Interventions to Enhance Emotion Regulation Among Young Adults from Pentecostal Churches' Clergy Families in Kajiado County

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore interventions that could help improve emotional regulation and psychological well-being of young adults growing up in Pentecostal Clergy Families in Kajiado County, Kenya. Young people brought up in Pentecostal clergy families experience specific systemic, socio-religious, and environmental stressors. This qualitative descriptive study has undertaken two Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) among young adults aged between 18 and 35 years old whose parents are ordained Pentecostal ministers in Kajiado County. The transcriptions were subjected to thematic analysis through NVivo. Seven unique and interrelated themes of intervention systems emerged from the thematic analysis, namely mentorship and solid support systems; promotion of autonomy and identity development; purpose in life and goal development; peer support and judgment-free communities; self-acceptance and personal growth; communication in the family and expectation management; and spiritual development and resilience. The findings showed that improvement in the psychological well-being of clergy children needs to move beyond just the spirituality approach. Holistic interventions combining family systems therapy, objective peer sanctuaries, and emotion regulation have to be adopted.

Keywords: Emotional Regulation, Psychological Well-Being, Clergy Families, Pentecostal Churches, Young Adults, Interventions

INTRODUCTION

The relationship between family life, religious leadership, and youth psychological health becomes quite a socio-psychological vulnerability matrix across the globe. In the Global South, especially the Pentecostal Churches in Kenya, the household of the church ministers is not only a private family space, but also a public domain of the religious institution. The young adults going through the process of development within such a framework experience a peculiar socio-religious environment. In the USA, Graça and Brandão (2024) studied religious coping, emotion regulation, psychological well-being, and life satisfaction of university students and revealed that there is a negative relationship between negative religious/spiritual coping and psychological well-being. Such young adults in Kajiado County utilized religious coping as the main form of emotion regulation and psychological well-being.

Dobles Villegas et al. (2025), in Costa Rica, examined emotional competencies and psychological well-being among emerging adults and found that emotion management and regulation positively contribute to psychological well-being. Melville et al. (2026) attempted to determine the causes that lead to affective well-being of New Zealand Baptist pastors in their work, and found out that the pastors who make use of adaptive techniques enjoy lasting benefits; however, psychoeducation on ER is required by many. This shows that there are problems with emotion regulation within clergy families.

A study conducted by Bennett (2025) examined the experience of being a child of the Clergy, especially how they are under pressure compared to other members of the church. It was found that children of the clergy aspire to have the ability to choose freely and for their choices to be respected. In another study by Caraballe et al.

(2026), it was found that the children of Seventh-day Adventist pastors were emotionally exhausted, hyper-vigilant, and had issues of identity amid negotiation of visibility and vulnerability. Ajibade (2016) reported that pastors' children are constantly criticized and subjected to strict moral codes of conduct.

According to Mathiu et al. (2021), in Kenya, children of pastors feel pressured to be right at all times and thus have experienced stress, depression, and indiscipline such as substance abuse in the long run. The researchers recommended that counselors be hired by church leaders to offer individual counseling to the children of the pastors. However, despite the extensive studies carried out in the modern literature regarding the problem of burnout among clergy members, there is little attention to the psychological price that the children of these clergy members have paid.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study was theoretically guided by the Multidimensional Model of Psychological Well-Being (PWB) of Ryff (1989). According to Ryff's model, well-being does not just involve the absence of negative affect; rather, it involves a complex structure of six dimensions: autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance. All these six dimensions are put to test for a clergy child by the socio-religious demands of the church community. The distinctions between the parental pastoral responsibilities, the family, and the socio-religious demands of the church community are often indistinct among Pentecostal clergy families, thus causing strong emotional fusion (Hill & Raimondi, 2003). The differentiation attempt by a young adult causes family anxiety that tends to pathologize the youth's need for an independent identity. Using Ryff's model, this study provides a strong theoretical framework for analyzing the seven intervention themes.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study used a qualitative descriptive phenomenological methodology design to capture the detailed lived experiences of the participants. The reason for choosing this design is that it enables in-depth analysis of the subjective emotional experiences and the interventions required by young people from clergy families.

Study Location

The study was conducted in Kajiado County, Kenya. It is known that peri-urbanization and socio-economic change processes are prevalent in this country (Kaoga et al., 2021). There is a great number of Pentecostal Churches that are present in the area, making it the perfect setting for the study. The main reason behind this choice of location is the presence of a peculiar combination of pastoral traditions with modern urban subcultures. The youth of clergy families have to balance between these two sides.

Study Population and Sampling Procedure

The study used a total of 14 adult subjects between the ages of 18 and 35, who were born to Pentecostal pastors in Kajiado County, Kenya. The participants were chosen through purposeful sampling for an even distribution of male and female participants, different socio-economic groups, and different geographical areas. Participants were eligible if they considered themselves children of Pentecostal pastors and had been in the county for at least one year.

Data Collection Procedures

The data collection process was carried out using two semi-structured Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), whereby seven participants were assigned to each discussion group. This particular number was chosen because it provided an intimate environment conducive to the flow of ideas. The FGDs were conducted based on a semi-structured guide targeting interventions to promote emotion regulation. The FGDs were audio-taped with prior written consent from all participants.

Qualitative Data Analysis

Theme generation was done through thematic analysis which used the help of NVivo software in analyzing the dataset. Thematic analysis is a method of analyzing qualitative research data that allows identification of meaningful patterns of themes in a dataset (Ahmed et al., 2025). This method involves reviewing, coding, and categorizing themes. Seven major themes emerged from the raw data collected from the participants: mentoring and strong support system, autonomy and identity formation, meaning and goal setting in life, peer encouragement and non-judgmental community settings, self-acceptance and personal development, discussion with families and expectations, and spirituality and resilience.

Trustworthiness

Reliability was achieved according to the criteria set out by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Reliability was assured through the process of member-checking, where preliminary results were discussed with some of the respondents to ascertain the validity of the results. Audit trails were employed to maintain dependability in that all the analytical processes were tracked. Transferability was attained through rich and detailed descriptions of the socio-religious setting of the respondents.

Ethical Considerations

This study was ethically cleared by both the Catholic University of Eastern Africa (CUEA) and the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI). Informed consent was provided by all subjects in written form. Anonymization of transcriptions and code name references to the subjects (for example, P04) ensured confidentiality. Due to possible stress from the discussion of emotional trauma, a counselor was available for debriefing post-FGDs.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Mentorship and Strong Support Systems

The participants felt an extreme level of loneliness emanating from the lack of adult role models that are reliable and credible in their lives. In the Pentecostal community context, most of the available adults to the young adults are either the church leaders, board members, or the members of the congregation. As such, it becomes extremely difficult for the young adults to discuss any personal issues without creating a scandal. As one participant commented:

"We cope by ourselves because our parents are busy with the ministry. I have grown to depend on myself because I came to realize that when I'm going to tell people about what I'm going to tell them, I find that they are in different seasons, and I don't know. At times, people lie." (P04, FGD, 3/12/2025)

Participants recommended the implementation of formal mentoring programs where young adults in the clergy will be mentored by people who are entirely separate from their parents and the churches that they attend. The separation of institutions would help maintain confidentiality in case the young adults need counseling.

Promotion of Autonomy and Identity Development

The participants indicated that they are not considered as individuals; rather, they are seen as symbols of the father or mother's spiritual mandate. One participant stated that:

"Sometimes we over-rely on what our parents are saying… and you find you don't even know yourself... you just follow instructions without understanding your own direction." (P03, FGD, 3/12/2025)

However, to overcome this challenge, any treatment program ought to specifically concentrate on ensuring that self-differentiation is achieved. Training in personal boundaries, emotional regulation, and value clarification

should be provided in the psychological workshops. Community grace was identified by another participant as important in the following sense:

"Let us lower our expectations a little. When we find someone doing some things, when one is making mistakes, let's not be quick to point fingers... What if they don't want to do what their parents are doing?" (P09, FGD, 9/12/2025)

This is consistent with Holliman et al. (2021), who argue that autonomy is an important requirement for psychological well-being.

Purpose in Life and Goal Formation Several participants stated that their own aspirations and professional ambitions had been continuously manipulated in the name of the church's needs and demands, causing existential aimlessness. A participant said:

"Parents should give their children permission to have their own goals." (P010, FGD, 9/12/2025) Another noted:

"Your career and your calling may be different… but both can still give you purpose… You just need guidance to understand how they connect." (P07, FGD, 9/12/2025)

As noted by Ryff (2014), adults should be considered humans with the goal of making sense of their existence. Through the use of structured interventions like vocational assessments and career counseling, the individuals can get the chance to pursue careers other than the religious one and find new meaning in life (Karei, 2019).

Peer Support and Non-Judgmental Community Spaces

The information obtained suggested that young adults from the clergy background find themselves uniquely understood only by peers coming from the similar background. One participant explained:

"Because you have that fear of judgment... someone, instead of giving you an empathetic response, judging you. So I would say I just like talking to God. I rarely talk to humans about issues that are affecting me." (P04, FGD, 3/12/2025)

The development of such networks of peer support, called "Preacher's Kids Sanctuaries," would be key to any intervention strategy. This, as one participant said:

"If the support group is strong and active, many problems can be solved before they get worse." (P014, FGD, 9/12/2025)

Within these communities, young adults were able to shed their facades and deal with their emotional trauma without jeopardizing their family's reputation (Hong et al., 2024).

Self-Acceptance and Personal Growth

Perpetual scrutiny by the community results in unhealthy perfectionism. All participants felt severe guilt when they did not uphold the perfect standard of morality. Clinically speaking, CBT and ACT are highly recommended when treating religious perfectionism. With the replacement of the distorted cognition of "I have to be perfect to save my family's work" with "It is okay for me to be imperfect and growing," self-acceptance can be achieved. One of the participants said that:

"*We need spaces where we reflect, understand ourselves, and grow, not just being told what to do." (P09, FGD, 9/12/2025)*

Family Dialogue and Expectation Management

The domestic setting of Pentecostal pastors is often similar to a church ceremony wherein a theological difference takes on the meaning of a spiritual rebellion. One participant said:

"I think that our parents, the way they go to Bible school, should also take a course in guidance and counselling. For real... you got yourself a child from the past; accept yourself." (P14, FGD, 9/12/2025)

According to Wynja (2022), pastors who intentionally emphasized the importance of family and involved their kids in transitional life events became better parents. Interventions should focus on the family system using psychoeducational family therapy by educating families about nonspiritual communication and unrealistic behavioral expectations.

Spiritual Development and Resilience

The participants were irritated by the nature of performance-based, institutionalized religion and wanted to disentangle their own spirituality from the politics of the church. It is well-documented that there is a direct connection between intrinsic spirituality and psychological resilience (Shelton et al., 2019). Such interventions need to help with deconstructing toxic religious structures to encourage young adults to follow their genuine spiritual path. Spiritual retreats facilitated by progressive theologians could assist in this process.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The emotional regulation and psychological well-being of the young people within the Pentecostal clergymen's families cannot be sorted out using a simple and purely religious method. The psychological challenges they face are a normal reaction to living in a very demanding and high-pressure socio-religious environment. It is important for these problems to be handled through a deliberate approach to more organized and holistic interventions. Through the application of the seven interventions recommended in this research, it is possible to achieve psychological flourishing among the children of clergymen.

According to the empirical results, church leadership and ecumenical organizations need to create an independently run clergy family wellbeing department at the national or county level. It is important for this department to remain independent from the local church politics so as to offer counseling in a confidential manner. In addition to this, psychologists and family therapists should come up with CBT and family systems approaches aimed at dealing with religious perfectionism, codependence, and identity loss. The parents who are clergy need to encourage a clear distinction between leadership and parental roles.

Limitations of the Study

However, since this is a qualitative phenomenological study based on a purposeful sample of 14 participants in Kajiado County, the results cannot be generalized statistically to all clergy's children across the globe. Self-reporting of experiences through FGDs could also be susceptible to social desirability bias, even as measures of confidentiality were taken into consideration. Nevertheless, thick description makes generalization possible.

Suggestions for Further Research

Further studies should involve quantitative longitudinal research in Kenya in order to examine how these seven intervention strategies can have an effect on the global well-being of children of clergy members.

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