

The Prevalence of Intergenerational Differences of the Catholic Nuns in Selected Monasteries in Rwanda

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to assess the prevalence of intergenerational differences of the catholic nuns in selected monasteries in Rwanda. It utilized a convergent parallel mixed methods research design guided by Bengtson and Roberts' (1991) Intergenerational Solidarity Theory. The target population consisted of 112 professing nuns and the novices across four contemplative monasteries (Benedictine, Carmelite, Trappistine, and Visitandine). Quantitative data was collected from 97 respondents using the standardised Uskudar XYZ Generational difference scale, and qualitative with semi-structured interviews with four major superiors. Quantitative data was analysed with descriptive and inferential statistics using SPSS version 23 software. The findings showed that the Intergenerational Differences among the nuns is on moderate of with mean 2.88 (SD= 0.34) on a 5-point scale. Qualitative data exposed hidded undercurrents of stress related to modern structural demands secular's legal concepts of individual right ans thechologicaj advancement. Findings are beneficial to monastic superiors and formation leaders in adopting leadership strategies that foster inclusivity, empathy, and mutual respect between older and younger members.

Key words: Intergenerational difference, generational, Monastery, Nuns

INTRODUCTION

Monastic life, shaped by the ancient vows of obedience, stability, and conversion of life, calls men and women to a radical commitment to prayer, asceticism, and communal living. Under the guidance of an Abbot or Abbess, monks and nuns dedicate themselves to spiritual transformation and service, withdrawing from secular life to pursue a deeper union with God (Alliance Inter-Monastique (2021). The vow of stability, which binds members to remain in the same monastery from entry until death, creates a permanent, intergenerational community where younger members benefit from the wisdom and continuity embodied by elders, while offering renewed vitality and fresh perspectives in return.

Despite these mutual benefits, significant age differences can sometimes lead to tensions in communication, expectations, and attitudes toward change, and the caregiving needs of elderly members can place demands on the younger generation. Nonetheless, living together across a lifetime transforms the community into a "school of communion," where patience, mutual service, and enduring charity turn intergenerational coexistence into a meaningful path of spiritual growth.

The Intergenerational difference refers to variations in attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviors between older and younger members who live or work together (Beyers & Goossens, 2008). These differences may lead to misunderstandings, decreased communication, and tension within communal living settings. Worldwide,

scholars have studied intergenerational dynamics among families (Bengtson, 2020), in workplaces, and in educational institutions (Costanza & Finkelstein, 2015). Research findings consistently indicate that intergenerational differences can either enrich communities through various perspectives or create problems when not properly managed.

Through the program organized by ASEC in 2022 which brings together older and younger members of religious communities to foster intergenerational dialogue and mentorship, younger sisters report gaining valuable guidance, skills, and emotional support from their more experienced counterparts. This exchange not only promotes a smooth transition of leadership, but also helps preserve the community's traditions while allowing space for innovation. For older sisters, the presence of younger members serves as a source of hope and joy for the future of their congregations. However, the significant age gap between the two groups can make it difficult for older sisters to find peers with whom they can connect deeply, often resulting in feelings of isolation and, in some cases, depression.

To some degree, younger generations have always challenged and reshaped the existing culture, viewing older generations as old-fashioned, condescending, and out of touch. At the same time, older generations have consistently complained about "today's youth" and have looked at youth cultures with confusion and a sense of offense toward their own familiar generational norms.

Intergenerational tensions have always been a reality in the lives of religious communities. When vocations to the spiritual life are few, and the differences between generations proliferate, the intergenerational tensions are not just a psychological or sociological fact of the religious life, but a condition of its vital transformation for the service to the Kingdom. This article suggests that the key issue in intergenerational dynamics is the *cura personalis* (care for the person), beginning with religious superiors. It also offers basic guidelines for such care and for intergenerational dialogue: learning, empathizing, trusting, consoling, collaborating, planning, and celebrating. Thus, these attitudes become factors that may negatively affect mental health outcomes (Thomas, 2021).

According to Pope Francis (2024), in his homilies during the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord, he reflects on the relationship between the elderly and the young in consecrated life, saying: "*It is good for the elderly to communicate their wisdom to the young, to share this wealth of experience and understanding, and to carry it forward, not to keep it in a museum, but to put it into practice in facing the challenges of life, for the benefit of all religious families in the Church.*" This highlights that, in today's world, religious communities are deeply affected by rapid cultural change, which often creates tension between generations within consecrated life.

Monaco (2024) explored generational tensions among Catholic sisters in Kenya, Uganda, and Zambia, emphasizing differences in leadership expectations, spiritual expression, and vocational dedication. During an interview on April 8, 2024, with the executive director of CASAK, mentioned that religious women in Kenya face two major issues: the growth of new members, which strains their community resources, and the aging of current.

In the context of Rwanda, studies on intergenerational issues have mainly focused on rapid technology development, on trauma transmission, and parenting after the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi (Munyandamutsa et al., 2019).members without plans to support them in old age.

Statement of the Problem

Following the 1994 Genocide against Tutsi, many religious congregations and monasteries in Rwanda faced significant disruptions, including a sharp decline in vocations. For years, some communities did not accept new members due to the internal consequences of the conflict. This created a visible gap between older nuns, who lived through the genocide, and younger members who joined after Rwanda's period of rapid technological and social change.

This historical and generational division has created a significant Intergenerational difference within monastic communities. Older nuns often uphold traditional religious practices, cultural values, and structured communal life shaped by their past experiences, while younger nuns may approach religious life with perspectives influenced by modern education, digital exposure, and changing societal norms. These differences have led to varying understandings of religious identity, Christian values, authority, and human relationships within the same communities.

As a result, tension, miscommunication, and mutual misunderstanding frequently arise, potentially impacting the psychological well-being of both older and younger nuns. While monasteries are intended to be spaces of peace, unity, and spiritual growth, unresolved generational conflicts may instead foster emotional isolation, reduce communal cohesion, and psychological stress.

Despite these realities, there is a distinct lack of empirical research exploring how these specific intergenerational dynamics affect the mental and emotional health of Catholic nuns in Rwanda.

Objective of the Study

The main objective of this study is to assess the prevalence of Intergenerational differences of the catholic nuns in selected monasteries in Rwanda.

METHODOLOGY

The current study used a mixed-methods research approach adopting the convergent parallel design. This design involves collecting qualitative and quantitative data simultaneously, analysing each separately, and then integrating, comparing, and interpreting the results to draw holistic conclusion (Egunjobi, 2024). A census method was used for the quantitative component, involving all members of the target population, while a purposive sampling approach was applied for the qualitative component to select key administrative leaders' in-depth interviews. This research was conducted in four selected monasteries in Rwanda: The Benedictines, Carmelites, Trappistines, and Visitandines. Out of the targeted population of 112 members, 97 participants responded fully to the quantitative questionnaires a response rate of 86,6%): 16,5% novices, 34% temporal professed, 49,5% final professed. Additionally, four major superiors from the selected monasteries were selected for qualitative semi- interviews. Quantitative data was collected using Standardized *Uskudar XYZ* Generational Differences Scale (Tarhan, 2022) which assess divergences across critical dimensions: belongingness, trust, individualism, self-esteem, social media use, emotion control, and desire control.

Presentation and Discussion of Findings

The main objective of this study was to evaluate the prevalence of intergenerational differences among nuns within selected monasteries in Rwanda. As religious communities increasingly become places of diverse age cohorts, understanding the psychological and social shifts between generations is essential for maintaining communal harmony and spiritual vitality. Through the use of the *Uskudar XYZ* Generational Differences Scale to measure divergence across six critical dimensions (belongingness, trust, individualism, self-esteem, social media influence, and the control of emotions and desires). Those sub-dimensions descriptive statistics are presented below.

Belongingness

Table 1 Questionnaire Responses on Belongingness

Statements	NS		LS		MS		VS		CS	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
1. My apostolate or education is the most important part of my life	28	28.9	18	18.6	33	34.4	13	13.4	5	5.2
2. I work hard for the success of the institution or group I am in, even if the financial value is not sufficient.	3	3.1	3	3.1	3	3.1	28	28.9	60	61.9

Table 1 presents the participants' responses regarding their sense of belonging, specifically focusing on the priority of their work/education and their commitment to their respective institutions.

The most remarkable finding reveal a high level of collective commitment to institutional success. A combined 90.8% of respondents indicated that they work hard for the success of their group or institution even when financial compensation is insufficient (Item 2), with 61.9% identifying this as "Completely Suitable." This indicates that for the vast majority of participants, professional or communal mission takes precedence over personal financial gain.

Conversely responses regarding whether personal of "apostolate or education" (Item 1) revealed a more diverse range of perspectives. While 34.4% of respondents viewed it as moderately important ("Medium Suitable"), nearly half of the participants (47.5%) leaned toward the lower end of the scale ("Not Suitable" or "Less Suitable"). This demonstrates that while the respondents are highly committed to the *success* of their institutions, they maintain healthy boundaries between their professional work from their internal spiritual life.

Trust

Table 2 Questionnaire Responses on Trust

Statements	NS		LS		MS		VS		CS	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
3. I feel like doing the opposite of what the superior one told me.	61	62.9	21	21.6	6	6.2	6	6.2	3	3.1
4. It is very important to me that the superior is fair and reassuring	4	4.1	1	1.0	3	3.1	15	15.5	74	76.3
5. I care about the rights and needs of others in human relations.	1	1.0	1	1.0	9	9.3	30	30.9	56	57.7

Table 2 explores the respondents' attitudes toward supervision and their ethical orientation in human relationships. The data reveals a strong inclination toward organizational harmony and social responsibility.

The findings shows a high baseline level of cooperation with leadership, as a cumulative 84.5% of respondents indicated that they do not feel the urge to act in opposition to their superiors (Item 3). This cooperative spirit is heavily dependent on the perceived the quality of managements; a significant majority (91.8%) emphasized that it is "Very" or "Completely" important for a superior to be fair and reassuring (Item 4). These results imply that

while the participants are naturally cooperation, their obedience high relationship is linked to the emotional support and justice provided by leadership.

In terms of interpersonal values, the participants demonstrated a profound concern for the welfare of others (Item 5). Nearly 89% of respondents affirmed that they care about the rights and needs of others in their human relations, with 57.7% identifying this as "Completely Suitable." Only a negligible 2% of the sample expressed a lack of concern for these social dimensions, suggesting that altruism is a core value among the group.

Individualism

Table 3 Table 3 evaluates the levels of individualism, self-interest, and response to adversity within cohort.

Questionnaire Responses on Individualism

Statements	NS		LS		MS		VS		CS	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
6. For me, the priority is my own needs; others come later	34	35.1	24	24.7	21	21.6	13	13.4	5	5.2
7. I'm happy with what I get without effort.	60	61.9	22	22.7	8	8.2	4	4.1	3	3.1
8. When I'm faced with adversity, I don't tire myself out.	55	56.7	24	24.7	11	11.3	5	5.2	2	2.1

The results generally indicate a community-oriented mindset and a strong personal work ethic across the sample.

The data clearly shows that the majority of respondents reject individualistic behavioural pattern. Nearly 60% explicitly stated that prioritizing their own needs over others was either "Not Suitable or Less Suitable" for them. While 21.6% maintained a neutral stance ("Medium Suitable"), only a small minority (18.6%) identified with a self-centred priority framework.

There is a very clear consensus regarding the value of effort and perseverance. Moreover, an overwhelming 84.6% of respondents rejected the idea of being satisfied with rewards gained without effort (Item 7). This resilient work ethic is further supported by the respondents' attitudes toward challenges; 81.4% of the participants indicated that they do not give up easily when facing difficult situations (Item 8). Instead of "not tiring themselves out," the vast majority demonstrate a willingness to exert personal effort in time of crisis.

Self-Esteem

Table 4 Questionnaire Responses on Self Esteem

Statements	NS		LS		MS		VS		CS	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
9. I have complete confidence in myself in every environment, and I do not shy away from anyone.	15	15.5	12	12.4	31	32.0	24	24.7	15	15.5
10. Even if I disagree with where the elders are, I can say my opinion differently in an appropriate style	2	2.1	4	4.1	19	19.6	34	35.1	38	39.2

Table 4 presents the data assessing the participants' levels of self-assurance and their capacity to express dissenting opinions within a social or hierarchical structure. The findings regarding self-confidence (Item 9) reveal a balance and distributed. While a cumulative 40.2% of participants expressed high level of environmental

self- confidence ("Very" or "Completely" Suitable), nearly one-third (32%) maintained a strictly neutral or "Medium" level of confidence. This indicates that for a significant portion of the group, self-assurance is likely dependent on the specific environment or social context.

In contrast, there is a powerful, clear consensus regarding assertive communication (Item 10). A vast majority (74.3%) of respondents indicated that they feel completely capable of expressing a dissenting opinion to elders, provided it is done in an appropriate style. Only a negligible (6.2%) felt unable to voice disagreement. These results presents that the respondents value a careful balance between personal integrity and traditional monastic respect.

Social media

Table 5 Questionnaire Responses on Social Media

Statements	NS F	%	LS F	%	MS F	%	VS F	%	CS F	%
11. I express myself more freely on social media.	41	42.3	32	33.0	10	10.3	10	10.3	4	4.1
12. After my family, I trust my friends the most.	62	63.9	22	22.7	8	8.2	3	3.1	2	2.1
13. I don't think communication tools like TV, social media are at the centre of my life.	57	58.8	18	18.6	10	10.3	4	4.1	8	8.2
14. When I'm away from my smartphone, I feel incomplete, uneasy.	68	70.1	16	16.5	6	6.2	6	6.2	1	1.0
15. I always check my social media accounts before I go to sleep and immediately after I wake up	76	78.4	16	16.5	1	1.0	2	2.1	2	2.1
16. I don't disconnect from social media while I'm reading and working.	68	70.1	16	16.5	5	5.2	1	1.0	7	7.2
17. I prefer to watch series and movies on TV, rather than their classic mediums.	58	59.8	13	13.4	8	8.2	12	12.4	6	6.2
18. I think I should get help using technological devices.	46	47.4	22	22.7	16	16.5	10	10.3	3	3.1

Table 5 illustrates the participants' relationship with digital technology and social media networks.

Overall, the data suggests a high level of digital independence and a preference for traditional social structures. Interestingly, the findings contradict common assumptions regarding social media addiction. A vast majority of respondents (78.4%) explicitly rejected compulsive behavioural like checking digital accounts directly before sleep or immediately upon waking (Item 15). Furthermore, over 70% of participants reported that they do not experience anxiety or feel "incomplete" when physically separated from smartphones (item 14), and can maintain a clear focus while working or reading.

Regarding interpersonal trust, the data shows a strong leaning toward traditional family units; 63.9% of respondents felt it was "not suitable" to suggest they trust friends more than family. Additionally, despite the global trend of online anonymity, less than 15% of this group felt that social media allowed them to express themselves more freely than in person.

Finally, the respondents demonstrated notable confidence in digital literacy with only (13.4%) reporting a need for assistance when using technological devices, with nearly half (47.4%) stating they required no help at all.

Emotional control

Table 6 Questionnaire Responses on Emotional Control

Statements	NS		LS		MS		VS		CS	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
19. If it lowers my mood, I'd rather avoid the truth.	36	37.1	35	36.1	16	16.5	6	6.2	4	4.1
20. Most of the time, I can't control my fears	46	47.4	26	26.8	15	15.5	8	8.2	2	2.1
21. I can't control my anger most of the time.	19	19.6	39	40.2	19	19.6	18	18.6	2	2.1
22. I don't like it when I'm criticized	4	4.1	29	29.9	23	23.7	30	30.9	11	11.3
23. I can't stand it when I'm asked stupid questions.	6	6.2	18	18.6	31	32.0	21	21.6	21	21.6
24. I can't rest until I convince the other person that I'm right	27	27.8	24	24.7	29	29.9	13	13.4	4	4.1
25. My mood changes when I don't have something I want	19	19.6	33	34.0	29	29.9	14	14.4	2	2.1

Table 6 explores parameters of emotional regulation and interpersonal defensiveness within the monasteries. A combined 73.2% of participants rejected the idea of avoiding the truth to protect their emotional comfort (item 19). The data shows high level of emotional resilience and psychological commitment to transparency. Active self-possession was strongly evident as 74,2% reported high internal control over personal fears (item 20) and 59,8% confirmed their ability to regarding criticism(item 22) the plurality (30.9%) indicated a distinct dislike of being criticized was 'very suitable' for them. Furthermore, a combine 43,2% indicated low tolerance for being asked perceived “stupid questions”(23),indicating subtle areas of relational stress.

Desire control

Table 7 Questionnaire Responses on Desire Control

Statements	NS		LS		MS		VS		CS	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
26. I'm usually positive; I don't despair.	5	5.2	15	15.5	22	22.7	37	38.1	18	18.6
27. I can control my sexual desires.	2	2.1	4	4.1	11	11.3	41	42.3	39	40.2
28. I think I'm humble	4	4.1	17	17.5	51	52.6	21	21.6	4	4.1
29. When I'm shopping, I stop and think, and then I decide.	8	8.2	8	8.2	15	15.5	38	39.2	28	28.9
30. I can think solution-oriented, not problem-oriented, by facing problems.	3	3.1	8	8.2	14	14.4	46	47.4	26	26.8
31. You could say I usually live on a plan	0	0.0	5	5.2	29	29.9	45	46.4	18	18.6
32. I can adjust my sleep patterns most of the time	12	12.4	11	11.3	29	29.9	30	30.9	15	15.5
33. I can be happy with little things.	5	5.2	6	6.2	16	16.5	42	43.3	28	28.9
34. When I don't get what I want at that moment, I get depressed.	17	17.5	32	33.0	24	24.7	14	14.4	10	10.3
35. It's a grind to be patient with people who think differently.	8	8.2	27	27.8	28	28.9	24	24.7	10	10.3

Table 7 evaluates the respondents' capacity for emotional regulation, disciplined living, and impulse control. The data generally suggests a high degree of self-discipline and a proactive approach to life's challenges.

The participants demonstrated significant emotional stability and self-possession. For instance, a combined 56.7% of respondents reported a consistently positive outlook (Item 26), while an overwhelming 82.5% indicated high levels of perceived control over personal desires (Item 27). This sense of internal mastery is further reflected in their problem-solving approach; 74.2% of the sample identified as being solution-oriented rather than problem-oriented when facing difficulties (Item 30).

Regarding daily routines, the findings indicate a preference for structured living. A majority of respondents (65%) reported that they live according to a plan (Item 31), and 72.2% indicated an ability to find contentment in "little things" (Item 33). Interestingly, while most participants feel capable of adjusting their sleep patterns (Item 32), this area showed more variability than other forms of self-regulation, with nearly a quarter (23.7%) expressing difficulty in this regard.

The data suggests that the respondents are generally deliberate rather than impulsive. Approximately 68.1% of participants reported that they pause to think before making purchasing decisions (Item 29). Furthermore, the group appears resilient against immediate gratification; 50.5% rejected the idea that they become depressed when they do not immediately get what they want (Item 34). However, interpersonal patience remains an area of moderate challenge; nearly 35% of respondents admitted that being patient with those who think differently can be a "grind" (Item 35), representing one of the more diverse response spreads in this category.

Overall descriptive of the Mean and Standard deviation of the Intergenerational difference and Psychological well-being of the nuns.

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Uskudar XYZ Generational Differences Scale	2.8880	.34413	97
Psychological Well-Being Scale	5.0584	.49932	97

Table 8 provides the aggregate mean scores and standard deviations for the two primary variables of the study: Intergenerational Differences and Psychological Well-Being. These scores offer a bird's-eye view of the collective experience of the 97 participants.

The overall mean score for the Intergenerational Differences Scale was 2.88 (SD=0.34). Given that the scale typically ranges from 1 to 5 (where 3 is the midpoint), a mean of 2.88 suggests that the respondents perceive a "moderate" level of generational difference. The relatively low standard deviation indicates that there is a high level of consensus among the nuns; most participants share a similar perception that while generational gaps exist, they are not perceived as extreme or overwhelming within the community.

Behavioral manifestations of the Intergenerational divide

Response showed a significant difference between the behavior of the senior nuns and the young ones. This is due to modern lifestyle in modernization, technology, differences in age, self-acclaimed rights and respect and values, attached to individual life of the nuns.

According to participant 1, the older nuns are not much culturally respected as in the past. In addition, it seems that the young ones do not see respect as a value because of self-acclaimed rights.

"Today, there are many differences. For example, in the past, we saw that an elderly person received the respect they deserved, as we were raised in the family. Today, that culture really seems to be disappearing; a concept called 'rights' appears and removes many values"(Interview, 16th December, 2025)

In the words of participant 2, differences are manifested in age, socio-cultural wants, self-control and how respect is viewed among the young and the old nuns.

“Yes, there is an age difference. There are the older ones; the one who is older has tried, she is the mature person who wavers, you can see that she has self-control. When she doesn’t understand certain things, especially those of the younger ones, she react quickly by telling you that not understanding doesn’t mean it’s bad, but just that it’s not yet her age”.(Interview, 16th January, 2026).

Participant 3 explained that respect is different, due to age difference among the nuns. Also, the young ones see ‘Rights’ as important and parental upbringing equally contributed to the difference in their behaviour.

“We talk about it a lot, and it also saddens us, because adults are often critical of young people, saying for example, that today's youth are like this... For instance, adults say that songs in the past had melody and lessons, but today it's just noise. Regarding politeness, we used to respect adults; it was customary to let adults pass, and we see that many things have been lost. Today, this stems from what is called "human rights." We see that novice young people respect adults, whether out of honour or reverence or to ask for favours; this, nobody can know. But it also depends on the child, some have been well brought up by their parents, others because of their past, we cannot judge them, because what they do, we see that it is self-defence”. (Interview, , 20th January, 2026)

Participant 4 offered a contrasting, highly structured environmental perspective. She noted that strict cloistered spaces and intentional silence naturally insulate certain communities from these overt behavioral conflicts, attributing differences to individual histories rather than generational associates:

“I don’t see that here, especially since our time for talking or being together aside from prayer and meal times is very limited, and in those moments we remain silent. Anyone who chooses to come here possesses a sufficient degree of discipline to avoid such "noise," and if someone falters, we remind them. I wouldn't say that the small issues that arise are caused by age gaps; rather, they stem from human nature, which is never without minor problems. Usually, it is a person’s past experiences and personal history that have the strongest influence”. (Interview, 15th February, 2026)

Prevalence of Intergenerational Differences

The study revealed a moderate level of intergenerational difference, defined by a unique blend of high individualism (M=5.0) and strong communal trust (M=4.0). Unlike the "membership crisis" and demographic decline observed in European monasteries (Laurier et al., 2024), the Rwandan context reflects the growth trends noted by the National Catholic Register (2024). This growth introduces an "educational divide" where younger sisters prioritize academic and digital advancement, potentially clashing with the traditional "institutional transparency" valued by elders (Dalibor, 2020). Furthermore, while modernization, specifically mobile phone usage, is perceived as a threat to communal cohesion (Pir Wahab, 2022), the high trust scores suggest that the monastery serves as a site of solidarity. By sharing testimonies of past hardships, elder sisters provide a "psychological anchor" that mitigates the "emotional distance" typically associated with Rwanda's post-genocide landscape Uwineza (2023).

The Coping Strategies in directing the Monasteries

The Superiors primarily rely on prayer and divine trust to navigate communal challenges. These spiritual practices are supported by open communication and intentional solitude, particularly when addressing misunderstandings, administrative decisions, and the distractions of modernization, specifically the increased use of mobile phones.

Participant 1 reinforced this, noting that challenges are best resolved by centering God in all activities. She further emphasized that intergenerational harmony is maintained through a culture of friendliness, mutual sharing, and personal self-care.

“If conflicts exist, it is rather because the characters are different, and the perception of things differs. The way to resolve them is to return to the source of life. For example, the founder of the community invites us to have love for one another. When you feel that these conflicts are present, you begin to look for how to speak to each individually, then you see how to bring them all together because they must live all their lives together. The person in charge is close because they live together day after day, and he constantly helps them by reminding them of what brought them here, always reminding them that the community is made up of the beauty of diversity, which should not be a problem, but a solution”.(Interview, 16th December, 2025).

Participant 2 opined that, the best tragedy is prayer. Another possible way for her is to share the problem through counsels, as well as through contemplation and silence.

“When there are unusual problems, very delinquent ones that I cannot share with the community, in that moment, it is exhausting. Often, I pray and God helps me resolve them; after praying, I always find guidance, and I share it with groups of counsels”.(Interview, 16th January, 2026).

Also, participant 3 explained that prayer, psychological counsel, faith, solitude and organizing recreational activities are the measures taken as coping strategies among the nuns.

“For me, it depends on the problem at hand. For example, there are times when I have a council meeting as a guide and I give a presentation on something, but for me, it seems clear and yet it is rejected. Instead of manipulating the sisters, I go into solitude, I take the time to pray about it, because I have found that manipulating the fellow sisters brings nothing to the community, and entering into solitude helps me reflect on the reasons why it was rejected. Another time is when a sister talks to me about the difficulties she is going through, like a trial with a sister, and I feel that she is confiding a secret to me, which may be known later. Then, I ask myself: what should I do now, whom should I ask for advice, let it go, let her down. Even if it is a personal trial, there may be a problem in the family, and given that I am perceived as the centre of the family, it weighs on me. Even if I tell you, I say it lightly, not directly as it really is, so as not to dramatize, and I think that I am here dying feeling that I do not know how to manage myself, so I entrust it to God”. (Interview, 20th January, 2026)

According to Participant 4 coping strategies include mainly prayers and putting God in the picture.

“When the workload becomes heavy, or when there are ordinary or specific problems within the house for instance, you can see we have very elderly members, and their health often worries me. In all of this, I surrender it to Jesus, because the service I am performing is not mine, but His”.(Interview, 15th February, 2026)

The Superiors discussed how psycho-spiritual therapy and updated regulations could enhance intergenerational relationships. They concluded that these efforts should prioritize prayer, communal togetherness, and self-care, while also addressing the practical realities of modern technology.

Participant 1 shared that realities of life, like “papal fences” and friendly moves, in conjunction with prayers, may really make things better.

“I do not have the power to change the rules of the community, but I will give you an example. Last year, there was a general assembly that brought together the leaders of the community from around the world, asking themselves: what can we do to keep our life meaningful? They observed certain things, for example, clothing is now different depending on the country, but everyone comes together around the cross. The fences have also been adapted according to the cultures of the places visited. They say, for example, that Rwandans have a friendliness which is manifested through the warmth they share in hugs. They continue by saying: do you find that the papal fence brings you joy in pursuing it? They really see that it is part of their identity. It is a hidden life in God that we have chosen in accordance with the founder's wish for the community”.(Interview, 16th December, 2025).

Participant 2 emphasized the inclusion of modern technology and other things that can constructively engage the nuns into the system.

“For me, adding something would be a wish, but I am studying something related to technology. However, maybe someone could add that this technology should be used by experienced people, because people are overwhelmed. And when people are overwhelmed, nothing is understandable. You see a nun busy managing three families on a platform like Tel, for example. The notion of renunciation becomes a major problem in monastic life”. (Interview, 16th January, 2026).

Participant 3 gave the opinion that, though the constitution was made based on experience, life itself is based on realities, therefore, besides the spiritual inclusion, and realities of life should as well be considered.

“Now, we do this by harmonizing the Constitution, the schedule, and reality; they do not align for everything to work well. There is always a clash, but you ask yourself: what should we do? Change the document or change our life? Because the document was developed from long experience. Life itself draws us starting from reality. For example, right now we are doing an interview with you, and I say that the time has come, let's stop this, I am going to pray, and you say that this is not reality. Yesterday, there was a sister who spent her day following someone who came to repair a generator, I knew where she was, which meant she did not come to a community activity, but her presence was very necessary for this task to be done well. It is said that once upon a time the sisters had time to compose songs, now we people are overwhelmed, the services are numerous, society demands a lot from us, and another source of disorder is self-care or self-financing, working within the system. Once we took care of ourselves at home, now nothing can be done without going through the system in order to be treated with health insurance, there are many things connected to social reality. This social reality shakes us in such a way that it is difficult to remain in a contemplative way of life”.(Interview, 20th January, 2026).

Participant 4 stressed the importance of knowing the new nuns aspirants as well as of providing psychological well-being activities in order to assist the nuns develop spiritually and physically.

“Something I believe should be focused on today and in the future is getting to know a new person who wishes to live with you in a sufficiently deep way. You need to know the history they have lived through, their family background, their personal life, and how they relate to others. It is very necessary because it would help people know themselves and grow internally, accepting themselves where needed and accepting one another; that is how God finds a place to dwell within us. However, training is scarce, and currently, we don't have anyone with specialized formation in that field. It's clear that due to the history we've lived through and the changing times, psychological support is especially needed”. (Interview, 15th February, 2026).

This study presents, interprets, and discusses findings of a study among 97 Catholic nuns from four Rwandan monasteries, highlighting a predominantly young community where over half the participants are under 35 years old. The demographic profile reveals a balanced spiritual structure, with nearly half of the nuns being finally professed, providing a stable "spiritual anchor" for the 50.5% currently in formation. Furthermore, the cohort is intellectually diverse and highly literate, as over 84% have completed at least secondary education, with a significant 30.9% holding university degrees.

The research established a statistically significant relationship between intergenerational differences and psychological well-being, though this factor only contributes approximately 6.45% to the overall well-being. While the nuns maintain high communal cohesion and strong discipline in areas like "Desire Control" and "Trust," there is a notable internal struggle with "Self-Acceptance," with 90.7% of them expressing some dissatisfaction with parts of their personality. Despite these internal critiques, the majority remain pleased with their overall life story and trajectory within the religious vocation.

To navigate challenges such as modernization, technological distractions, and intergenerational shifts, the nuns primarily rely on spiritual and communal coping strategies. Superiors emphasized prayer, putting one's life in the hands of God, and seeking solitude as the most vital tools for resolving conflicts and maintaining focus. Additionally, the community fosters well-being through "communal togetherness," sharing difficulties through counselling, and engaging in healthy social and spiritual activities.

Limitation of study

This study is subject to several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the scope is restricted to only four monasteries, expanding this sample to a larger number of institutions would provide more comprehensive coverage and a broader range of perspectives. In addition, as the research was conducted exclusively within Rwanda, the findings may not be adequate for broader generalization, given the specific cultural, environmental, and political particularities of the region. Finally, the study focuses solely on women religious, meaning the results may not be perfectly representative of the entire Catholic entity or the experiences of other groups within the Church.

Recommendation and suggestion for further research

Improved internal community dynamics with a deeper understanding of the hidden tensions possibly existing in the monasteries. Findings are beneficial to monastic superiors and formation leaders in order to adopt leadership strategies that foster inclusivity, empathy, and mutual respect between older and younger members. Religious (nuns) members are empowered to grow in self-awareness and mutual understanding while fostering a culture of openness and healing. Psychological and mental health professionals get a deeper insight into the psychological challenges experienced by nuns. For the future researchers should explore the Digital interconnectivity generation and the integrity of the Monastic Cloister among Catholic Nuns and Monks in the Monasteries in Rwanda, the Impact of virtual communication platforms on the Monastic Charism of the Catholic Nuns and Monks in Rwanda, and The Digital generations' influence on the Traditional Practice of Sacred Silence among the Catholic Nuns in the monasteries in Rwanda.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, intergenerational differences among the nuns are primarily driven by variations in age, background, status, and attitudes toward modernization and digital exposure. Despite these differences in dynamics between the generations, the overall perception of this generational gap remains moderate, averaging 2.88 on 5 point scale. This indicates that while differences in viewpoint exist, they are not viewed as extreme or irresistible, largely because the communities maintain a strong foundation of mutual trust and shared institutional commitment over personal gain. However, the younger nuns display a greater preference for autonomy and digital innovation which can lead to a desire to bypass formal instructions. Ultimately, the study concludes that these findings are highly beneficial for monastic superiors and formation leaders. It provides them with the insights needed to adopt inclusive, empathetic leadership strategies that foster mutual respect, bridge the gap between traditional monastic practices and modern realities, and support the psychological well-being of both older and younger sisters.

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