

Relationship Between Formation Programme Components and Psycho-Spiritual Well-Being Among Novices in Female Religious Institutes in the Archdiocese of Nyeri, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Formation programmes play a critical role in fostering the holistic development and psycho-spiritual well-being of novices in religious life. This study examined the relationship between formation programme components and psycho-spiritual well-being among novices in selected female religious institutes in the Archdiocese of Nyeri, Kenya.

The study specifically focused on the relationship between spiritual, human, intellectual, and pastoral formation and psycho-spiritual well-being dimensions, namely self-awareness, connectedness, compassion, meaningfulness, and self-transcendence. The study adopted an embedded mixed-methods research design in which quantitative data formed the primary strand while qualitative data were embedded to enrich and explain the quantitative findings. Quantitative data were collected from 31 novices using the Formation Programmes Survey Scale (FPSS) and the Psycho-Spiritual Well-Being Scale (P-SWBS), while qualitative data were collected from four formators using semi-structured interviews. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics and Pearson Product Moment Correlation. The findings revealed that formation programmes were positively perceived across all dimensions, with pastoral formation recording the highest mean score ($M = 4.31$). Overall psycho-spiritual well-being was moderately high ($M = 3.86$), although self-awareness recorded the lowest score ($M = 3.72$). Correlation analysis revealed generally weak and mostly non-significant relationships between formation programme dimensions and psycho-spiritual well-being variables. The study concludes that although formation programmes provide a strong structural foundation for vocational preparation and spiritual growth, authentic psycho-spiritual well-being also depends on emotional maturity, psychological integration, self-awareness, and relational support. The findings have important implications for the design of holistic formation programmes and may inform policy, formation practice, and psycho-spiritual accompaniment within religious institutes in Kenya and similar contexts.

Keywords: *psycho-spiritual well-being, formation programmes, psychological integration, novices, religious formation, consecrated life, vocational formation*.

INTRODUCTION

Religious formation within female religious institutes is intended to promote holistic human development through spiritual, intellectual, human, and pastoral formation. Within consecrated life, formation programmes are expected to nurture vocational identity, emotional maturity, spiritual growth, interpersonal balance, communal integration, and apostolic preparedness among novices (Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life [CICLSAL], 2018; John Paul II, 1996). Formation therefore serves not only as a spiritual preparation process but also as a developmental process intended to foster emotional stability,

psychological maturity, and relational adjustment necessary for sustainable religious commitment (Pope Francis, 2014; Rossetti, 2011).

The Catholic Church emphasizes holistic and integrated formation as an essential aspect of consecrated life. Formation programmes are expected to develop the entire person by harmonizing spiritual, emotional, intellectual, psychological, and relational dimensions (CICLSAL, 2018; Vatican Council II, 1965). Consequently, authentic formation should strengthen not only spiritual commitment and institutional discipline but also emotional resilience, self-awareness, interpersonal adjustment, and psycho-spiritual maturity (Ngundo, 2021; Rossetti, 2011).

Despite these expectations, some novices continue to experience emotional distress, identity struggles, anxiety, unresolved family wounds, interpersonal difficulties, and spiritual uncertainty during formation. In some cases, novices may demonstrate external conformity to institutional expectations while struggling internally with emotional integration and psychological adjustment. Such experiences raise important concerns regarding the extent to which current formation programmes adequately support psycho-spiritual well-being among novices.

Psycho-spiritual well-being refers to the integration of psychological and spiritual dimensions of human functioning. According to Egunjobi et al. (2023), psycho-spiritual well-being includes self-awareness, connectedness, compassion, meaningfulness, and self-transcendence. Self-awareness involves emotional insight, identity integration, and personal understanding. Connectedness refers to meaningful relationships with God, self, others, and the community. Compassion reflects empathy and concern for others. Meaningfulness involves vocational purpose, fulfillment, and life satisfaction, while self-transcendence refers to the ability to move beyond self-centeredness toward deeper spiritual meaning and service.

Previous studies have increasingly emphasized the importance of integrating psychological and emotional dimensions within religious formation. Rossetti (2011) emphasized that authentic vocational formation requires the integration of psychological health, emotional maturity, and spiritual development. Programmes that focus predominantly on spiritual practices without adequate attention to self-awareness and emotional growth may limit the holistic development necessary for long-term vocational commitment. Similarly, Ngundo (2021) observed that many formation programmes in Africa remain strongly structured around discipline and conformity while giving comparatively limited attention to emotional development and personal internalization.

Research by Sepaiyan et al. (2024) further demonstrated that psycho-spiritual well-being among religious personnel is influenced by emotional resilience, interpersonal support, counselling, and psychological adjustment. These findings collectively suggest that spiritual formation alone may not automatically result in authentic psycho-spiritual transformation unless emotional and psychological dimensions are intentionally addressed.

The study was guided by Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Egunjobi's Psycho-Spiritual Well-Being Model. Maslow's theory emphasizes belongingness, meaning, esteem, and self-transcendence as important dimensions of human development (Maslow, 1954). Within religious life, connectedness and meaningfulness are central aspects of vocational identity and communal living. Similarly, Egunjobi's model conceptualizes psycho-spiritual well-being as a multidimensional construct involving self-awareness, connectedness, compassion, meaningfulness, and self-transcendence (Egunjobi et al., 2023).

Although several studies have explored spiritual formation and religious development, limited empirical evidence exists regarding the relationship between formation programme components and psycho-spiritual well-being among female religious novices in Kenya, particularly within the Archdiocese of Nyeri. Consequently, the extent to which formation dimensions influence psycho-spiritual well-being remains unclear.

The purpose of this study was therefore to determine the relationship between the components of formation programmes (spiritual, human, intellectual, and pastoral formation) and the psycho-spiritual well-being of novices in selected female religious institutes in the Archdiocese of Nyeri.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Formation Programmes in Religious Life

Religious formation is a structured process of vocational discernment and personal transformation intended to prepare candidates for consecrated life through the integration of human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral dimensions (John Paul II, 1996). Contemporary scholars argue that effective formation must address not only spiritual development but also emotional maturity, identity formation, and psychological integration (Agudo, 1995; O'Neill & McCarthy, 2021). Holistic formation seeks to nurture the whole person and promote vocational stability, relational competence, and spiritual growth.

Psycho-Spiritual Well-Being

Psycho-spiritual well-being refers to the integration of psychological health and spiritual maturity. According to Egunjobi et al. (2023), psycho-spiritual well-being comprises self-awareness, connectedness, meaningfulness, compassion, and self-transcendence. Previous studies have demonstrated that psychological well-being and spirituality are closely interconnected, particularly within religious contexts where personal meaning, community relationships, and faith experiences contribute to overall well-being (Fisher, 2011; Miller & Thoresen, 2003).

Formation Programmes and Psycho-Spiritual Well-Being

Existing literature suggests that integrated formation programmes positively influence psychological adjustment, vocational commitment, emotional resilience, and spiritual development. O'Neill and McCarthy (2021) found that psychological accompaniment and reflective formation practices enhance emotional adjustment and vocational stability. African studies similarly emphasize the importance of communal support, leadership, and human formation in promoting psycho-spiritual development (Chiroma, 2020; Obi et al., 2021). In Kenya, studies by Kiplagat and Kendi (2020) and Sepaiyan et al. (2024) highlight the importance of psychological support and emotional well-being in sustaining healthy religious life.

Human Formation and Emotional Maturity in Religious Life

Human formation has increasingly been recognized as a foundational dimension of religious formation because it facilitates emotional maturity, self-knowledge, interpersonal competence, and psychological integration. According to Rossetti (2011), healthy vocational development requires a balance between spiritual growth and psychological well-being, as unresolved emotional difficulties may hinder authentic commitment and community living. Similarly, Mutuku et al. (2021) found that emotional intelligence significantly contributes to adjustment, conflict resolution, and community integration among consecrated women religious. Opondo (2024) further argues that contemporary formation programmes in Africa must intentionally address emotional development and personal growth to respond effectively to the complex psychosocial realities faced by candidates entering religious life.

Spiritual Well-Being and Community Life

Research has consistently demonstrated that spiritual well-being is closely linked to psychological health, life satisfaction, and relational connectedness. Fisher (2011) conceptualized spiritual well-being as encompassing personal, communal, environmental, and transcendental domains that collectively contribute to holistic human flourishing. Likewise, Miller and Thoresen (2003) observed that spirituality and religious engagement are associated with improved psychological adjustment, resilience, and meaning-making. In religious communities, experiences of belonging, shared mission, and supportive relationships foster a deeper sense of purpose and well-being. Rihani and Nugroho (2024) found that happiness among women religious is strongly associated with meaningful relationships, vocational fulfilment, and spiritual commitment, underscoring the importance of community life in psycho-spiritual development.

Contemporary Challenges in Religious Formation

Contemporary religious formation is increasingly confronted with challenges arising from social change, cultural diversity, trauma experiences, and shifting vocational expectations. The Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life (2016) emphasizes that formation programmes must continually adapt to emerging realities while remaining faithful to the essential values of consecrated life. Similarly, the Association of Consecrated Women in Eastern and Central Africa (2022) highlights the need for integrated formation approaches that respond to emotional, psychological, and spiritual challenges experienced by candidates. Chinyeaka (2007) further notes that authentic formation should facilitate personal interiorization of values rather than mere conformity to institutional expectations. These perspectives reinforce the need for holistic formation models that promote both vocational commitment and psycho-spiritual well-being.

Research Gap

Despite growing interest in psycho-spiritual well-being, empirical studies examining the relationship between specific formation programme components and psycho-spiritual well-being among female religious novices remain limited. Most existing studies focus on professed religious, priests, or general formation processes rather than the novitiate stage. Furthermore, little empirical evidence exists within the Kenyan context, particularly in the Archdiocese of Nyeri. This study addresses this gap by examining the relationship between formation programme components and psycho-spiritual well-being among female religious novices.

Furthermore, recent African formation reports indicate that many novices enter religious life with diverse psycho-social experiences, emotional vulnerabilities, and developmental needs that require integrated formation approaches combining human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral dimensions (Ngundo & Mwesa, 2025). However, empirical evidence on how these formation dimensions influence psycho-spiritual well-being among novices remains limited, particularly within the Kenyan context.

METHOD

Research Design

The study adopted an embedded mixed-methods research design integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches. Quantitative data formed the primary strand of the study, while qualitative data were embedded to enrich and explain the quantitative findings. The design was appropriate because it enabled the study to combine statistical measurement with participants' lived experiences and contextual insights.

Participants

The target population consisted of novices and formators from selected female religious institutes within the Archdiocese of Nyeri. Census sampling was employed because the population was relatively small and manageable.

The intended sample consisted of 34 novices and five formators. However, the final sample realized during data collection consisted of 31 novices and four formators drawn from four female religious congregations.

Instruments

Three instruments were used to collect data for the study. Quantitative data were collected using the Psycho-Spiritual Well-Being Scale (P-SWBS) and the Formation Programmes Survey Scale (FPSS). The P-SWBS measured the dimensions of psycho-spiritual well-being, namely self-awareness, connectedness, compassion, meaningfulness, and self-transcendence, while the FPSS assessed participants' perceptions of spiritual, human, intellectual, and pastoral formation. Qualitative data were collected using a semi-structured interview guide administered to formators to obtain in-depth insights into formation experiences and psycho-spiritual well-being among novices.

The P-SWBS measured self-awareness, connectedness, compassion, meaningfulness, and self-transcendence. The FPSS assessed spiritual, human, intellectual, and pastoral formation dimensions.

The interview guide was used to collect qualitative data from formators regarding formation experiences, psycho-spiritual challenges, and strategies for enhancing psycho-spiritual well-being.

Data Collection Procedure

Permission to conduct the study was obtained from relevant institutional authorities. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, confidentiality measures, and voluntary participation.

Questionnaires were administered to novices, while semi-structured interviews were conducted with formators.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were coded and analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics included frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations. Pearson Product Moment Correlation (Pearson's r) was used to determine the relationship between formation programme dimensions and psycho-spiritual well-being variables. Qualitative data were analysed thematically following Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis procedures involving transcription, coding, categorization, and theme development.

RESULTS

Demographic Information

The study involved 31 novices and four formators drawn from four female religious congregations within the Archdiocese of Nyeri, Kenya. The novices represented a relatively homogeneous group in terms of age, socioeconomic background, and educational attainment, reflecting comparable formation environments and institutional contexts. Most participants were in early adulthood, a developmental stage characterized by ongoing identity formation, vocational discernment, and personal integration. This demographic profile is particularly relevant to the study because psycho-spiritual well-being and responsiveness to formation programmes are often influenced by developmental and vocational transitions.

The participants also shared broadly similar socioeconomic backgrounds, suggesting relatively comparable life experiences prior to entering religious formation. Such similarities may have contributed to common perceptions of communal living, discipline, and formation practices. Educationally, the majority possessed foundational academic qualifications, although some participants had attained higher levels of education, introducing a degree of diversity in learning experiences and intellectual engagement within the formation process.

The qualitative component of the study involved four formators aged between 47 and 55 years, with between four and seven years of experience in formation ministry. Their maturity and practical experience provided valuable insights into the implementation of formation programmes and the psycho-spiritual development of novices.

Perceptions of Formation Programmes

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for Formation Programme Dimensions (N = 31)

Formation Dimension	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Spiritual Formation	31	1	5	4.20	0.36
Intellectual Formation	31	1	5	4.09	0.51
Human Formation	31	1	5	4.06	0.46
Pastoral Formation	31	1	5	4.31	0.47

Note. Scores ranged from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree.

The findings revealed positive perceptions of formation programmes across all four dimensions. Pastoral formation recorded the highest mean score ($M = 4.31$, $SD = 0.47$), followed by spiritual formation ($M = 4.20$, $SD = 0.36$), intellectual formation ($M = 4.09$, $SD = 0.51$), and human formation ($M = 4.06$, $SD = 0.46$). The relatively low standard deviations indicate a reasonable degree of consistency in participants' perceptions across the various formation dimensions. Overall, the findings suggest that novices generally viewed the formation programmes positively.

Level of Psycho-Spiritual Well-Being

The second research question examined the level of psycho-spiritual well-being among novices across five dimensions: self-awareness, connectedness, meaningfulness, compassion, and self-transcendence. The descriptive statistics are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics for Psycho-Spiritual Well-Being (N = 31)

Dimension	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean (M)	SD
Self-awareness	31	1	5	3.72	0.67
Connectedness	31	1	5	3.98	0.57
Meaningfulness	31	1	5	3.92	0.48
Compassion	31	1	5	3.79	0.52
Self-transcendence	31	1	5	3.87	0.52
Overall Psycho-Spiritual Well-Being	31	1	5	3.86	0.42

Note. Scores ranged from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree.

The findings indicate moderately high levels of psycho-spiritual well-being among the novices ($M = 3.86$, $SD = 0.42$). Connectedness recorded the highest mean score ($M = 3.98$, $SD = 0.57$), followed by meaningfulness ($M = 3.92$, $SD = 0.48$), self-transcendence ($M = 3.87$, $SD = 0.52$), and compassion ($M = 3.79$, $SD = 0.52$). Self-awareness recorded the lowest mean score ($M = 3.72$, $SD = 0.67$), suggesting comparatively lower levels of personal insight and greater variability among participants. Overall, the findings suggest that novices generally experience positive psycho-spiritual well-being, particularly in relational connectedness, vocational meaning, and transcendental orientation.

Relationship Between Formation Programmes and Psycho-Spiritual Well-Being

Correlation analysis revealed that formation dimensions were positively interrelated.

Variables	Correlation (r)
Human Formation & Pastoral Formation	.599**
Spiritual Formation & Intellectual Formation	.395*
Intellectual Formation & Human Formation	.421*

The strongest relationship was observed between human formation and pastoral formation ($r = .599$, $p < .01$).

However, relationships between formation programme dimensions and psycho-spiritual well-being variables were generally weak and mostly not statistically significant.

Variables	Correlation (r)	Interpretation
Spiritual Formation & Self-Awareness	.104	Weak

Spiritual Formation & Connectedness	.305	Weak Positive
Human Formation & Compassion	.306	Weak Positive
Pastoral Formation & Self-Transcendence	.076	Very Weak

These findings suggest that although formation programmes were structurally holistic and positively perceived, their direct relationship with psycho-spiritual well-being variables was generally weak.

Qualitative Findings

Qualitative findings revealed that accompaniment, counselling, mentorship, emotional healing, and relational support were considered important strategies for enhancing psycho-spiritual well-being among novices. Participants emphasized that emotional wounds, identity struggles, unresolved family issues, excessive routine, and lack of emotional support may hinder authentic psycho-spiritual growth. One formator stated: *“Emotional distress, anger, mood swings, identity struggles and uncertainty are common among novices.”* Another formator explained: *“When past wounds are not attended to, novices find it difficult to transcend.”* The qualitative findings therefore reinforced the need for stronger psychological and emotional integration within formation programmes.

DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that formation programmes within female religious institutes provide a strong structural foundation for spiritual growth, communal integration, vocational preparation, and apostolic engagement. The positive ratings across spiritual, human, intellectual, and pastoral formation dimensions demonstrate that novices generally perceive the programmes positively.

The high scores in connectedness and meaningfulness further indicate that novices experience a strong sense of belonging, communal identity, vocational purpose, and spiritual fulfillment within religious life. These findings support Maslow’s emphasis on belongingness and meaning as important dimensions of human development.

However, self-awareness recorded the lowest mean score. This finding suggests that emotional insight, personal reflection, identity integration, and psychological maturity remain comparatively underdeveloped among some novices.

The weak and mostly non-significant correlations between formation programme dimensions and psycho-spiritual well-being variables suggest that external formation structures alone may not automatically produce authentic psycho-spiritual transformation.

These findings support previous studies emphasizing the importance of emotional healing, psychological integration, and personal meaning-making within authentic formation (Rossetti, 2011; Ngundo, 2021; Sepaiyan et al., 2024).

The qualitative findings further demonstrated that unresolved emotional wounds, identity struggles, excessive routine, and limited psychological integration may hinder authentic inner growth among novices. Consequently, psycho-spiritual well-being depends not only on institutional formation structures but also on emotional maturity, self-awareness, counselling, mentor-ship, accompaniment, psychological healing, and relational support.

Relational dimensions in this study refer to the quality of interpersonal relationships experienced within formation communities, including relationships between novices, formators, spiritual directors, mentors, and the wider religious community. Healthy relational support strengthens connectedness, emotional stability, trust, belongingness, and psycho-spiritual growth.

The study therefore argues that authentic psycho-spiritual formation requires intentional integration of spiritual, emotional, psychological, and relational dimensions within formation programmes.

Recommendations

The study recommends that female religious institutes adopt a more integration-oriented formation approach that intentionally combines spiritual formation with emotional healing, counselling, mentorship, accompaniment, and psychological support. Formation programmes should strengthen self-awareness, emotional maturity, identity integration, and relational development among novices.

There is also a need for professional psychological support systems within formation programmes, including counselling services, trauma-informed care, emotional development programmes, and psychological accompaniment.

Formators should receive additional training in psycho-spiritual accompaniment and emotional support in order to respond effectively to the psycho-spiritual needs of novices.

Future research should adopt longitudinal and comparative approaches to examine psycho-spiritual well-being across different stages of religious life, congregations, dioceses, and cultural contexts.

Limitations of the Study

The study was limited by a relatively small sample size, particularly in the qualitative phase involving only four formators. This may limit the generalizability of the findings beyond selected female religious institutes within the Archdiocese of Nyeri.

The study also relied on self-reported data obtained through questionnaires and interviews, which may have introduced social desirability bias due to the sensitive nature of spirituality and emotional well-being within consecrated life. Additionally, the cross-sectional design limited the ability to examine long-term psycho-spiritual development over time. Nevertheless, the use of mixed methods and triangulation strengthened the credibility and depth of the findings.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that although formation programmes in female religious institutes are structurally holistic and positively perceived, authentic psycho-spiritual well-being requires deeper emotional, psychological, spiritual, and relational integration. The weak correlations between formation programme dimensions and psycho-spiritual well-being demonstrate that external formation structures alone are insufficient for deep inner transformation.

Consequently, authentic psycho-spiritual growth depends not only on participation in formation activities but also on emotional maturity, psychological healing, self-awareness, mentorship, accompaniment, counselling, and relational support.

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