

# Coping Strategies to Burnout in Christian Ministry among Catholic Religious Men and Women Working In Rural Areas: A Case of Lodwar Diocese in Turkana County, Kenya

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**Abstract:** Coping with burnout in Christian ministry is critical for mental well-being of Church ministers. Based on the global concern of burnout in Christian ministry among Church ministers, the study aimed to explore the coping strategies used to prevent burnout in Christian Ministry among the Catholic religious men and women working in Lodwar Diocese. The study adopted phenomenological design. Using convenience sampling, a sample size of 16 Catholic religious men and women were included in the study. The qualitative data was collected using Focus Group Discussion Guide. The data was analyzed using thematic analysis. Some of the findings on coping strategies to burnout in Christian ministry among Catholic religious' men and women were: Role modelling through culture of reading, taking a break from ministry among others. The study recommends the future studies to conduct a similar study with Protestant clergy and other helping professionals working in Kenyan rural areas which were not part of this study.

using humour (Sandina, Jennifer & Theodore, 2019). Physical exercise, leisure activities, contact with nature, self-expression, food, drinks, and social support provide self-care practice (Rahbel et al., 2020; Michelle et al., 2015). Other strategies to prevent burnout include goal setting, time and task management, and self-reflection through journaling (Nicole & Natalie, 2018).

Researchers have also shown that participating in groups plays a significant role in reducing burnout among the Church ministers. For example, a study in United States found that Church ministers can minimize the degree of burnout by making time to meet others, regularly engage in communities, and publicly express their inner feelings to individuals who care (Staley, McMinn, Gathercoal, & Free, 2013). More studies have shown that there are many benefits experienced by Church ministers who engage in support groups. For instance, several studies that were carried with clergy in dioceses of Bristol and England revealed that clergy who participate in reflexive groups experience less feelings of isolation (Travis, 2008; Gubi, 2016a; Gubi, 2016b). However a study that was carried out with Presbyterian ministers in the United States revealed that support strategies did have any effect in reducing emotional exhaustion in ministry (Francis, Robbins, & Wulff, 2013).

Holistic care has been found to be paramount in helping Church ministers in dealing with burnout. For instance, McGarrigle and Walsh (2011) suggests that self care helps them to live a balanced life in areas of personal, professional, emotional, physical and spiritual. Self care on areas mentioned can help the helping professionals to cope better with stress caused by the nature of their ministry. Spiritual resources strengthen the helping professionals to overcome the stressors that emerge as a result of their work (Dombo & Gray, 2013). Some of the spiritual resources that aid helping professionals to cope with burnout include prayer, meditation and attendance of spiritual and religious activities (Bloomquist et al., 2015).

Many researchers seem to be in agreement that prayer is key in helping Church ministers in dealing with burnout. For instance, Frederick et al. (2018) found that spiritual practices

## I. INTRODUCTION

Coping with burnout in Christian ministry is critical for mental well-being of Church ministers. Globally, researchers have come up with strategies of coping with burnout among the helping professionals including the Church ministers. Studies have identified coping strategies to burnout among the Church ministers. For instance, a study by Staley et al. (2013) reveals that the action learning intervention plays a great role in reducing isolation among the clergy. A research with the Truro diocesan clergy also found that support for action learning is a resource for personal and professional support (Muskett & Village, 2016). A study with counsellors in the United States showed that group supervision intervention increased knowledge about burnout symptoms and healthy coping mechanisms among the participants (Natalya et al., 2015). Moreover, Jean (2017) study among veterinaries in Canada found supportive environment to be significant in reducing levels of burnout. Likewise, a study with mental health providers in United States found that where managers promote support collaboration and team work are also helpful in reducing employees' burnout (Johanne et al., 2018). Others forms of support include social support (Lorenzo, Sebastian, Franco & Rolf, 2015), including having a supportive supervisor, supportive work-life policies, teaching one to compartmentalize, setting boundaries, and

such as prayer, taking rest and community support systems plays a big role in reducing burnout among the Church ministers. Prayer plays a role in connecting Church ministers to Christ. Furthermore, prayer helps them identify role salience and role satisfaction which helps in coping with burnout. In addition, researchers have revealed that Jesus prayer is beneficial in enhancing moods, promoting emotional well-being and reducing the levels of burnout among the Church ministers (Rubinart et al., 2017; Knabb & Vasquez, 2018). The helping professionals can reduce the level of burnout by connecting with the ultimate being or something greater than themselves (Gilham, 2014). Moreover, they can connect with the higher being by engaging in prayer and reading the sacred scriptures (Dudley, 2016). Surrender or letting go through prayer, meditation and mindfulness has been found to increase the level of connection with the higher power and reduce the level of stress and burnout among the helping professionals (Colzato & Kibebe, 2017). These studies have revealed that when professional performers connect with higher power and surrender, they greatly improve on their performance and experience joy in their work (Colzato & Kibebe, 2017; Dudley, 2016; Gilham, 2014).

Numerous studies have capitalized on meditation as a crucial form of prayer in helping Church ministers deal with stress and burnout. These studies argue that helping professionals who engage in meditation do not only prepare for deep listening to the people they work with but also are able to acknowledge their uncertainties in handling client issues (Chodron, 2012; Kristeller & Johnson, 2005). Meditation helps the professionals learn how to focus and be present here and now, and avoid being distracted (Sadye, 2014). Using meditation, helping professionals learn how to surrender and let go of the worries and stress caused by the nature of their work (Weiss, 2004). Attending spiritual retreats have found to provide numerous benefits to participants including social, spiritual and cognitive benefits (Chelsea, Jan & Roy, 2018).

Many studies globally have been conducted on effectiveness of various forms of meditation and all of them have found to reduce burnout and promote the well-being among helping professionals. In their study, Donna and Sara (2020) found that mindfulness based interventions reduced the levels of burnout among nurses in Pennsylvania. Dispositional mindfulness among forensic health care professionals in Wales shows that higher mindfulness skills reduce significantly the levels of stress, maladaptive coping and burnout. Self-awareness gained in mindfulness is found to reduce levels of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization (Sarah, Katie & Robin, 2019). An intervention research on the efficacy of the meditation app in reducing burnout and building resilience found that compared to chaplains who use the leisure app, the chaplains who used the meditation app had lower levels of emotional fatigue and depersonalization. In addition, the chaplain also reported higher levels of personal achievement and endurance in the treatment community (Samta, 2019).

Additional studies on effectiveness of meditation have been conducted in Turkey, Holland and China among students, teachers and social workers. A study in Turkey among senior students showed that there was a significant relationship between mindfulness and burnout levels among students (Elvan & Ayhan, 2019). A similar study showed a significant difference between pre-and-posttest measures of religiously oriented mindfulness and personal burnout. Moreover, findings showed that religiously oriented mindfulness is effective in enhancing heart rate variability and reducing the levels of personal burnout among the social workers (Regina, Gawnhi & Ian, 2020). Likewise, a study with pre-service teachers in China showed that there was increase of mindfulness and well-being after going through the mindfulness based programme. Also in the same study, mindfulness was found to reduce the levels of stress, anxiety and burnout. The authors suggested that mindfulness can be utilized in teaching education as an intervention of prevention occurrence of burnout among the teaching professionals (Ming-tak & Ngar-sze, 2015). Furthermore, findings on effectiveness of compassion meditation training with chaplains in United States showed that, those who were assigned to treatment group had significant decrease in burnout compared to those were in control group (Marcia et al., 2020).

Apart from meditation interventions, studies have also focused on other interventions to reduce burnout among the helping professionals. For instance, internet based intervention was found to reduce the levels of burnout, anxiety and depression (Benjamin, Fabian & Peter, 2017). Moreover, self-help book using acceptance and commitment therapy was found to lower stress, burnout and to promote psychological flexibility among the treatment group compared to the controlled group. The study suggested that self-help book without a therapist can help in managing stress and burnout in various helping professions (Patrizia et al., 2018). In addition, leisure time physical activity intervention and art therapy among students and doctors was found increase control. In their research, Ángel, Javier, José, Eduardo and Luis (2019) found that teachers in the treatment group had a great deal of change in areas of vigor, absorption and satisfaction relative to teachers in the control group. The study revealed that leisure-time physical activities intervention can enhance the well-being of teachers in relation work related outcomes. On the other hand, art therapy among the doctors who were working palliative care in London found that there was a significant improvement after the course on emotional exhaustion and personal achievement. The results showed that a six weeks structured art therapy can reduce burnout among the doctors working in oncology and palliative care (Megan & Gehan, 2019). There are limited studies in Africa and particularly in Kenyan rural areas on coping strategies of burnout among the Church ministers and therefore, the study aimed at exploring the coping strategies used by Catholic religious men and women working in Lodwar Diocese.

## II. METHOD

### *Research Design*

The study employed phenomenological research design. Miller and Salkind (2002) describe phenomenology research as a method that seeks to describe the meaning of the lived experiences surrounding those who have experienced a phenomenon. Phenomenological researchers view the person and his or her world as inextricably linked and thus they refrain from focusing on the world or individual as distinct entities and explore the essence of the meaning of their interactions (Creswell, 1998; Gay & Airasian, 2000; Merchant, 1997). The design was suitable for this study because it sought understand the lived experiences of coping with burnout in Christian ministry among the Catholic religious men and women working in rural areas.

### *Study Area*

This study was conducted in Lodwar diocese Kenya. It is in North-Western part of Kenya, West of Lake Turkana. In 1968 the Diocese was established as prefecture of Lodwar from the Diocese of Eldoret. In the year 1978, it was promoted to become Diocese of Lodwar. It has 30 parishes served by Catholic Diocesan Priests, Religious Priests, Religious Brothers and Sisters. It is a remote and arid area characterized by poverty and harsh living conditions. The inhabitants are faced with many problems of getting clean water, food, health, education and conflict among communities. There are community conflicts due to lack of clean water and pressure for herds. The Catholic religious men and women work towards alleviating poverty by promoting peace among the communities, providing clean water, food, education, health services and above all spiritual nourishment. Due to the harsh conditions, the Catholic religious men and women working in Lodwar diocese is likely to be predisposed to burnout hence the need to explore the coping strategies to preventing burnout in Christian ministry.

### *Study Population*

The target population was the Catholic religious men and women working in Lodwar Diocese. Catholic religious men and women are people called to live community life, a life of prayer, professing the three evangelical vows of chastity, obedience and evangelical poverty. They also carry out apostolate in conformity with their founders' various charisms. Their reason for being is based on Christ and his call. They chose to live celibacy out of their own choice and regard it as an essential part of their commitment to others and to God. They have made a conscious decision to live a life that does not include marriage. They take the vow of poverty, which entails committing oneself completely to the cause of God's dominion, even if it means abandoning one's family and foregoing the opportunity to marry and start a family. Finally, they take the vow of obedience, which entails a commitment to the essential Christian notion that all truth is community at the end of the day.

### *Sampling Procedure and Sample Size*

Through convenience sampling, 16 participants were selected to participate in the focus group discussions. There were two focus group discussions, one comprising 7 priests and the other 9 religious' sisters (See Table 1). Table 2 shows the gender and vocation identity of the Catholic religious men and women who participated in the Focus Group Discussion.

Table 1: Sample Size for Focus Group Discussions Using Convenience Sampling

Type of Population	Sample Size
Priests	7
Religious Sisters	9
Total	16

Field data, 2021

Table 2: Response Rate for the sample which participated in Focused Group Discussion

Respondents	Gender	Vocation Identity
1. R 001	M	Priest
2. R 002	F	Sister
3. R 003	M	Priest
4. R 004	M	Priest
5. R 005	F	Sister
6. R 006	F	Sister
7. R 007	F	Sister
8. R 008	M	Priest
9. R 009	F	Sister
10. R 010	F	Sister
11. R 011	F	Sister
12. R 012	F	Sister
13. R 013	M	Priest
14. R 014	M	Priest
15. R 015	M	Priest
16. R 016	F	Sister

Field data, 2021

### *Data Collection Methods and Instruments*

Focus Group Discussion Guide was used to collect data on coping strategies used by Catholic religious men and women to prevent burnout in Christian ministry. Some of the questions were: "How do religious manage stress in the place of apostolate?", "What measures does the Church leadership have in place to help their members to deal with burnout?", "What programs does the Church have in place to prevent burnout?", "What need to be done address burnout among Catholic religious men and women?"

### *Trustworthiness and Credibility of Qualitative Instrument*

According to Creswell, Vicki and Clark (2011) trustworthiness in qualitative research is ensured through

credibility, transferability, dependability and conformity. Willis (2007) outlines several strategies that can be utilized by the researchers to ensure the credibility of the findings. These include member checking, peer review and research journaling. After, transcribing the data, it was shared with some participants to check its similarity to the responses given. Also, the qualitative findings were shared with some participants to check whether it is in line with what they discussed. Trustworthiness of focus group discussion guide was subjected to a review by the experts in qualitative research before the actual day of collecting data. Trustworthiness was ensured during the analysis of data where two experts in qualitative data analysis analyzed the data together and come up with emerging themes.

#### *Data Collection Procedures*

The collection of data took place on the month of May 2021. Data was collected through online due to restrictions of travelling as result of Covid-19 pandemic. Focus Group Discussion was conducted through zoom meeting. There were two focused group discussions, one comprising 9 religious sisters and the other one comprising 7 religious priests. The researcher identified the participants for focus group discussion a week before the zoom meeting and shared the main questions that were to be discussed. The researcher shared with the participants the zoom meeting link a day before. The participants were requested to join five minutes to time in order to solve any technical problem that would occur. The researcher was on time to admit the participants. All the participants joined on time. The researcher with the assistant briefly explained the purpose of the group discussion. The participants were informed that the group focus discussion was to take one hour and fifteen minutes and that it was video recorded only for the academic purposes. The researcher asked the participants to give consent before collecting the data. All the participants were encouraged to participate freely. They were asked to speak at a time to ensure proper recording. The researcher facilitated the group discussion guided by the research questions. At the end the researcher asked every participant to add anything they would want on regard to the topic of discussion. Finally, the researcher closed the focus group discussion thanking the participants for accepting to participate in the study.

#### *Data Analysis*

The data collected from the focus discussion groups was analyzed using thematic analysis. "A method of detecting, interpreting, and reporting patterns (themes) within data is thematic analysis" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.79). This method extends beyond identifying and evaluating the study issue to interpreting various parts of it (Boyatzis, 1998). Thematic analysis is meticulously coding the data and then reporting on the patterns found in the data. The coding method was carried out by two researchers who compared notes at different stages to strengthen the trustworthiness of the findings.

#### *Step 1: Open Coding:*

The transcribed data from the focus discussion groups was meticulously read by the two researchers' together, highlighting words, phrases and sentences that had possible meaning in relation to the research questions. Each highlighted text-unit was assigned a theme by two researchers.

#### *Step 2: Axial Coding:*

In the second level of coding the two researchers compared their notes. They checked high level of similarities as throughout the entire text. They agreed on the common coding after discussion.

#### *Step 3: Thematic Identification:*

The researchers focused on salient themes that provided significant answers to the research questions. The result section reports the identified themes.

#### *Ethical Consideration*

Schurink (2005) refers to ethical problems as questions and dilemmas that emerge about the proper way to perform research, not to establish adverse situations for investigation participants more explicitly. The study ensured the following ethical considerations are adhered to: Informed consent; not putting the client at risk or harm and ensuring confidentiality. On regard to informed consent, the researcher created awareness to the participants about the nature of the research including their role in participating in the research. Having knowledge on the research, it helped the participants to make an informed consent to participate in the study or not. Apart from voluntary participation, they were also made aware that they could withdraw their data for analysis even if they had provided the information.

Furthermore, the researcher verified that the volunteers were not subjected to any bodily or psychological injury during the data gathering process. Before collecting data, the researcher got authorization from NACOSTI to guarantee that the participants' safety was not jeopardized. Finally, the participants were promised that the information they submitted would be kept private. The group discussion participants were promised that their information would only be handled by the researchers engaged.

### III. RESULTS

#### *Coping Strategies to Burnout in Christian Ministry*

The results of the transcribed focus group discussion data are presented in this study. The themes are organized around a single research question: What are the coping strategies employed by Catholic religious men and women working in the Lodwar Diocese of Kenya to avoid burnout in Christian ministry? The participants' verbatim quotes are used to support the findings.

#### *Role modeling through culture of reading*

Some participants pointed out that burnout in ministry can be prevented by reading books from other people who have

experienced burnout and they were able to overcome it. For instance, a male participant said

*“Spirituality helps me to go back to where I started and I am able to know who I am and I’m able to go back to myself and renew self by reading a spiritual book which will rejuvenate”*

(Focus group discussion, R002 personal communication, May, 2021).

Another female participant said,

*I also want to encourage the members; we should cultivate the culture of reading because through life you will find people who have gone through life experiences and may be whatever you are going through there are people who also went through it and they have good ways of how they handled it and were strengthened (Focus group discussion, R006 personal communication, May, 2021).*

*Taking a break from ministry*

Most of the participants acknowledged that ministry work can be overwhelming and can easily lead to burnout and therefore, there is a need for Catholic religious men and women to take a break by engaging in spiritual exercises such recollections and retreats. A female participant said,

*According to me how they do it, after work or even within the work there is where they share their day-to-day experiences and also some can also ask for a short break especially when they feel they are too tired and others will be taking a short break and a times you can have your retreat, you can have your recollection and also you check on the timetable, how have you planned on your timetable because sometimes it can be too much on you. Other moments you can also manage by time management and that can help one to manage the stress (Focus group discussion, R005 personal communication, May, 2021).*

Taking break from ministry as a strategy of preventing burnout in Christian ministry was also emphasized by another female participant who said,

*What I think is that there is the change of place and environment that could be the best way to solve little bit of stress and again the Church organizes get together; for example, here in Lodwar we have at least one week where we get together all the priests, sisters, all the religious people, we stay there and relax and we have sessions. The whole week we are there sharing, laughing at least when you go back you have a little bit of energy. So, I find this it becomes a great source of encouragement and it reduces much of the stress. I think there is also what we call get together in the parishes and also in the communities so this also helps reduce the stress and*

*also sharing in the community (Focus group discussion, R009 personal communication, May, 2021).*

A male participant also reported taking break as way preventing burnout in Christian ministry among the Catholic religious men and women. He said,

*Apart from prayer that we organize at the denary and even dioceses level, other things like sports and games, associations, groups where we come together and relax yeah, these are things that help us to release the tension that is gained in the ministry and so we try as much as possible to spare time for these things, for games, for associations, for friends, I even go for my annual holiday, for my retreat because in the process I gain more energy to continue serving because if I get burn out then I will not serve any more and to avoid maybe drinking and other things I might get lost in (Focus group discussion, R003 personal communication, May, 2021).*

*Creating awareness through psycho-education*

Some participants pointed out that religious men and women get burnout as a result of lack of awareness about the symptoms of burnout. Sometimes they come to realize the impact of burnout in their lives when it already too late. They pointed out that awareness of symptoms of burnout can help religious men and women prevent it. This comes out very strongly from a female participant, who said,

What I can recommend is that, I think a lot of us do not/ are not open/ alert to the signs and symptoms of burnout. Such that it is already there at an advanced stage when you could have noted it earlier on so first of all is awareness. Sometimes we may think we know but actually we don’t know because when we look at the symptoms of that maybe they are happening every time but we are not aware. We wait for the last stage that is the time we start running around to look for help. So, awareness is something which need to be done repeatedly and then also, you know we have this “It’s like a negative thing”. We have to be able to know that it is something that can happen because we are human and we are exposed to all these demands so it’s something which can happen so to take it positively that I am extremely tired, I am actually heading to burnout (Focus group discussion, R007 personal communication, May, 2021).

*Open communication with superiors*

Some of the participants expressed the need of religious men and women to be open with their superiors when they feel that they are exhausted and they need to take a break. Some religious men and women lack courage and feel shameful expressing to their superiors the need to take a break. Asking for a break without a shame plays a big role in preventing burnout among the religious men and women. This was emphasized by a female participant, who said,

*So, it's not a shame to ask for a break, to ask for a change or to ask for what I need to be able to have that freedom and courage to say that I really feel I need a break and it's not that I am not happy with my apostolate, it's something positive that I am aware that I have reached the end of my road and I need something to be done (Focus group discussion, R002 personal communication, May, 2021).*

Moreover, mutual relationship between the religious men and women with the superiors can help them to reduce the levels of stress and burnout in Christian ministry. A male participant said,

*Our priestly life is connected with Bishops, so at times when our Bishops does call us for me personally am getting dry so even in Lodwar we are different kind we have diocesan priests here we have coming from this and also, we have different religions so if we don't have that connection with our bishops at home that makes me at times very weak so then maybe that can help elevate the burden (Focus group discussion, R003 personal communication, May, 2021).*

#### *Positive attitude towards seeking professional services*

Sometimes religious men and women experience burnout because of negative attitude towards seeking professional services such as counseling and sabbatical programs. This comes as a result of negative perception that people who are sent for professional services have big issues to deal with in their lives and therefore, they feel stigmatized when they seek professional help or they are asked to seek professional services. A female participant said,

*Because sometimes we also ask even when people are sent you have already noted that this person is heading downwards and you are encouraging people to go for counseling or for a sabbatical, some people even feel like you are being coerced to do it, so not everybody who feels like..." ha ametumwa huko kwani nini mbaya?" We still have some people feeling like there is something wrong that's why they were sent to that place. So maybe just to grow in awareness and to start to take it positively (Focus group discussion, R006 personal communication, May, 2021).*

#### *Empathetic listening without condemnation from superiors*

The participants expressed the need of superiors to actively listen to their members without condemnation. Sometimes the superiors fail to actively listen to their members because they think that they are not interested with apostolate they are assigned which can easily lead them to burnout in Christian ministry. If the superiors are able to listen to their members with empathy and unconditional positive regard, this to a greater extent can reduce the level of burnout in Christian ministry. A female participant said,

*We also need to be listened to and to avoid condemnations. Many are the times when you are condemned that you don't want that apostolate, you don't want to be in that place and so many times people are ignored and when you are ignored then it continues growing to an extend you become depressed. How I wish the superiors and the bishops could listen to those people who are crying maybe they feel they are uncomfortable to be listened to rather than to condemn them (Focus group discussion, R012 personal communication, May, 2021).*

Moreover, the aspect of superiors listening to their members with understanding and without judgment is supported by another female participant who said,

*Sometimes there is the idea of more or less like what others have shared, that somebody may even be fearing that I will say that I be changed from this place, or I be given a new apostolate, maybe the person will be judged really that she doesn't want to sacrifice, she doesn't want to work but at the same time this negative judgment makes somebody to shy off from sharing what is deep within. So, the understanding is very important and listening and dialogue so that to come to a conclusion and then the person can get the help needed (Focus group discussion, R002 personal communication, May, 2021).*

The theme of empathetic listening was also encouraged among the Catholic religious men and women and not only to the superiors. There is a need of all the religious men and women coming to Lodwar for mission to be taught empathetic listening because they will not only require it among themselves but also in dealing with the people they are called to serve. This was emphasized by a male participant, who said,

*There is one thing I can add maybe the skill of empathy or listening should be taught all religious, priests coming to the diocese of Lodwar, so if someone is listening in at least is not counseling, giving guidance, just to listen. Like what we are doing now, Br. Pius you are just listening and taking our sharing. It makes life easy; I think that what we can give to the people in the Lodwar, skills to listen because those are very important for burnout for losing energy (Focus group discussion, R002 personal communication, May, 2021).*

#### *Appreciation, encouragement and motivation through community living*

Most of the participants acknowledge that the presence of appreciation, motivation and encouragement of the members through community living can have a big positive impact in preventing burnout in Christian among the catholic religious men and women. Community living provides an opportunity

to its members to share the stress and frustrations they have experienced in ministry. This is a big challenge for diocesan priests who lack the opportunity to live community life and which makes them vulnerable to burnout. This is expressed by a female participant, who said,

*We need to be appreciated and motivated so that we can have positive spirit of continuing what we are doing and responding to our calls and also, they need to encourage community life because it's in a community this stress, we empty ourselves after the day's work and we are able to share what the day was all about. And you find that maybe on the side of priests many of them those who are diocesans at least they are not advantaged to have the community living but at least you could see there is unity where people they are more than one person. So, they are not overwhelmed because they have somebody to share how the day was if there was any problem any struggle so it's good to encourage community life (Focus group discussion, R005 personal communication, May, 2021).*

#### Capacity building for Catholic religious men and women

Some participants pointed out that religious men and women get into burnout because of given responsibilities that they are not qualified. They are assigned to some responsibilities that are technical when they do not have adequate skills need. This makes them become prone to burnout. There is a need to train religious men and women before they are given responsibilities and especially those would require technical skills. This is echoed by a female participant, who said,

*The demands of ministry we said can be a cause of burnout and you know there is a time sometimes just because you are a sister, you are a priest, you're a given a very big responsibility and maybe you don't have the capacity or the technical know-how of that and that can be very stressful. So, to encourage those in positions or power to train the members for the positions that they hold. You don't have to be a coordinator because you are a sister, brother, or father and even when you find yourself there, to support the person to get the trainings they need and that will reduce burnout (Focus group discussion, R005 personal communication, May, 2021).*

The aspect of congregational leadership to have a dialogue and assigned religious men and women in the areas of their expertise was further emphasized by the participants. Rather than forcing members through vow of obedience to go for mission, there is a need to have dialogue with members and to assign ministries to them based on their areas of interest and qualification. This is suggested by a female participant, who said,

*I have heard this notion that "religious men and women, the clergy, can do any work and so you find you are given the kind of work that is not your*

*career, it's not your profession, you also don't feel motivated to do it but because of that notion that religious men and women can do any work at times it is not very encouraging. Because we have the vow of obedience so you will obey and go to do the work but you will not perform, you even don't give your best. So, it is good to ask what people like, what this religious feel they are comfortable as long as going for a mission especially here in Lodwar, you cannot send somebody because you are a religious or because you are a priest to go (Focus group discussion, R010 personal communication, May, 2021).*

#### Establishment of self-care programmes

The participants recommended establishment of self-care programs that can buffer Catholic religious men and women from experiencing burnout in Christian ministry. By availing self-care programs, it will help in reducing levels of burnout among religious men and women and even reduce the cost of medical care. This expressed by a female participant who said,

I want to say that self-care, sabbatical programs min or full sabbatical programs are very expensive so for congregations and dioceses to really invest in this because if we start looking at the money you find it is very expensive but when you compare the amount of money spend on admission and hospitalization and ongoing medical care it is very expensive. So, to encourage congregations and dioceses to invest on self-care and those programs that brings reduced burnout. You know prevention is better other than waiting for a disease to occur so that we can cure it because it will be very expensive (Focus group discussion, R016 personal communication, May, 2021).

Another female participant reported,

Many points have been said, I had all about festivals where at least people can meet and share their talents, have prayer days and retreats, time for workshops and seminars and recreational sessions like what we have here is that mutual relation and also exchange programs these can also help relax from our daily apostolate (Focus group discussion, R007 personal communication, May, 2021).

A male participant shared that a diocese has put in place services that help religious to prevent stress and burnout. He said,

Generally, diocese has a lot of avenues that have been said that are helping us to refreshment, some leave for school just to refresh and there is also counseling maybe those who need counseling services are all available. Generally, those are some of the things that keep us in place (Focus group discussion, R014 personal communication, May, 2021).

#### Prayer and meditation

Majority of the participants acknowledged that prayer and meditation play a critical role in reducing burnout in Christian

ministry. Through prayer and meditation, they are able to tap from the higher power which helps them to calm down and relax. A female participant said,

My spirituality through activities like prayer and meditation helps me to release stress and cultivate peace within. It trains the mind to relax and also will help me to take some days to rest. Even in the scripture we know that God rested during creation, this helps me to ask who am I, if I don't rest and God himself rested; I should find a reason to rest. And also, in realization that everything works out according to the plan of God, I therefore become satisfied when I have done something. Whatever I have done I get satisfied of it and fulfilled and then I am able to rest and leave it to God so that I can get more energy to move forward and do much better (Focus group discussion, R012 personal communication, May, 2021).

A female participant emphasized the importance of prayer in dealing with burnout as a result of overburdening ministry tasks. She said,

What I can say how my spirituality helps me deal with burnout is what has been spoke, that after I have finished with the children, teachers, board, I come to relax and especially during the time of my prayers. My spirituality helps me to deal with burnout especially during prayer, meditation, and reflection when I sit down and relax and bring myself in the hands of the Lord and then I try to use relaxation method that will help me to deal with burnout of that day (Focus group discussion, R005 personal communication, May, 2021).

#### *Creativity and openness to change in Ministry*

Some participants pointed out that religious men and women get into burnout in Christian ministry as a result of lack of creativity and openness to change in their ministry. Sometimes the nature of ministries for Catholic religious men and women do not change. For instance, Catholic priests are called to administer the sacraments all the time. Some religious men and women minister to the people based on their career professions such as nursing, social work, teaching, accounting among others and they are likely to serve in that capacity for the rest of their lives. If creativity and openness is applied in these ministries, it plays a big role in preventing burnout in Christian ministry. For instance, priests can adopt new ways of preaching and those who are teachers can also adopt different methodologies of teaching. For religious men and women to overcome burnout there is need to practice creativity in their ministry by coming up with different approaches of carrying out the same activities. A female participant reported,

*I say doing the same type of work over and over again, with little variation of creativity, is itself a source of burnout. So, it is up to each parish, and communities, anybody who is in position to look for ways of bringing creativity into the ministry, and also to open up people for exposure so that we can look at the diverse ways of doing the same thing or different*

*approaches to ministry (Focus group discussion, R002 personal communication, May, 2021).*

On the same theme, another female participant reported,

At a personal level, I feel personally doing the same kind of work day in day out and naturally that's the structure of the apostolate, I wake up in the morning, I go to the health facility and as you know the whole of this year and last year was all vigilant for COVID and all this, so it is the same kind of work every single day. But personally, I am comfortable for that apostolate and I feel what helped me is the openness to change and also to bring creativity, to look for ways even if is the same work every single day going to the same clinic doing the same thing but there is still a lot of openness in doing things a little different to bring that kind of variation so that it doesn't have to become boring. That way, I don't feel overwhelmed or bored because of doing the same thing. Because it is going to be like that as long as I am in this ministry and that is also; a part from my apostolate is also the profession so it will not change but it is up to me to bring that kind of variation (Focus group discussion, R006 personal communication, May, 2021).

#### IV. DISCUSSION

The study was to explore the coping strategies to prevent burnout in Christian ministry among the Catholic religious men and women working in Lodwar Diocese. Some participants pointed out that burnout in Christian ministry can be prevented through role modelling and culture of reading. These findings are consistent with Patrizia et al. (2018) who found that self-help book without a therapist can help in managing stress and burnout in various helping professionals. The study was carried with an assumption that meeting a therapist can be sometimes being costly and limited. Considering Lodwar diocese is located in the remotest part of Kenya, it might be difficult to get trained mental health professionals such as counsellors and psychologists and therefore, reading self-help books can create self-awareness on handling stress and burnout.

Prayer and meditation emerged from the data as one of the major coping strategies to burnout in Christian ministry. Majority of the participants acknowledged that prayer and meditation play a critical role in reducing burnout in Christian ministry. Through prayer and meditation, they are able to tap from the higher power which helps them to calm down and relax. The findings of this study were in line with Donna and Sara (2020) who found that mindfulness or awareness-based intervention reduced the levels of burnout among the care psychiatric nurses. The participants argued that when Catholic religious men and women are aware of the symptoms of burnout earlier, they can be able to seek professional help that can buffer them from suffering burnout. Similar to lay nurses, Catholic religious men and women work in ministry of medicine and nursing and mindfulness can help them to curb burnout in Christian ministry. Since meditation is closely related to mindfulness which is part of prayer for Catholic religious men and women, it can play a great role in helping



them to deal with burnout in Christian ministry. This shows that mindfulness helps in reducing the levels burnout among different populations.

The findings are also in agreement with Elvan and Ayhan (2019) who conducted a correlational study to examine the relationship between mindfulness and burnout levels among senior students in the capital city of Turkey who had experienced stressful situations for the last one year. The results showed that there was a significant relationship between mindfulness and burnout levels among students. The finding of this study complements the findings of the previous study that is quantitative in nature. That means studies using different approaches such as quantitative, qualitative or mixed method approach has found mindfulness to be significant in reducing burnout among the helping professionals.

Furthermore, the findings of this study is supported by Regina, Gewnhi and Ian (2020) who conducted an intervention study to the effectiveness of religiously oriented mindfulness on heart rate variability and personal burnout among the social workers in Holland and findings from paired t-tests showed that there was a significant difference between pre-and-posttest measures of religiously oriented mindfulness and personal burnout. Moreover, the findings showed that religiously oriented mindfulness is effective in enhancing heart rate variability and reducing the levels of personal burnout among the social workers. Similar to social workers, Catholic religious men and women minister in social work and findings show that mindfulness can pay a big role in addressing burnout they experience in their ministry work.

Empathetic listening without condemnation from superiors was another coping strategy to burnout in Christian ministry among the Catholic religious men and women working in Lodwar Diocese. Most of the participants expressed the need of superiors to actively listen to their members without condemnation. Sometimes the superiors fail to actively listen to their members because they think that they are not interested with apostolate they are assigned which can easily lead them to burnout in Christian ministry. If the superiors are able to listen to their members with empathy and unconditional positive regard, this to a greater extent can reduce the level of burnout in Christian ministry. The finding of this study is in agreement with Sandina, Jennifer and Theodore (2019) who examined the risk and protective factors for secondary traumatic and burnout among home visitors in United States and the results from thematic analysis identified protective factors to secondary traumatic and burnout as having a supportive supervisor, supportive work-life policies, teaching one to compartmentalize, setting boundaries, and using humour to deal with challenging situations. If Catholic religious men and women feel they supported by their Bishops and superiors, they are likely to develop emotional resilience to buffer them from burnout in Christian ministry. They are able to have a positive attitude when they are commissioned to work in rural and challenging areas. Likewise, the findings are supported by Johanne and his colleagues (2018) who

conducted an intervention study to examine the social capital and burnout among mental health providers in United States. Results from thematic analysis showed that workplace social capital is a protective factor in reducing the levels of burnout. Moreover, work environment where managers promote support collaboration and team work helps in reducing employees' burnout. That means if Bishops and superiors create an environment where religious men and women feel supported, it going to help them reduce the levels of burnout.

Most of the participants acknowledge that the presence of appreciation, motivation and encouragement of the members through community living can have a big positive impact in preventing burnout in Christian among the catholic religious men and women. Community living provides an opportunity to its members to share the stress and frustrations they have experienced in ministry. This is a big challenge for diocesan priests who lack the opportunity to live community life and which makes them vulnerable to burnout. The motivation and encouragement of Catholic religious men and women mostly takes place in the context community living where there is supportive environment. This is consistent with findings of Jean (2017) who carried out an empirical study to examine the coping strategies of coping with burnout among the veterinaries registered in Alberta, Canada and found support environment is significant in reducing the levels of burnout among the veterinarians. Unlike diocesan priests, Catholic religious women live community life where there is a minimum of three community members and that helps them to share the challenges they are facing in ministry and hence help them to reduce the level of burnout. Furthermore, the findings are in line with Seyed, Tahereh and Suzanne (2019) who conducted a correlational study to examine the relationship between social capital, psychological resilience on burnout among the employees working in hazardous work environments. The findings showed that social capital play a significant role in reducing levels of burnout among the employees working hazardous work environment. Lodwar diocese can be considered hazardous work environment where Catholic religious men and women encounter numerous challenges as they minister to people. Community living that provides social support can help them to buffer from burnout in Christian ministry. Moreover, the findings are consistent with Mwangi (2020) who explored the strategies that are used by diocesan priests in diocese of Murang'a Kenya to cope with burnout. The findings were taking time off for rest, self-awareness, living a balanced life, social support and sharing experiences, professional accompaniment and physical exercises.

Establishment of self-care programmes also emerged strongly as a coping strategy of coping with burnout in Christian ministry among Catholic religious men and working in Lodwar Diocese. Majority of the participants recommended establishment of self-care programs that can buffer Catholic religious men and women from experiencing burnout in Christian ministry. By availing self-care programs, it will help in reducing levels of burnout among religious men and

women and even reduce the cost of medical care. The findings of this study concur with Rahbel, Angela, Anya, Rebecca and Olga (2020) who conducted study to examine burnout and self-care among HIV providers and managers in human service organizations who were working New York City. Findings from thematic analysis showed that self-care practices that buffer employees from burnout included physical activity, recreational activities, interacting with nature, self-expression, food, drinks, and social support. These findings are further supported by Chelsea, Jan and Roy (2018) who examined the restorative benefits of spiritual retreats among the clergy in Australia who had participated in spiritual retreats. The results showed spiritual retreats provided numerous benefits for the participants include restorative, social, spiritual and cognitive benefits. Moreover, the findings are in agreement with Vukani (2017) who found that spiritual practices such as lectio divina, prayer groups, recollections and liturgical celebrations of saints were key strategies of coping with burnout in Christian ministry among the Catholic clergy.

## V. CONCLUSION

The study recommends future studies to be conducted with the Protestant Church ministers working in Kenyan rural areas to establish their coping mechanisms to burnout in Christian ministry. They are similar in many ways with Catholic religious men and women because they are all called to the service of humanity in the Church. They may be even more vulnerable to burnout than the Catholic religious men and women because apart from Church ministry, they also have family responsibilities of bringing up their children. Sometimes they may not have adequate resources to carry out their ministry which can easily lead them to burnout. Finally, the findings of this study can be utilized by Catholic Bishops and Religious Superiors, Protestant Church leaders, Counselling Psychologists, Researchers and institutions that offer helping professional services to people with various needs. The Catholic Bishops and Superiors of congregation of men and women may use this study to come up with mechanisms of preventing burnout in Christian ministry among their members.

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