

Relationship between Psycho-spiritual Well-being and Resilience among Catholic Religious Sisters in Nigeria

Sarah Eyareosowo Bedebe, Fr. Dr. Richard Ehusani., Dr. Maria Ntarangwe

Psycho-Spiritual Institute of Lux Terra Leadership Foundation, an affiliate of Veritas University, Abuja, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Psycho-spiritual well-being and resilience are vital for human flourishing under stress and adversity, particularly for women in consecrated life, whose vocation is shaped by prayer, community living, and demanding apostolic ministry. This study examined the relationship between psycho-spiritual well-being and resilience among Catholic religious sisters in Nigeria, highlighting how spirituality, inner resources, and supportive systems enable them to thrive amid vocational challenges. Objective explored the relationship between psycho-spiritual well-being and resilience among participants. The study was guided by logotherapy and "ordinary magic" frameworks. Through simple random sampling, a sample of 238 was determined from a target population of 587 using the Yamane formula. Employing two standardised tools; the Psycho-spiritual Well-being Scale (P-SWBS) and the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC-25), yielded 159 valid responses. Employing a quantitative research design, the study utilised Google Forms for data collection, and SPSS for data analysis. Pearson correlation analysis revealed a statistically significant, moderate positive correlation ($r = .500, p < 0.01$). The study concluded with empirical evidence that psycho-spiritual well-being was moderately and positively associated with resilience, indicating that it is an important correlate among participants. Recommendations included spiritual direction, counselling, self-care, community life, education, leadership and on-going formation as potential contextual supports to strengthen the relationship between psycho-spiritual well-being resilience among Catholic religious sisters in Nigeria.

Keywords: Psycho-spiritual well-being, resilience, Catholic religious sisters in Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

The well-being of women in consecrated life is essential for the sustainability of their vocation and apostolic mission. While psycho-spiritual well-being provides an important foundation for meaning, inner integration, and relationship with God, resilience enables religious sisters to adapt positively to the demands and challenges of religious life. This study examined the relationship between psycho-spiritual well-being and resilience among the Catholic religious sisters in Nigeria.

Background

Psycho-spiritual well-being and resilience are closely connected concerns in contemporary studies of human flourishing. Psycho-spiritual well-being refers to the integration of psychological and spiritual dimensions of human life, including emotional balance, meaning, self-awareness, connectedness, compassion, and openness to transcendence. It is not reducible to mental comfort, nor is it limited to formal religious observance. Rather, it concerns the inner integration through which persons interpret life, relate to God and others, sustain hope, and respond meaningfully in the face of personal and social pressures (de Brito Sena et al., 2021; Egunjobi et al., 2024; Ge et al., 2023).

Resilience, by contrast, refers to the capacity to adapt successfully when adversity threatens personal, relational, spiritual, or institutional functioning. It is not a fixed personality trait possessed equally by all people. It is a dynamic process shaped by internal resources, supportive relationships, cultural values, spiritual meaning, and wider systems of care. Masten (2014) describes resilience as ordinary rather than exceptional because it often

emerges through everyday protective systems such as supportive relationships, self-regulation, routine, meaning, and community belonging. Ungar and Theron (2020) similarly argue that resilience depends on multisystemic processes rather than individual strength alone.

This distinction is important in religious life. A sister may possess strong faith, a clear sense of vocation, and deep commitment to prayer, yet still face emotional exhaustion, grief, interpersonal tension, ministry fatigue, or difficulty adapting to stress. Religious commitment may provide a strong sense of meaning and hope, but it does not automatically remove vulnerability. Studies on consecrated persons and clergy indicate that prayer, spiritual practice, community belonging, and purpose can support wellbeing, while heavy workload, burnout, conflict, leadership pressure, and inadequate emotional support can weaken resilience (Crea & Francis, 2022; Kersteins & Muasa, 2022; Kiplagat et al., 2019; Ndunge, 2024).

The present study focused on the Catholic religious sisters in Nigeria because they live at the intersection of prayer, communal life, apostolic mission, and the wider pressures of Nigerian society. Their work often places them within educational, pastoral, healthcare, and social-service contexts where they encounter human suffering and institutional demands. In such a setting, the relationship between Psycho-spiritual well-being and resilience is not merely theoretical; it has practical implications for formation, spiritual direction, counselling, community life, leadership, workload planning, and the sustainability of apostolic mission.

Statement of the Problem

Consecrated life is expected to nurture inner peace, meaning, and strength in adversity, yet existing evidence shows that religious commitment does not automatically protect Catholic religious sisters from stress, burnout, emotional exhaustion, or spiritual struggle (Kiplagat et al., 2019). Across the globe Catholic religious sisters have raised concerns about silent stories of distress with many fearing to seek help or speak out due to possible misunderstanding or judgment (Kajuna, Global sisters report, 2025). Among sisters in Africa, prayer and community support can enhance wellbeing and resilience, yet heavy workloads, leadership tensions, emotional pressure, and inadequate self-care practices can weaken them (Ndunge et al, 2024; Draru et al., 2022).

This problem raises a more serious concern in Nigeria, where Catholic religious sisters live and minister within a context of major social, religious and economic strain. In 2024, about 47% of Nigerians were estimated to be living in poverty, and about 3.6 million people were internally displaced by conflict and insecurity. Mental-health care is also severely limited: only about 10-15% of Nigerians with mental disorders receive professional care, about 85-90% receive none, fewer than 5% of primary health-care facilities provide mental-health services, and the country has only about 0.16 psychiatrists per 100,000 population (World Bank, 2024; UNHCR, 2025). These realities directly affect Catholic religious sisters, who minister among vulnerable populations while living within the same socio-economic and health-care environment. The increasing pastoral demands, exposure to human suffering, limited access to mental-health support, and the pressures of religious life may heighten their psychological, emotional, spiritual, and relational challenges, making the maintenance of psycho-spiritual well-being and resilience particularly important.

Despite these realities, there is still inadequate empirical knowledge on how Psycho-spiritual well-being and resilience are experienced together among Catholic religious sisters in Nigeria. As a result, an important question remained unresolved: how do Catholic religious sisters sustain meaning, emotional balance, and adaptive strength under the actual pressures of vowed life and apostolic mission in Nigeria? Without this evidence, leadership, formation, counselling, and support structures may continue to rely on assumptions rather than context-specific understanding.

Research Objective

To determine the relationship between Psycho-spiritual well-being and resilience among Catholic religious sisters in Nigeria.

Research Question

What is the relationship between Psycho-spiritual well-being and resilience among Catholic religious sisters in

Nigeria?

Theoretical Framework

Egunjobi (2024) defined a theoretical framework as the foundation upon which research is built. Similarly, Luft et al. (2022) describe a framework as an analytic lens that illuminates the phenomenon under investigation and clarifies the assumptions held by the researcher. This study adopted the frameworks of logotherapy by Viktor Frankl and the “ordinary magic” by Ann Masten.

Logotherapy

Viktor Frankl's logotherapy provides a strong lens for interpreting the relationship between Psycho-spiritual well-being and resilience because it locates human endurance in the search for meaning. Frankl (2006) argues that human beings can preserve dignity and purpose even under suffering when they discover meaning in their circumstances. This does not deny pain; rather, it explains how suffering may be endured without becoming spiritually or psychologically destructive. For women in religious life, meaning is closely connected to vocation, prayer, service, sacrifice, community, and fidelity to God.

Logotherapy is directly relevant to this study because it explains why Psycho-spiritual well-being may be positively associated with resilience. Psycho-spiritual well-being includes meaningfulness, self-transcendence, inner coherence, and relationship with God (Frankl, 1986). These elements can help a sister interpret hardship as part of a wider vocational horizon rather than as a meaningless burden. Studies on purpose, spirituality, and resilience support this link by showing that meaning can protect individuals against burnout and strengthen adaptation in difficult circumstances (Crea & Francis, 2022; Din & Khan, 2023; Manning et al., 2019). At the same time, logotherapy's emphasis on the individual's inner attitude may not fully account for the external factors that support resilience. Although meaning can strengthen resilience, it does not eliminate the need for supportive relationships and other protective resources. The “Ordinary Magic” framework therefore complements logotherapy by highlighting the importance of connectedness, relational and contextual factors in fostering resilience.

“Ordinary Magic”

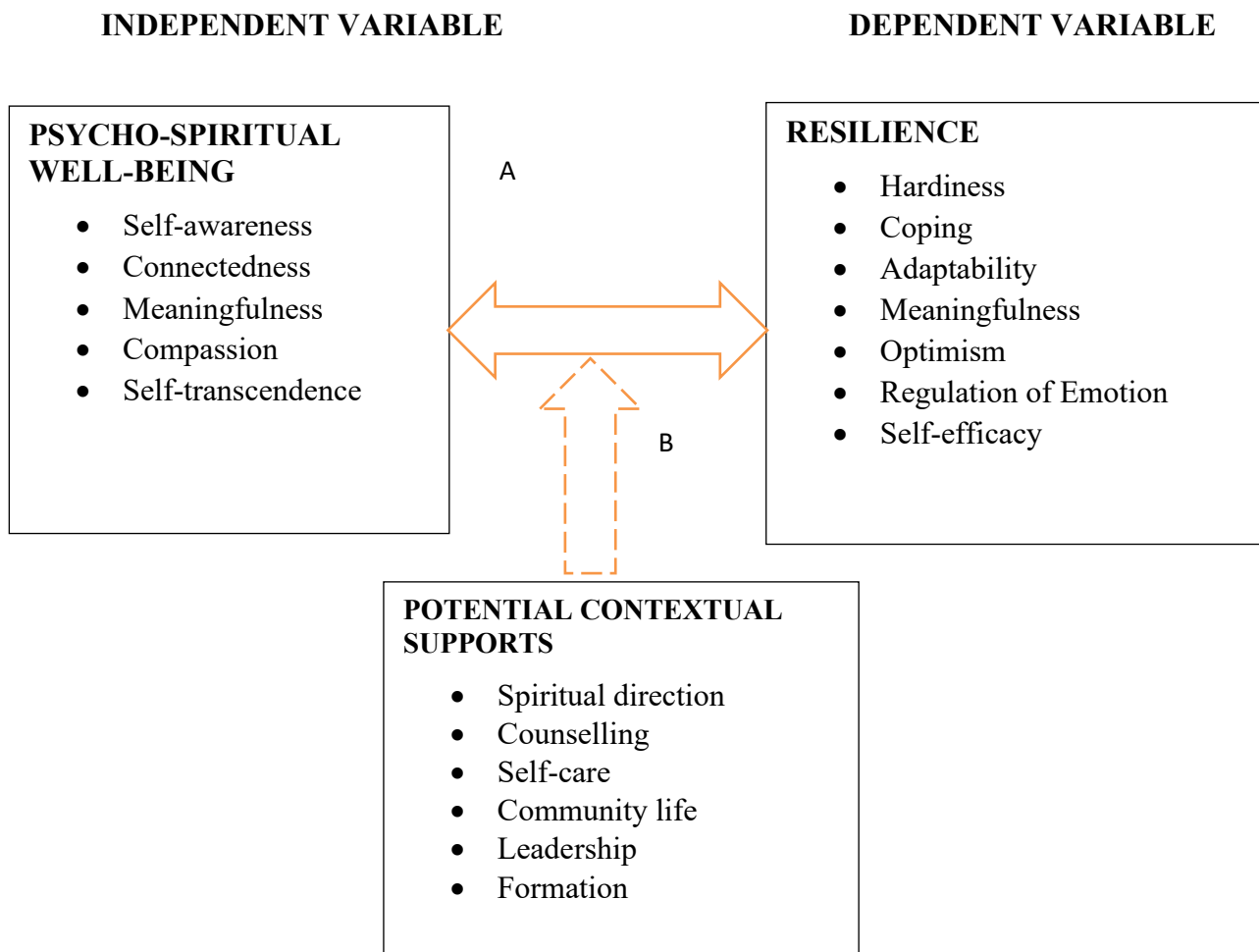
Masten's “ordinary magic” framework complements logotherapy by showing that resilience emerges through ordinary protective systems rather than extraordinary invulnerability. These systems include stable relationships, self-regulation, supportive community, routines, mentorship, opportunities for participation, and meaning systems (Masten, 2001, 2014; Masten & Cicchetti, 2016). This perspective is useful because it shifts attention from heroic endurance to the practical systems that enable individuals to keep functioning under pressure. For Catholic religious sisters in Nigeria, ordinary magic can be seen in prayer routines, communal support, formation structures, spiritual direction, and supportive leadership. These practices are ordinary in the sense that they belong to the daily life of a religious congregation, yet they can become powerful protective systems when they help sisters process stress, recover from grief, manage interpersonal conflict, and continue their mission. This made the framework especially relevant to this study.

Logotherapy and “ordinary magic” collectively provide a balanced framework. Logotherapy explains the transcendence, meaning-making and spiritually grounded resilience, while ordinary magic explains the relational and institutional systems that translate meaning into adaptive functioning. The study therefore treated Psycho-spiritual well-being not as an automatic guarantee of resilience but as a foundation that requires support through prayer, formation, relationships, accompaniment, and supportive community structures.

Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework refers to the structured arrangement of key concepts and ideas drawn from the theories that guide a research study. It helps to clarify the main focus of the study and provides direction for the investigation by organising the central concepts in a logical manner (Shikalepo, 2020). In this way, the conceptual framework visually showed the relationship between the variables examined in the study (Mensah, 2020). The conceptual framework for the present study is presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1 Conceptual Framework



Direction A in figure 1 illustrate the hypothesised relationship between psycho-spiritual well-being and resilience in this study. It showed that psycho-spiritual well-being was expected to be positively associated with resilience among Catholic religious sisters in Nigeria. As the independent variable, psycho-spiritual well-being referred to the integration of psychological wellness and spiritual wellbeing. It is expressed through the domains of self-awareness, connectedness, meaningfulness, compassion, and self-transcendence. These dimensions were expected to help the sisters remain inwardly grounded, purposeful, and open to God, self, and others, thereby providing the inner resources needed to cope with the challenges of their vocation and ministry.

Resilience, which was the dependent variable, refers to the capacity to endure, adapt, and grow in the face of adversity. In this study, it is reflected hardness, coping, adaptability, meaningfulness, optimism, regulation of emotion and self-efficacy. Among Catholic religious sisters, resilience is understood as both a psychological and spiritual capacity. It is seen not only in the ability to integrate faith and inner strength in responding to difficulties, but also in the ability to rely on supportive and secure relationships when dealing with stressors.

Direction B in the diagram presented the potential contextual supports that may strengthen the relationship between psycho-spiritual well-being and resilience. These included spiritual direction, counselling, self-care, community life, education, leadership, and formation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section reviewed empirical literature relevant to Psycho-spiritual well-being and resilience, with particular attention to Catholic religious women and comparable populations exposed to emotional, vocational, social, and spiritual demands.

Psycho-spiritual well-being and Resilience

The relationship between Psycho-spiritual well-being and resilience has received growing attention because both concepts speak to the capacity of persons to remain meaningful, hopeful, emotionally balanced, and adaptive in the face of stress, suffering, and uncertainty. Psycho-spiritual well-being refers to the integration of psychological and spiritual dimensions of life, including self-awareness, meaningfulness, connectedness, compassion, and self-transcendence (Egunjobi et al., 2024). Resilience, on the other hand, refers to the capacity to endure, recover, adapt, and continue functioning despite adversity (Opara, 2024). The literature reviewed generally suggests that these two constructs are positively related, although their relationship varies according to population, context, vocation, and available support systems.

Crea and Francis (2022) provide an important foundation for understanding this relationship in religious and ministerial contexts. Their study examined Catholic priests and religious in Italy using Frankl's logotherapy as a guiding lens. They found that purpose in life protected participants from professional burnout and strengthened satisfaction in ministry. This is significant for the present article because purpose, meaning, and vocation are central components of Psycho-spiritual well-being. Their findings suggest that persons who interpret their life and ministry through a strong sense of meaning are better equipped to withstand emotional exhaustion and vocational strain. However, because their study focused on burnout rather than resilience as the main outcome, it supports but does not fully answer the present concern with the direct relationship between Psycho-spiritual well-being and resilience among Catholic religious sisters in Nigeria.

Ramos (2021) also contributes to this discussion by showing how spirituality enhances resilience among Catholic leaders. In a mixed-methods study involving pastors and ministry leaders in the Roman Catholic Diocese of St. Petersburg, Florida, Ramos found a strong positive link between spirituality, servant leadership, and resilience. Participants who maintained spiritual practices such as prayer, meditation, and reliance on divine purpose demonstrated stronger adaptive capacity in pastoral service. This study is useful because it shows that spirituality can promote virtues such as empathy, forgiveness, resourcefulness, and care, which are also relevant to resilience in religious life. However, Ramos' focus on Catholic leaders in the United States means that the findings cannot be directly generalised to African women religious without further contextual study.

Khai and Medina (2024) similarly examined the relationship between spiritual wellbeing and psychological wellbeing among novice clergy and senior priests in Myanmar. Their findings showed that spiritual wellbeing strongly predicted psychological wellbeing across vocational stages. For novice clergy, personal spiritual wellbeing accounted for a substantial proportion of variation in psychological wellbeing, while among senior priests the environmental domain of spiritual wellbeing was particularly influential. This is relevant because resilience among religious persons is not only sustained by private faith, but also by the spiritual quality of the environment in which they live and minister. The study therefore supports the idea that Psycho-spiritual well-being can become a resource for adaptive functioning, especially where spiritual identity, emotional regulation, and supportive structures are integrated.

Studies outside formal religious life also emphasised the connection between spirituality, wellbeing, and resilience. Adepoju et al. (2020), in a study among male inmates in northern Nigeria, found that spirituality and resilience were associated with lower psychological distress. Although the prison setting differs from consecrated life, the study is valuable because it demonstrates how spiritual practices, reflection, belief in a higher purpose, and inner meaning can protect individuals in highly stressful environments. Similarly, Chukwuorji et al. (2025), in a study among Nigerian orthopaedic nurses, found that spirituality and resilience contributed to vicarious posttraumatic growth among nurses exposed to patient suffering and trauma. Their findings indicate that nurses with high spirituality often recorded high resilience, and that resilience moderated the relationship between spirituality and posttraumatic growth. These findings are particularly relevant to the present study because many Catholic religious sisters work in educational, pastoral, medical, and social-service settings where they encounter suffering, need, and emotional demands. Nevertheless, differences in population, context, and lifestyle limit the generalisability of these findings to consecrated religious life.

Bagereka et al. (2023) also found that psychosocial-spiritual wellbeing was related to resilience and mindfulness among persons facing severe vulnerability. Their work supports the view that resilience is strengthened when

psychological, social, and spiritual resources operate together. This is consistent with Masten's "ordinary magic" framework, which understands resilience as a process sustained by ordinary adaptive systems such as supportive relationships, self-regulation, meaning systems, and community belonging. Ungar and Theron (2020) further argue that resilience should not be reduced to individual strength alone, since adaptation depends on the interaction of biological, psychological, social, cultural, and ecological systems. In the context of consecrated life, this means that psychospiritual well-being may provide an inner foundation for resilience, while prayer, community life, leadership, formation, counselling, and spiritual accompaniment may influence how effectively this well-being supports resilient adaptation.

Research among consecrated women and clergy provides further evidence of the importance of psycho-spiritual well-being and resilience in religious and ministerial life. Kiplagat et al. (2019) examined Psycho-spiritual well-being and happiness among consecrated religious women in Nairobi County and demonstrated the importance of integrated psychological and spiritual wellbeing. Their findings are particularly relevant because they involved African women religious and showed that spiritual life, emotional wellbeing, and happiness are closely connected. However, the present study goes further by examining resilience directly among Catholic religious sisters in Nigeria. Francis et al. (2026), working among Anglican clergy, also linked perceived resilience with work-related psychological wellbeing, showing that resilience is important in ministerial settings where role demands, emotional labour, and pastoral expectations can affect psychological health.

The literature reviewed indicate a generally positive relationship between psycho-spiritual well-being and resilience across diverse populations and contexts. These findings support the complementary perspectives of Logotherapy and Masten's Ordinary Magic theory in explaining how meaning, inner resources, and supportive environmental systems may contribute to resilience. However, limited empirical research has examined this relationship among Catholic religious sisters in Nigeria using integrated measures of both constructs. The present study addressed this gap by investigating the relationship between psycho-spiritual well-being and resilience among Catholic religious sisters in Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY

This section outlined the methodological procedures that guided the investigation into the relationship between psycho-spiritual well-being and resilience of Catholic religious sisters in Nigeria, namely: the research design, the location of the study, target population, sampling procedure and sample size; the research instruments as well as the data collection and analysis procedures.

Research Design

The study adopted a quantitative research design. According to Creswell and Plano Clark (2018), this design allows for systematic examination of relationships between variables and generalisation of findings.

Participants and Sampling

The population for this study consisted of 587 Catholic religious sisters in Nigeria. A simple random sampling technique was used to ensure that each participant had an equal opportunity of being selected thereby minimising sampling bias. A sample of 238 was determined using Yamane formula. Out of the 238 questionnaires sent via Google forms, 159 valid responses were returned. This gave a confidence response rate of 66.8% used for the analysis.

Research Instruments

Psycho-spiritual well-being was measured using the Psycho-spiritual well-being Scale (P-SWBS), a 25-item instrument that measures self-awareness, connectedness, meaningfulness, compassion, and self-transcendence (Egunjobi et al., 2023). The scale was appropriate for this study because the relationship under investigation required a measure that integrated psychological and spiritual dimensions rather than treating well-being in purely clinical terms.

Resilience was measured using the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale, 25-item version (CD-RISC-25), which

assesses hardness/control, coping, adaptability/ flexibility, meaningfulness/ purpose, optimism, regulation of emotion & cognition, and self-efficacy. (Connor & Davidson, 2003).

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

Quantitative data were collected online via Google Forms and analysed using SPSS version 25. Inferential statistics were used to determine the relationship between the variables. Specifically, the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was used to test the relationship between Psycho-spiritual well-being and resilience among the participants. Results were presented in tables and were followed by interpretation and discussion in relation to the research question.

Ethical Considerations

Participants completed an anonymous online questionnaire. No names or direct personal identifiers were collected. Participation was voluntary and respondents could withdraw before submitting the form.

Presentation and Interpretation of Results

The findings of this study are presented and interpreted in the subsections that follow. The structure is aligned with the study's objective, providing both descriptive inferential statistics.

Relationship between Psycho-spiritual well-being and Resilience among Catholic Religious sisters in Nigeria

This relationship was identified using inferential analysis. The Pearson correlation coefficient was used to test the correlation between these variables. Results of the analysis are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1

Pearson Correlation between Psycho-spiritual well-being and Resilience

VARIABLES		P-SWBS	C-DRISC-25
P-SWBS correlation	Pearson	1	.500**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0
	N	159	159
C-DRISC-25 correlation	Pearson	.500**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0	
	N	159	159
** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

Table 1 revealed a statistically significant moderate correlation between Psycho-spiritual well-being and resilience, $r = .500$, $p < 0.01$, $r^2 = .25$, $N = 159$. This moderate association suggests that participants who reported higher levels of self-awareness, connectedness, meaningfulness, compassion and self-transcendence also tend to demonstrate stronger capacity to cope with adversity while those with lower levels of Psycho-spiritual well-being tend to report lower resilience.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The Pearson correlation analysis revealed a statistically significant moderate positive relationship between Psycho-spiritual well-being and resilience among participants, significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). This fin-

ding supported the conceptual framework indicating that inner spiritual and psychological integration contributes to adaptive capacity. Sisters who experience stronger self-awareness, connectedness, meaning, compassion, and self-transcendence are more likely to possess resources that help them cope with adversity. These findings align with logotherapy framework, which views meaning as associated with resilience (Frankl, 2006), and with studies linking spirituality, purpose, and resilience across religious and non-religious populations (Bagereka et al., 2023; Crea & Francis, 2022; Din & Khan, 2023).

At the same time, the relationship was moderate, not strong enough to imply that Psycho-spiritual well-being alone determines resilience. This aspect of the finding is very significant because, it implies that a sister can be spiritually grounded and still need emotional support, rest, counselling, supportive relationships, and healthy leadership structures. The result challenges any formation or leadership approach that expects sisters to cope effectively because they are prayerful. Spiritual resources matter, but they must be supported by practical resources. Consequently, Masten's "ordinary magic" framework complements this outcome by affirming that resilience is not static or extraordinary but arises from ordinary adaptive systems such as healthy relationships, community support, and self-regulation. The present findings therefore illustrate the interplay between Frankl's meaning-centred resilience and Masten's systemic oriented resilience, showing that Psycho-spiritual well-being provides the inner resource base, while ordinary system supports determine the extent to which resilience is sustained (Frankl, 2006; Masten, 2014).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study found a statistically significant moderate correlation between psycho-spiritual well-being and resilience among Catholic religious sisters in Nigeria. To strengthen this relationship, potential contextual support programmes that integrate psycho-spiritual therapy with self-care practices and supportive community living should be prioritised. Furthermore, ongoing formation, and empathetic leadership are vital for equipping sisters with adaptive skills and fostering resilient environments. Such strategies can provide practical tools and renewed motivation, ensuring that the relationship between psycho-spiritual well-being and resilience is enhanced among participants. The study concluded that psycho-spiritual well-being was moderately and positively associated with resilience, indicating that it is an important correlate among participants.

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