysis was performed to evaluate the relationship between the two main variables.

The research adhered to ethical guidelines for voluntary participation, ensured no harm to participants, and maintained privacy and confidentiality. Informed consent was obtained from both the respondents and the Abbess of the Umuoji Monastery. Confidentiality was maintained, and anonymity was safeguarded through the use of codes. Confidentiality ensured that participants' names were not disclosed, and respondents were guaranteed anonymity both during and after questionnaire completion. The researcher also maintained timely communication with the research assistant to ensure the study's success. The study's findings are reported with honesty and accuracy.

FINDINGS

Relationship between emotional intelligence and Psycho-spiritual well-being

Demographic Characteristics

The researcher sought to find out the demographic characteristics of the participants. The findings are as presented in table 1

Table1. Demographic characteristics of participants.

Demographic Characteristic and Category	Frequency (n)	%
Age Bracket		
20–30 years	28	27.7
31–40 years	25	24.8
41–50 years	22	21.8
51–60 years	13	12.9
61 years and above	13	12.9
Educational Level		
Senior Secondary	61	60.4
Bachelor's Degree (BSc, B.Ed., BA)	20	19.8
Master's Degree (MA, MSc)	4	4.0
Doctorate (PhD)	1	1.0
Other	15	14.9
Years in Monastic Life		
0–10 years	31	30.7
11–20 years	28	27.7
21–30 years	17	16.8
31–40 years	19	18.8

41–50 years	5	5.0
51 years and above	1	1.0

As shown on table 1, the demographic profiling of the 101 participants revealed a well-distributed representation across age, educational background, and monastic tenure. In terms of age distribution, 28% of the nuns were aged 20–30 years, 25% were aged 31–40 years, 22% were aged 41–50 years, 13% were aged 51–60 years, and 12% were 61 years or older. Regarding formal education, the majority held a senior secondary school certificate (60.40%), followed by bachelor's degrees (19.80%), master's degrees (3.96%), and doctorates (0.99%), while 14.85% possessed alternative qualifications. Analysis of monastic experience indicated a highly diverse range of tenure within the abbey, with 31% of participants having served 0–10 years, 28% having served 11–20 years, 17% having served 21–30 years, 19% having served 31–40 years, 5% having served 41–50 years, and 1% having spent 51 years or more in monastic life.

To establish the nun's levels of emotional intelligence, the respondents filled the modified emotional intelligence questionnaire. The findings are as shown on table 2.

Table 2. Emotional Intelligence Levels of Participants

Emotional Intelligence Level	Number of Nuns (n)	%
Low	11	10.9
Moderate	31	30.7
High	59	58.4
Total	101	100.0

The Emotional intelligence of the 101 nuns who took part shows that most of them have very good emotional intelligence. In fact, more than half of the nuns have emotional intelligence, which is 59 nuns or 58.4% of the total. Then there are 31 nuns who have emotional intelligence, which is 30.7% of the group. On the hand only a few nuns scored low which is 11 nuns or 10.9% of the total. Overall, 90% of the nuns have moderate to high emotional intelligence, which means that they are very aware of their emotions and can control them well. The emotional intelligence of the nuns is very high. This shows that the nuns are very good, at understanding and managing their emotions. The nuns' emotional intelligence is a part of who they are.

The researchers also sought to determine the level of psychospiritual well-being among the nuns in Umuoji Monastery, Anambra State, Nigeria. The findings are as presented on table 3.

Table 3. Level of Psycho-Spiritual Well-Being

Level of Psycho-Spiritual well-being	n	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Very Low	1	1.0	1.0	1.0

Moderate	5	5.0	5.0	5.9
High	21	20.8	20.8	26.7
Very High	74	73.3	73.3	100.0
Total	101	100.0	100.0	

The psycho-spiritual well-being of the 101 nuns shows a very positive trend, with the vast majority of nuns falling into the highest bands. Almost three quarters of the sample, 74 or 73.3%, report a Very High level of well-being. When combined with the 21 nuns (20.8%) who have a high level, a significant 94.1% of the nuns is represented in the upper two categories. In stark contrast, mid-to-lower levels of well-being are surprisingly rare, with only 5 participants (5.0%) in the Moderate level, and only 1 participant (1.0%) in the Very Low category. In conclusion, the findings suggest a high overall prevalence of advanced psycho-spiritual well-being in the great majority of nuns sampled.

To determine whether there was a relationship between emotional intelligence and psych-spiritual well-being, Pearson's correlation was used to analyze the data. The results are presented in table 4.

Table 4. Relationship between emotional intelligence and psycho-spiritual well-being among the nuns.

Correlations B/w EI and PSWB		Psycho-Spiritual Well-Being	Emotional Intelligence
Psycho-Spiritual Well-Being	Pearson Correlation	1	.637
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	101	101
Emotional Intelligence	Pearson Correlation	.637**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	101	101

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

As detailed in Table 4, the Pearson correlation coefficient between emotional intelligence and psycho-spiritual well-being reveals a strong, positive correlation ($r = 0.637$, $p = 0.000$). This indicates a direct proportional relationship: as an individual's emotional intelligence metrics increase, their psycho-spiritual well-being scores rise correspondingly.

This significant association demonstrates a deep, real-world connection between the emotional and spiritual dimensions of a person's life. Practically, individuals who score high on emotional intelligence scales are better equipped to recognize, regulate, and manage their affective states. This regulatory capacity forms the psychological foundation for psycho-spiritual well-being, as emotionally stable individuals can achieve deeper internal peace, systemic balance, and spiritual transcendence (Egunjobi et al., 2023). Conversely, elevated psycho-spiritual well-being functions as a reinforcing mechanism, cultivating the calmness, empathy, and positive affect necessary to expand one's emotional intelligence.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal that the nuns at Umuoji Monastery possess high levels of emotional intelligence (EI), particularly within the domains of self-awareness and self-management. Furthermore, their psycho-spiritual well-being was consistently high, with connectedness and meaningfulness emerging as the strongest dimensions. This robust well-being is heavily supported by daily monastic practices and communal living. Because the formative training of these nuns deeply integrates the significance of cultivating a spiritual connection with God and fostering harmonious relationships within the community, it is highly probable that the participants have successfully internalized these values. Prior literature supports the premise that individuals can be trained to enhance both their spiritual well-being and interpersonal skills. This explanation aligns with the systematic review and meta-analysis by McLouth et al. (2020) regarding psychosocial interventions, as well as a cross-cultural study by Sim et al. (2022) on the outcomes of spiritually integrated psychotherapies. Together, these structured training frameworks likely account for the elevated levels of psycho-spiritual well-being and emotional intelligence observed in the current sample.

These results are also consistent with broader empirical evidence examining high emotional intelligence across specific vocational cohorts. For instance, Omoronyia et al. (2020) noted robust emotional intelligence levels among psychiatric nurses, while Fteiha and Awwad (2020) observed high emotional intelligence among students, driven specifically by motivation and empathy. Regarding psycho-spiritual outcomes, Kiplagat et al. (2022) similarly indicated that the psycho-spiritual well-being of consecrated women in Nairobi was high and explicitly linked to life satisfaction and happiness, though their study also highlighted underlying vulnerabilities such as depression and suicidality.

Adding to this convergent evidence on a regional level, Udechukwu (2024) surveyed 375 religious women across Nigeria, yielding a statistically significant, moderate positive correlation ($r = 0.348$, $p < 0.01$) between emotional intelligence and psychological well-being. While Udechukwu's macro-level survey established a useful regional baseline, its broad national sample did not isolate the specific monastic setting examined in the present study. Consequently, the current findings build upon this regional evidence by confirming this positive relationship within a cloistered context.

Conversely, the findings of the current study diverge from several recent lines of research. Zeinolabedini (2026) observed that within high-burnout cohorts, individuals scoring high on objective emotional intelligence tasks did not demonstrate a parallel increase in spiritual well-being, pointing instead to a weak and structurally distinct relationship between the two constructs.

This separation is echoed by Mróz et al. (2023), who highlighted that an advanced capacity to navigate external interpersonal dynamics (high EI) can exist completely isolated from an individual's internal psycho-spiritual well-being or existential framework. Finally, Kaur and Singh (2022) concluded that emotional intelligence and spiritual well-being function via distinct cognitive-emotional pathways rather than operating as mutually inclusive traits.

This divergence in the literature may be explained by the unique socio-environmental and structural differences between monastic life and secular or high-stress vocational cohorts. In secular populations, such as the high-burnout cohorts examined by Zeinolabedini (2026) or the general samples studied by Mróz et al. (2023) and Kaur

and Singh (2022), emotional intelligence is frequently utilized as a cognitive tool for external adaptation, navigating interpersonal dynamics, or coping with occupational stress. Consequently, in these settings, EI functions independently of an individual's internal existential framework. Conversely, within Umuoji Monastery, emotional regulation (such as self-management) and spiritual growth are not treated as separate cognitive pathways, but are deeply integrated through the daily Rule of Life, communal living, and spiritual formation. For these cloistered consecrated women, emotional maturity is viewed as a prerequisite for, and a direct reflection of, spiritual maturity. Therefore, while EI and spiritual well-being may operate via distinct pathways in the general public, they become mutually reinforcing and structurally intertwined within an intentional, spiritually integrated lifestyle.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the cloistered nuns of Umuoji Monastery possess exceptionally high levels of both emotional intelligence (EI) and psycho-spiritual well-being (PSWB). Descriptively, the sample exhibits a profoundly positive trend across both constructs. Overall, 90% of the participants scored within the moderate-to-high ranges for emotional intelligence, reflecting an advanced capacity for emotional self-awareness, regulation, and management. Similarly, the participants' PSWB metrics are heavily concentrated in the highest tiers, with nearly three-quarters of the sample—74 nuns or 73.3%—reporting a "Very High" level of psycho-spiritual well-being.

Inferentially, the Pearson correlation coefficient reveals a strong, statistically significant positive relationship between emotional intelligence and psycho-spiritual well-being ($r = 0.637$, $p < 0.001$). This strong correlation establishes a direct proportional relationship, indicating that higher levels of emotional intelligence correspond systematically with elevated psycho-spiritual well-being. Within this specific monastic context, emotional maturity and spiritual health do not function as isolated mechanisms; rather, an individual's capacity to understand and manage emotions serves as a vital foundation for robust existential meaning and spiritual connectedness.

RECOMMENDATION

To fully utilize these findings, emotional intelligence training should be formally integrated into initial and ongoing formation programs through structured practices such as reflective journaling, mindfulness, and guided group conversations. Monastic superiors should provide institutional support by prioritizing professional development, maintaining spaces for communal silence, and organizing targeted community-building activities.

Compassion, which was identified as a relatively lower-scoring dimension in this sample, should be intentionally cultivated through service-based activities and empathetic dialogue. Concurrently, the community's high levels of connectedness and meaningfulness should be sustained through shared spiritual practices and collaborative projects.

For future research, investigators should broaden the geographic and structural scope beyond a single monastery to include diverse cultural and denominational contexts, utilizing cross-tradition comparisons to assess generalizability. Longitudinal studies are needed to track changes in emotional intelligence and psycho-spiritual well-being over time, necessitating the development of culturally sensitive instruments for accurate measurement.

Furthermore, experimental or quasi-experimental designs should be deployed to test the empirical effectiveness of targeted interventions, such as empathy training and peer mentoring. Researchers should also explore variance across gender and generations, as well as the intricate interplay between emotional intelligence, psycho-spiritual well-being, resilience, coping strategies, and broader mental health outcomes, thereby more firmly situating monastic life within contemporary psychological discourse.

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