Perceived Leadership Styles of Women Religious Community Superiors and Psycho-Spiritual Life Skills of Their Community Members in Langata Constituency, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationship between the leadership styles of women's religious community superiors and the psycho-spiritual life skills of their community members (Religious sisters) in selected universities in Langata Constituency, Nairobi County, Kenya. The objectives included identifying leadership styles, assessing psycho-spiritual life skills and examining their relationship. Grounded in Servant Leadership Theory and Social Cognitive Theory, the study employed a concurrent parallel mixed-methods design. Using Cochran's (1977) formula for an infinite population, a sample of 385 participants was determined. Convenience sampling was used to select 368 participants for quantitative data collection, with 265 questionnaires returned, yielding a 72.01% response rate. Qualitative data were gathered from 17 purposively selected participants. Data collection tools included the Servant Leadership Behavioural Scale (SLBS-6), Leadership Styles Questionnaire (LSQ), and Psycho-Spiritual Life Skills Scale (P-SLSS). Quantitative data were analyzed through descriptive and inferential statistics, while qualitative data underwent thematic analysis. Triangulation enriched the findings. Significant positive correlations were found between leadership styles and psycho-spiritual life skills. Autocratic ($r = .122$, $p < .05$), democratic ($r = .131$, $p < .05$), and laissez-faire ($r = .172$, $p < .01$) leadership styles were positively associated with Psycho-spiritual life skills. Although servant leadership showed no statistical significance ($r = .093$, $p > .05$), qualitative findings highlighted its profound influence. These results presented the role of adaptive, empathetic, and spiritually grounded leadership in enhancing psycho-spiritual life skills. The study offers valuable insights for improving formation programs and governance models in religious communities, enhancing trust, collaboration, resilience and holistic development.

Keywords: Religious sisters, Community Superiors, Leadership styles, psycho-spiritual life skills, Langata.

INTRODUCTION

Background of the study

Leadership is a cornerstone of organizational and communal success, profoundly influencing psychological and spiritual well-being within religious communities (Obi et al., 2021). In the context of convents and other religious settings, community superiors play a vital role in nurturing the holistic development of their sisters, who often live and work closely together. Through their leadership styles, superiors contribute significantly to the psycho-spiritual well-being of their sisters by cultivating essential life skills such as self-awareness, stress management, decision-making, communication, and spiritual growth. Despite extensive studies on leadership in secular contexts, there is limited literature on the relationship between the leadership styles of women religious community superiors and the psycho-spiritual life skills of their community members in Kenya. This

study addresses this gap by exploring how leadership styles such as servant, democratic, autocratic, and laissez-faire leadership influence these skills.

Women religious, often referred to as religious sisters, dedicate their lives to service through vows of chastity, poverty, and obedience, living in communal settings shaped by unique power dynamics and authority structures (ASEC-SLDI, 2020; Eze et al., 2016). These settings foster relationships defined by dialogue and obedience, with roles influenced by statuses like community superior or formator. Leadership within such communities is complex, integrating spiritual guidance with organizational effectiveness. Guided by Catholic teachings, leadership in this context emphasizes respect for human dignity, justice, and servant leadership, modeled after Jesus Christ (Eamon, 2015 as cited in Abdulmasih, 2021). Superiors, as finally professed sisters appointed by Major Superiors, are tasked with shaping the psycho-spiritual and holistic growth of their communities.

Rooted in the Servant Leadership Theory, this study examines the relationship between leadership styles of women religious community superiors and the psycho-spiritual life skills of their sisters in selected universities. It explores how different leadership styles influence skill development, bridging the theoretical perspectives on leadership with practical applications for religious life. By investigating this critical area, the study provides insights that can enhance formation programs and governance models within religious communities, promoting trust, collaboration, and spiritual maturity.

Autocratic leadership, often referred to as authoritarian leadership, centralizes decision-making power with the leader and minimizes input from others (Kendra, 2023). While it can be effective for quick decision-making, it often fosters dominance, discourages individual growth, and limits critical thinking—key components for psycho-spiritual development. By emphasizing obedience, this leadership style may impede self-reflection, emotional intelligence, and open communication, all vital for nurturing psycho-spiritual life skills. In religious congregations, hierarchical structures and the vow of obedience may incline leaders toward authoritarian tendencies. However, community superiors are encouraged to adopt approaches that support the holistic growth and mission effectiveness of their members.

Democratic leadership, or participative leadership, involves team members in decision-making, fostering collaboration and inclusivity. This style emphasizes open communication and shared responsibility, empowering individuals to express ideas, concerns, and feedback (Amanchukwu et al., 2015; Fiaz et al., 2017; Miloloza, 2018, as cited in Wahyuwardhana & Wisesa, 2024). By promoting transparency and participation, democratic leadership enhances psycho-spiritual life skills such as critical thinking, decision-making, problem-solving, and empathy (Agustin et al., 2021, as cited in Jakandar et al., 2024). This approach creates a supportive environment that nurtures individual and communal growth, which is particularly beneficial in religious communities.

Laissez-faire leadership is characterized by a lack of active engagement or direction from the leader and is often perceived as ineffective (Bass & Avolio, 1995; Hinkin & Schriesheim, 2008, as cited in Zhang et al., 2023). However, recent studies suggest that its outcomes depend on subordinates' cognitive appraisals and goal orientations (Zhang et al., 2023). For some, the lack of oversight fosters self-direction and improved performance, while others may struggle without clear guidance. These findings indicate that laissez-faire leadership, when interpreted positively, could encourage self-directed growth and the development of psycho-spiritual life skills in specific contexts.

Servant leadership, as defined by Greenleaf (1977, as cited by Zhou & Xin, 2020), prioritizes serving others and their long-term well-being through a relational, ethical, and spiritual lens. Rooted in altruism and empathy, this approach fosters personal and communal growth, empowering followers to achieve their full potential (Eva et al., 2019; Obi et al., 2021). Servant leadership shifts focus from self-interest to a broader concern for others, extending its impact to the congregation and the universal church. Its emphasis on intentional and empathetic practices makes it a compelling framework for promoting psycho-spiritual life skills, offering significant contributions to holistic development.

Life skills, both psychosocial and psycho-spiritual, enable individuals to adapt to challenges effectively and foster well-being, resilience, and self-efficacy (WHO, 1996; WHO, 1997). These skills, encompassing decision-making, problem-solving, self-awareness, empathy, and stress management, are essential for personal and communal success (Subasree & Nair, 2014). In religious communities, psycho-spiritual life skills integrate psychological and spiritual dimensions, promoting personal growth, resilience, and effective collaboration. Key competencies such as decision-making, self-awareness, communication, stress management and spiritual growth empower sisters to navigate communal living and fulfill their mission while fostering their self-esteem and contributions to society (Godana et al., 2023).

Decision-making, critical for leadership and problem-solving, supports adaptability and conflict resolution, aiding sisters in managing spiritual, communal, and personal responsibilities (Colakkadioglu & Celik, 2016; Kapur, 2024). Self-awareness, the recognition of one's emotions, beliefs, and behaviors, enhances relationships, self-reflection, and spiritual growth during transitional phases (London et al., 2023). Stress management, using techniques like prayer and meditation, mitigates challenges and enhances emotional well-being (Hall, 2023; WHO, 2024). Similarly, effective communication fosters empathy, conflict resolution, and spiritual connection, strengthening unity and ministry impact (De Sousa Mata et al., 2021).

Spiritual growth, shaped by scripture and leadership, fosters resilience, empathy, and moral development (Ruata & Tung, 2024; Purnomo et al., 2023). Leadership styles significantly influence spiritual development, with servant and transformational approaches encouraging autonomy, compassion, and community well-being (Nguyen, 2017; Berry, 2021). Research highlights that adaptive and empathetic leadership positively impacts community unity, psycho-spiritual skills, and ministry outcomes (Obi et al., 2021; Keita, 2019).

Despite formation programs, many Religious sisters face challenges such as low self-esteem, overdependence on approval, and difficulty applying talents. These issues highlight the underexplored influence of leadership styles on psycho-spiritual development within women's religious communities in Kenya. This study examines how leadership practices affect the development of psycho-spiritual life skills among Religious sisters in selected universities in Langata Constituency, Nairobi County.

This research addresses practical concerns and scholarly gaps, offering insights into leadership practices that nurture psycho-spiritual life skills which will enhance emotional resilience, confidence, and spiritual maturity. The findings of this study may guide major superiors and councils in refining selection and training processes for leadership roles. By adopting effective leadership styles, they can create spiritually vibrant communities that promote personal growth and improve retention rates while attracting new vocations. This research can inform the development of leadership frameworks and enhance the support systems within congregations, amplifying their contributions to society.

Beyond individual congregations, the study's insights have broader implications for the Catholic Church. Formation houses and leadership contexts can benefit from improved practices that foster psycho-spiritual life skills and supportive relationships. Understanding the interplay between leadership and spiritual development may also guide training programs and leadership approaches within religious institutions worldwide. This study also provides valuable insights for professionals like psycho-spiritual counselors and spiritual directors, enabling them to offer more targeted support. It also contributes to academic discussions on leadership, psychology, and spirituality, encouraging further research in this field.

Research questions

1. What are the leadership styles most commonly employed by Women religious community Superiors in Langata Constituency, Nairobi County?

2. What is the relationship between the leadership styles of women religious community superiors and the psycho-spiritual life skills among sisters in Langata Constituency, Nairobi County?
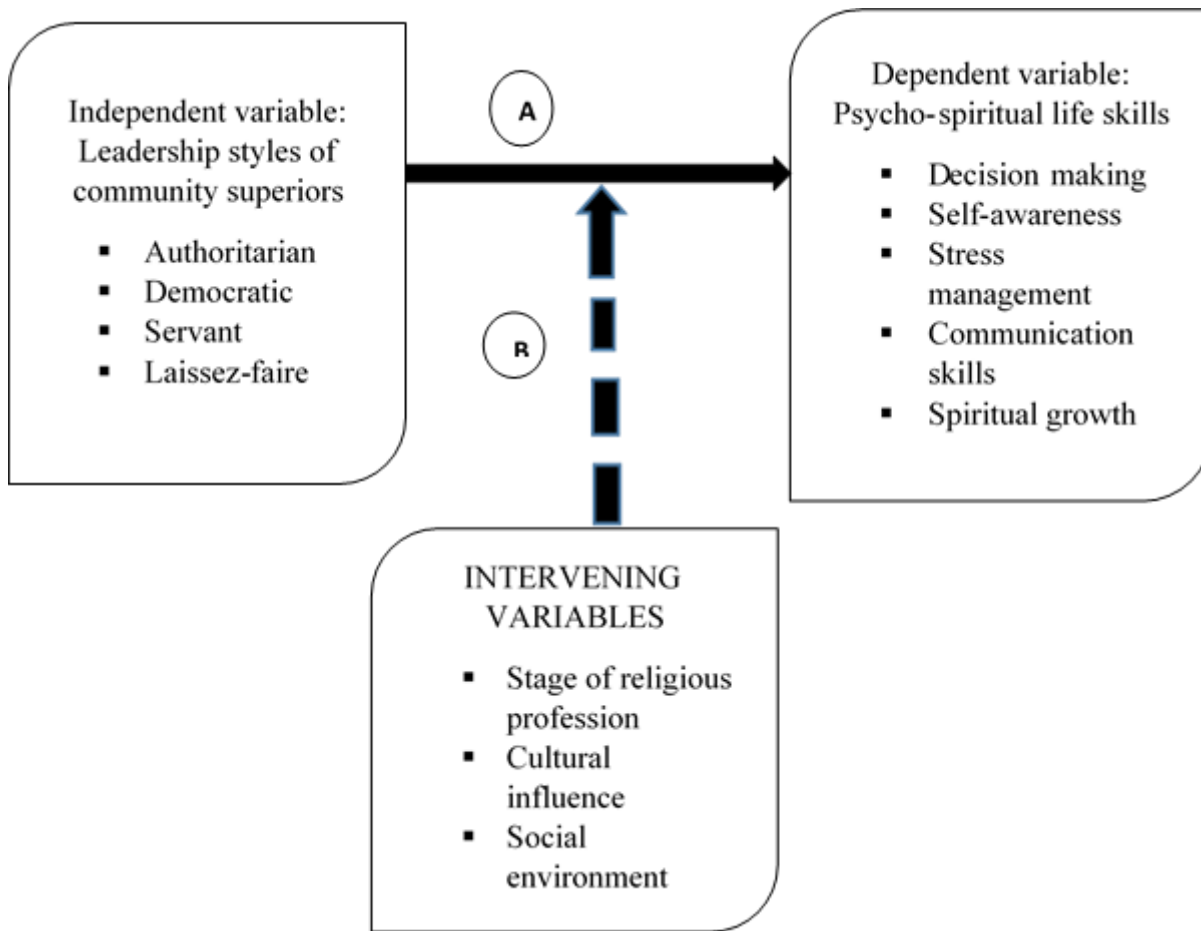
Conceptual framework

Figure I. Relationship between independent, dependent and intervening variables

The conceptual framework in Figure 1 depicts the relationship between leadership styles (independent variables) and psycho-spiritual life skills (dependent variables), with intervening variables influencing the relationship. The independent variables—authoritarian, democratic, laissez-faire, and servant leadership styles—are shown with Direction A, indicating their influence on the development of life skills such as decision-making, self-awareness, stress management, communication skills, and spiritual growth. Effective leadership practices are expected to enhance these skills, while ineffective or overused leadership styles may impede their development. Direction B represents the impact of intervening variables, including stage of profession, community size, cultural influence, and social environment, on the relationship between leadership styles and psycho-spiritual life skills. These variables may also shape how community members respond to leadership styles. However, the segmented arrow in Direction B suggests that their influence might be limited or not significantly affect the primary relationship explored in the study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Leadership styles significantly influence organizational productivity, team dynamics, and goal achievement (Van Quang, 2022; Sarwar et al., 2023). Effective leaders are distinguished by traits such as self-confidence, communication, creativity, resilience, and adaptability, enabling them to empower followers and achieve organizational objectives (Alnesr & Ramzani, 2019; Demirtas & Karaca, 2020, cited in Sarwar et al., 2023). Leadership grounded in Catholic values emphasizes dignity, justice, and the common good, fostering personal and societal development through ethical principles like respect for human dignity and collaboration (Abdulmasih, 2021). Similarly, life skills—such as problem-solving, decision-making, and empathy—play a critical role in enhancing well-being and resilience across all life stages (WHO, 2009; Catalano et al., 2004).

In Sub-Saharan Africa, democratic leadership has been shown to enhance employee performance through open communication and delegation (Folarin, 2021). South American research links spiritual growth among family

caregivers to self-efficacy and coherence, highlighting cognitive-affective and caregiving factors (Parra-Aguirre et al., 2023). In Indonesia, pastoral leadership supports youth spiritual growth through activities like Bible study and counseling (Imbing & Pandie, 2023). South African faith-based schools demonstrate the efficacy of servant leadership in addressing emotional, spiritual, and social needs while strengthening community ties (Shula et al., 2022). Across Africa, servant leadership rooted in the cultural value of ubuntu promotes trust and collaboration (Ezeorah, 2023).

Kenyan studies emphasize leadership qualities such as integrity, humility, and commitment as key to improving organizational performance (Githui, 2022). Women religious globally contribute to societal development through servant leadership, which emphasizes collective well-being, engagement, and spirituality (Obi et al., 2021; Ortiz-Gómez et al., 2020). Studies also highlight transformational governance and compassion among Catholic women religious leaders (Fiebig & Christopher, 2018).

Cultural differences in leadership styles are evident in Indonesia and Pakistan, where servant, transformational, and autocratic leadership approaches influence organizational outcomes (Gaol et al., 2023; Rahman & Ali, 2024). In Kenya, democratic leadership among university librarians fosters communication (Hongo et al., 2023), while psychological and spiritual well-being are positively correlated among consecrated women (Kiplagat et al., 2019). Life skills such as communication and decision-making continue to be vital for personal and professional development (Bolat & Korkmaz, 2021). Democratic and servant leadership are associated with enhanced psychological and spiritual well-being, while authoritarian leadership is linked to stress and dissatisfaction (Manurung & Zuriati, 2020; Ruata & Tung, 2024).

Research Gaps

Research gaps in the literature reveal significant limitations that warrant further investigation. One key gap is the lack of conceptual clarity, as there is no consensus on defining and classifying life skills, which hampers evaluation and limits interdisciplinary applications (Darlington-Bernard et al., 2023). Additionally, existing studies predominantly focus on general life skills or specific populations, with most prioritizing children and youth while neglecting psycho-spiritual life skills among adult Religious women. Leadership dynamics within religious communities are another area requiring exploration, as few studies examine the interplay between leadership styles and psycho-spiritual life skills, with most research emphasizing organizational or job-related outcomes (Obi et al., 2021). Furthermore, variations in outcomes across studies underscore the importance of culturally and contextually tailored approaches to leadership and psycho-spiritual development (Sukumar et al., 2022; Godana et al., 2023). The literature also reveals a gap in holistic frameworks, as prior research often employs qualitative or theoretical analyses or quantitative-only designs, limiting the comprehensive insights that mixed-methods approaches could provide (Sukumar et al., 2022; Kiplagat et al., 2019). Finally, while the role of leadership in fostering organizational outcomes and spiritual growth is frequently highlighted, empirical data exploring the intersection of leadership styles and psycho-spiritual life skills remains scarce.

Contribution of the Current Study

The present research addressed a significant research gap, as global, regional, and local studies on leadership styles and psycho-spiritual life skills within women religious communities remain limited. It bridges these gaps by employing a concurrent mixed-methods design to investigate the relationship between servant, democratic, authoritarian, and laissez-faire leadership styles and psycho-spiritual life skills. It focuses on decision-making, self-awareness, communication, stress management and spiritual growth among women religious communities in Nairobi. By integrating qualitative interviews and standardized questionnaires, the study provides a culturally relevant and a comprehensive understanding of how leadership styles influence psycho-spiritual development. By investigating this relationship in Kenya, the current study not only contributes to leadership research but also integrates psycho-spiritual dimensions within faith-based contexts, offering actionable insights into leadership practices within religious settings in the Kenyan context, advancing both theoretical and practical knowledge in this area.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

According to Creswell & Creswell (2018), research designs are specific frameworks used within qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches to guide the overall process of a study. In contrast, research methods refer to the particular techniques and procedures for gathering, analyzing, and interpreting data in a research project. According to Egunjobi (2024), mixed method research designs integrate both quantitative and qualitative approaches in one study to offer a deeper insight into the research question. By combining these methods, researchers can capitalize on the strengths of each, leading to a more detailed and well-rounded understanding of the subject matter.

The current study used a mixed methods approach adopting a convergent parallel mixed methods research design. This design involves gathering both quantitative and qualitative data simultaneously. This allows the researcher to analyze each type of data separately before merging the results for an integrated interpretation. This approach aims to provide a thorough analysis of the research problem, allowing for a comparison of findings to identify areas of agreement or conflict. It is suitable in this study, for determining the relationship between Women Religious Community Superiors' leadership styles and life skills among sisters in Langata Constituency, Nairobi County.

Location of the Study

The study was conducted in Lang'ata Constituency, Nairobi County, Kenya, a culturally diverse area with numerous women religious communities and institutions of higher learning, providing a unique context for exploring leadership styles and psycho-spiritual life skills. Universities were chosen as the research setting instead of the sisters' communities to ensure neutrality, reduce potential bias, and foster genuine responses. Academic settings minimize pressures participants might feel in their communities and offer centralized locations for efficient recruitment and larger sample sizes, aligning with ethical research practices. This approach respects participants' autonomy, reduces logistical challenges, and ensures reliable and valid data collection.

Study Population

This study targeted Women Religious community members in universities within Lang'ata Constituency, Nairobi County, Kenya, focusing specifically on sisters undergoing formation and training who are not currently in leadership positions. The study participants were predominantly under 46 years of age, indicating they were in formative stages of religious life where leadership and psycho-spiritual development intersect meaningfully. All participants had post-secondary education, and over half resided in small communities of 4–10 members, fostering close interpersonal relationships. Representing 20 nationalities, primarily Kenyan, the diverse cultural backgrounds provided a rich cross-cultural perspective on leadership practices and psycho-spiritual skills.

Sampling Procedure and Sample size

The study was conducted in two purposively selected universities in Lang'ata Constituency, Nairobi, Catholic University of Eastern Africa and Tangaza University, using a mixed-methods approach. Given the challenges in determining the exact population size, Cochran's (1977) formula for an infinite population, as elaborated by Gaikard (2022), was utilized to calculate a sample size of 385, targeting the notably high populations of professed student sisters at these universities. Quantitative data were collected from 368 participants through convenience sampling, a method suited for reaching hard-to-access populations, such as religious sisters, due to the lack of a comprehensive directory and the sensitivity of the study topic. Convenience sampling is a non-probability sampling method, is frequently utilized in both quantitative and qualitative research despite its limitations. When applied with caution ensuring the control of biases and uncertainties, it can yield valuable insights. Enhancing the representativeness and diversity of the sample, along with incorporating additional data, are effective strategies to improve the reliability and accuracy of convenience sampling (Golzar et al.,

2022). This sampling method offers several advantages, such as being affordable, time-efficient, and easy to implement. It is particularly useful in situations where probability sampling is impractical, such as when the target population is difficult to access or includes hidden groups that are challenging for researchers to engage with (Berndt, 2020, cited in Golzar et al, 2022). For qualitative data, purposive maximum variation sampling was employed, selecting 5 interviewees and 12 focus group participants, ensuring diverse perspectives based on shared characteristics such as age and education (Nyimbili & Nyimbili, 2024). In the absence of precise population data for the universities, the sample size was assumed to be equally distributed between the two institutions.

Research Instrument

The study employed a mixed-methods approach, integrating closed-ended questionnaires and semi-structured interviews to collect both quantitative and qualitative data. Leadership styles were assessed using the Leadership Styles Questionnaire (Northouse, 2009) for autocratic, democratic, and laissez-faire styles, and the Servant Leadership Behavior Scale-6 (SLBS-6) (Sendjaya et al., 2017) for servant leadership. Psycho-spiritual life skills were measured using the Psycho-Spiritual Life Skills Scale (P-SLSS) (Egunjobi & Idoko, 2024). Both the SLBS-6 and P-SLSS demonstrated strong reliability and validity. Semi-structured interviews provided deeper insights into leadership practices and psycho-spiritual development. Methodological rigor was maintained through triangulation, pilot testing, and reflexivity, with credibility checks and thick descriptions ensuring the trustworthiness of qualitative data. A pre-test involving 23 participants outside the main sample confirmed the clarity and suitability of the instruments. Despite minor limitations in the reliability of the Leadership Styles Questionnaire, the study's comprehensive design ensured reliable and transferable findings on leadership styles and psycho-spiritual life skills in religious communities.

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was conducted following approval from relevant authorities, including the Psycho-Spiritual Institute of the Lux Terra Leadership Foundation, Marist International University, Kenyan National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI), and the IRB of two universities. Quantitative data were gathered via paper-based questionnaires and online Google Forms with participants' informed consent, while qualitative data involved individual interviews and a focus group discussion. Five purposively selected older Religious sisters from one of the Universitiesparticipated in interviews between March 3–10, 2025, providing in-depth insights on leadership styles and psycho-spiritual life skills. A focus group discussion with 12 participants from the other University was conducted on March 17, 2025, representing varied nationalities and educational levels. Ethical guidelines were strictly followed, ensuring comprehensive and reliable data collection.

Data Analysis Procedure

The study employed a concurrent parallel mixed-methods approach, integrating quantitative and qualitative data collected simultaneously, analyzed independently, and combined during interpretation. This design provided a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between perceived leadership styles of women religious superiors and the psycho-spiritual life skills of their community members.

Quantitative data were collected using the Servant Leadership Behaviour Scale-6 (SLBS-6), Leadership Styles Questionnaire (LSQ), and the Psycho-Spiritual Life Skills Scale (P-SLSS). Data entry, cleaning, and screening were performed to ensure accuracy and reliability. IBM SPSS version 25 was used for descriptive statistics including mean, percentages and standard deviation summarized scale responses, while inferential statistics, including Pearson's correlation, assessed relationships between leadership styles and psycho-spiritual life skills. OpenAI tools supported summarization and formatting for clarity.

Qualitative data from interviews and focus group discussions were transcribed verbatim using TurboScribe and enriched with field notes. Thematic analysis, as outlined by Byrne (2021), was used to code and identify patterns linked to leadership styles and psycho-spiritual skills. Member checking enhanced trustworthiness, ensuring participants validated the interpretations. This analysis addressed research questions 1, 3, and 4.

Triangulation integrated quantitative and qualitative findings, comparing results to identify convergence, divergence, or complementary insights. This synthesis offered a comprehensive perspective on leadership's influence on psycho-spiritual skills, informing recommendations for effective leadership practices. The final presentation combined quantitative and qualitative results aligned with the study's objectives and theoretical framework, providing valuable insights into leadership practices supporting psycho-spiritual development.

Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to strict ethical standards throughout its process, ensuring respect for participants and research integrity. Necessary approvals were obtained from Institutional Review Boards (IRB) of the selected universities and Kenyan National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI). Informed consent was secured after participants were fully briefed on the study's purpose and their rights, including the voluntary nature of participation and freedom to withdraw without consequences. Confidentiality was upheld using anonymous identifiers, securely stored data, and composite profiles for reporting. The principle of non-maleficence guided all interactions, minimizing risks and respecting cultural sensitivities. Academic integrity was maintained through proper citation of sources and adherence to APA 7 guidelines to avoid plagiarism. Findings were presented truthfully, without manipulation, ensuring transparency and reliability in contributing to academic discourse.

RESULTS

A total of 368 questionnaires were distributed to participants. Of these, 265 questionnaires were validly completed and returned, yielding a response rate of 72.0%, which reflects a good level of participation and engagement from the participants. According to Egunjobi (2024), in a thesis or dissertation, a response rate of 60% is generally considered acceptable for sample sizes exceeding 300, while a 50% response rate is deemed sufficient for online surveys, regardless of the sample size. This upholds the assertion of Fincham (2008) that researchers should aim for response rates close to 60% in most studies. Additionally, qualitative data was gathered through five one-on-one interviews and a focus group discussion involving 12 participants, bringing the total number of qualitative participants to 17. According to Leedy and Ormrod (2015), focus groups typically consist of a small group of 10 to 12 participants, which is consistent with the structure of this study. This integration of quantitative and qualitative data provides a strong basis for analyzing the leadership styles and psycho-spiritual life skills of the targeted population. The results of the analysis are as presented below.

Leadership styles of community Superiors

Table 1. Leadership Styles of community superiors

Leadership styles	High percentage	Very high percentage	Total percentages
Autocratic	63.02%	22.64%	85.66%
Democratic	51.70%	39.25%	90.95%
Laissez-faire	61.89%	20.75%	82.64%
Servant	48.30%	14.72%	63.02%

The findings of the quantitative strand reveal a well-rounded approach to leadership among women religious superiors in Langata Constituency, characterized by a blend of diverse styles. Democratic leadership emerged as the most prevalent and positively regarded style, characterized by inclusivity, transparency, and shared decision-making. Over 90% of participants rated it as "High" or "Very High." Participants of the qualitative strand also described their superiors' leadership using terms such as "servant leadership," "authoritarian leadership," and "democratic involvement." Servant leadership, while qualitatively praised for its nurturing and spiritually grounded nature, had a lower quantitative representation at 63.02%. Autocratic and laissez-faire leadership styles were also prominent, each showing distinct advantages and challenges. Autocratic leadership

provided order but occasionally hindered spiritual growth, while laissez-faire leadership promoted autonomy but sometimes lacked direction. Their insights bring to light how leadership can enhance communal unity and spiritual motivation or, conversely, introduce tension and apprehension.

According to the findings of the qualitative strand, participatory leadership, often characterized by servant leadership principles, emerged as a preferred model. Servant leadership, characterized by inclusivity, humility, and empathy, fosters collective decision-making, open communication, and mutual support, creating a harmonious environment that nurtures personal and spiritual growth. Superiors exhibiting this style encourage responsibility, provide constructive feedback, and inspire engagement in spiritual exercises, enhancing members' emotional, spiritual, and social well-being. Conversely, authoritarian leadership, the controlling leadership styles emphasizes discipline and order, proving effective for maintaining structure but often suppressing individuality, creativity, open dialogue, leading to feelings of alienation, diminished self-worth, tensions and limiting intrinsic motivation. Despite these challenges, both styles contribute to spiritual guidance, with structured accompaniment providing valuable support for personal development. The following account highlight these dynamics and their influence on psycho-spiritual life skills development.

"We have a superior who communicates everything clearly. She calls us together, we discuss, and it makes all of us feel valued. That helps me pray with a free mind because I'm not worried or feeling left out" (FGP1, Focus Group, March 17, 2025).

On the other hand, some participants described encountering a more controlling leadership style. Participant 1 recounted:

"She wants to decide everything, leaving little room for our opinions. At first, I tried to contribute, but I realized she always wanted her own way. It made me withdrawn, and I'd carry that tension into my prayer" (P1, Individual Interview, March 3, 2025).

A participant who narrate the negative effects of overuse of authoritarian leadership style by her superior, at the same time, acknowledged her superior's deep prayer life and discipline, which encouraged punctuality and respect for spiritual obligations:

"She doesn't joke with prayer time… it helped me, even when I felt a kind of dark night of the soul" (P1, Individual Interview, March 3, 2025).

These findings emphasize the importance of adaptive, context-sensitive leadership that balances authority with empathy to support spiritual well-being and organizational cohesion.

Levels of Psycho-Spiritual life skills:

Table 2. Summary of level of psycho-spiritual life skills

Variable	Mean score	Level
Self-Awareness Skills	4.28	Very High
Communication Skills	3.83	High
Decision Making Skills	3.75	High
Stress Management Skills	3.84	High
Spiritual Growth Skills	4.35	Very High
Means Total	4.01	High

The quantitative study found that religious sisters possessed high levels of psycho-spiritual life skills. The highest mean scores were recorded in the domains of spiritual growth (M = 4.35) and self-awareness (M = 4.28), while communication, decision-making, and stress management also scored highly. These results suggest that participants were well-equipped to navigate the emotional, interpersonal, and spiritual demands of religious life. The qualitative findings reinforced this, demonstrating that leadership styles significantly shaped the sisters' self-awareness, stress management, spiritual routines, effective communication, and thoughtful decision-making.

Leadership styles and psycho-spiritual life skills

Table 3. Correlation of leadership styles and psycho-spiritual life skills

Variable		Psycho-Spiritual Life Skills
Psycho-Spiritual Life Skills	Pearson Correlation	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	
	N	265
Autocratic leadership	Pearson Correlation	.122[*]
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.047
	N	265
Democratic leadership	Pearson Correlation	.131[*]
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.034
	N	265
Laissez-faire leadership	Pearson Correlation	.172[**]
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.005
	N	265
Servant leadership	Pearson Correlation	.093
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.132
	N	265
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).		
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).		

This table presents the correlations between Psycho-Spiritual Life Skills and four leadership styles: Autocratic, Democratic, Laissez-Faire, and Servant Leadership. These relationships reveal how each leadership style may affect or connect to the development and demonstration of psycho-spiritual competencies among community members.

The quantitative strand of the study reveals a complex relationship between the leadership styles of women religious community superiors in Langata Constituency, Nairobi County, Kenya, and the psycho-spiritual life skills of their community members. Democratic leadership, characterized by inclusivity and collaboration,

shows a weak but significant positive correlation (r = .131, p < .05) with psycho-spiritual skills, fostering emotional resilience and spiritual growth. Relatively, Laissez-faire leadership demonstrates the strongest positive correlation (r = .172, p < .01), attributed to its emphasis on autonomy, which empowers members to develop self-awareness and independence. Autocratic leadership, though statistically significant (r = .122, p < .05), elicits mixed responses; while its structure can provide stability, its rigidity may hinder personal development. In contrast, qualitative data highlight servant leadership as transformative, emphasizing trust, mentorship, and spiritual maturity, despite its lack of significant quantitative correlation (r = .093, p > .05).

The qualitative strand revealed that the leadership styles of community superiors play a critical role in shaping the psycho-spiritual life skills of community members. Servant leadership fosters emotional well-being, spiritual growth, and interpersonal harmony by promoting inclusivity, open communication, and collaborative decision-making. Members feel valued and supported, which enables effective stress management, deeper self-awareness, and the development of strong communication and problem-solving skills. Superiors who demonstrate humility, actively listen, and offer constructive feedback inspire personal and collective growth.

Participants provided examples of superiors who ensured that everyone's voice was heard during community meetings. One sister remarked:

"I find that sister wants each person to speak… so it's challenging me… I have to talk… I'm free to speak it out" (FGP3, March 17, 2025).

Another participant emphasized the relief provided by her superior's willingness to listen:

"For me, her availability to listen to me gives me that space of expressing what I'm feeling or what I'm going through, so it reduces my stress" (FGP6, March 17, 2025).

Additionally, superiors who facilitated conflict resolution improved communication skills within the community. A participant shared:

"I once had an issue with another sister. Our superior got both of us to talk it out calmly. I learned how to listen first instead of reacting. Now I handle differences better" (FGP11, March 17, 2025).

Conversely, Authoritarian leadership styles hinder psycho-spiritual and personal development by fostering environments of stress, reduced autonomy, and feelings of being undervalued. Participants reported problematic strategies such as ambiguous feedback, lack of transparent dialogue, vague corrections, indirect communication, favoritism, and controlling attitudes. These practices stifled open communication, trust, and creativity, leaving members uncertain about their strengths and growth areas. Overbearing behavior, micromanagement, excessive monitoring, and rigidity further discouraged self-expression and decision-making, creating emotional barriers and suppressing shared ideas.

The consequences of these leadership approaches were profound, affecting both personal and communal well-being. Participants described feelings of frustration, brokenness, and emotional suppression, with younger members particularly vulnerable to withdrawal or superficial conformity out of fear of reprisal. Unclear feedback and a lack of support hindered self-awareness and conflict resolution, exacerbating distrust and discouragement. These findings underscore the need for empathetic and transparent leadership styles to foster trust, creativity, and holistic development within religious communities.

Participants discussed how the clarity and tone of feedback from their superiors significantly hindered their self-awareness. One sister recounted her frustration with vague corrections:

"She does not tell me which dimension… is it physical? Is it emotional? Or socially?" (FGP2, March 17, 2025).

Participant 4 observed that overly strict leadership stifled honest self-expression:

"Very strict superiors can make me hide parts of myself, preventing sincere self-expression" (P4, Individual Interview, March 9, 2025).

DISCUSSION

The study reveals that leadership styles profoundly influence interpersonal dynamics and the psycho-spiritual development of Religious sisters. Supportive leadership approaches, characterized by empathy, inclusivity, and participation, nurture environments conducive to emotional resilience, spiritual growth, and interpersonal competence. Conversely, authoritarian and ambiguous leadership styles present challenges, often resulting in diminished trust, emotional strain, and suppressed creativity.

Empathetic and participatory leadership emerged as transformative, fostering trust, self-expression, and personal growth. Democratic leadership, with its inclusive and collaborative nature, demonstrated a weak yet statistically significant positive correlation ($r = .131$, $p < .05$) with psycho-spiritual life skills, affirming its role in encouraging initiative and community engagement. Laissez-faire leadership exhibited the strongest positive correlation ($r = .172$, $p < .01$) among all styles, highlighting the empowering effect of autonomy on self-awareness and decision-making. Autocratic leadership also displayed a weak but significant positive correlation ($r = .122$, $p < .05$), suggesting that structure and clarity may benefit certain contexts, despite its commonly associated limitations. These findings emphasize the value of leadership styles that balance structure, flexibility, and relational sensitivity.

Servant leadership, widely recognized for its spiritual and relational benefits (Obi et al., 2021; Ruata & Tung, 2024), did not demonstrate a statistically significant correlation ($r = .093$, $p > .05$) with psycho-spiritual life skills in the quantitative analysis. However, qualitative insights consistently portray it as the most effective style, fostering stress management, decision-making, and spiritual depth. This divergence underscores the limitations of cross-sectional quantitative methods in capturing the indirect and long-term impacts of servant leadership.

Challenges posed by authoritarian leadership were evident, aligning with existing critiques in the literature (Manurung & Zuriati, 2020). While its structure may provide stability in decision-making or disciplinary contexts, its rigid nature often stifles creativity and self-expression. Ambiguous feedback, favoritism, and micromanagement further inhibit trust and growth, particularly among younger members.

The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings reveals a complementary relationship. Quantitative data provide statistical evidence, while qualitative insights enrich understanding by highlighting nuanced dynamics. Both approaches converge on the positive contributions of participatory leadership styles and the challenges posed by authoritarian approaches. They also highlight the role of autonomy, as reflected in the significant correlation of laissez-faire leadership and qualitative emphasis on independent decision-making. Divergences, particularly regarding servant leadership, suggest the need for further exploration through longitudinal and ethnographic studies.

Compared to existing literature, the findings align with studies emphasizing inclusive leadership's benefits (Shiundu, 2024; Zhang et al., 2023) and the spiritual alignment of servant leadership with Gospel values (Ruata & Tung, 2024; Shula et al., 2022). However, the study diverges in revealing the limited statistical impact of servant leadership within this context, contrasting with its broader recognition in faith-based and secular settings. Methodological distinctions further differentiate the study, with its mixed-methods approach providing a holistic perspective that bridges gaps in prior research.

The findings underscore the transformative role of adaptive, empathetic, and participatory leadership in fostering psycho-spiritual well-being. Effective leadership transcends rigid styles, requiring a context-sensitive blend of structure, empathy, and flexibility. By integrating Gospel-inspired servant leadership and participatory practices, leaders can create environments that support holistic personal and communal growth, reinforcing the spiritual vitality of religious communities.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the nuanced relationship between leadership styles and the psycho-spiritual life skills of women religious in Langata Constituency, Nairobi County, Kenya. Democratic leadership, characterized by inclusivity and collaboration, exhibited a weak but significant positive correlation with psycho-spiritual skills, fostering emotional resilience and spiritual growth. Laissez-faire leadership showed the strongest correlation due to its emphasis on autonomy, while autocratic leadership had mixed outcomes, offering stability but potentially hindering development. Qualitative data emphasized the transformative role of servant leadership, which nurtures trust, mentorship, and spiritual maturity, even though its quantitative correlation was not statistically significant. These findings emphasize the value of adaptive, context-sensitive leadership styles that balance structure, empathy, and collaboration, promoting both individual and communal well-being. The study affirms and extends Servant Leadership Theory and Social Cognitive Theory by integrating spiritual modeling, intrinsic motivation, and adaptive leadership practices suited to faith-based contexts.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY

For Religious Institutes:

- Develop leadership formation programs emphasizing empathy, participatory governance, and pastoral sensitivity.

- Offer mandatory training for new superiors on adaptive leadership, emotional intelligence, and communication skills.

- Create structured mentorship programs pairing experienced leaders with younger sisters.

- Promote inter-congregational collaboration for shared leadership training resources.

- Embed psycho-spiritual life skills training in initial and ongoing formation programs.

For Leadership Trainers and Educators:

- Include servant leadership principles like empathy, humility, and pastoral sensitivity in workshops.

- Integrate servant and democratic leadership training into leadership development programs.

- Design online courses and partner with theological institutes or secular organizations for ongoing development.

- Integrate intrinsic spirituality, relational skills, and spiritual modeling into leadership training.

- Include psycho-spiritual development outcomes in leadership evaluation criteria.

For Community Superiors:

- Conduct periodic leadership evaluations through anonymous feedback for accountability.

- Allocate resources for retreats, counseling, and skill-building workshops to support sisters' holistic development.

- Adopt leadership practices responsive to community size, cultural diversity, and stages of profession.

For Major Superiors:

- Use study findings to inform the selection and appointment of community leaders.

Recommendations for Practice

For Community Superiors:

- Adopt flexible leadership styles balancing authority with compassion.

- Prioritize participatory decision-making and inclusive governance to strengthen trust and communal identity.

- Undergo intercultural training to ensure inclusivity across diverse communication styles and expectations.

For Community Members:

- Participate in mentorship and small group initiatives for personalized guidance and growth.

- Engage in rotational leadership roles to build confidence and prepare for future responsibilities.

- Attend workshops on stress management and conflict resolution integrating spiritual and psychological tools.

For Formation Programs:

- Incorporate holistic leadership approaches combining faith-based practices with psychological insights.

- Organize periodic community councils to encourage democratic decision-making and leadership skill-building.

For Religious Institutes:

- Facilitate networking with broader communities to exchange best practices and enrich leadership strategies.

- Support shared leadership opportunities for temporarily professed sisters to enhance practical experience.

For Faith-Based Community Leaders:

- Practice servant leadership that balances humility, accountability, and participatory decision-making.

- Promote communal prayer and spiritual activities to build resilience and shared values.

- Foster environments that respect individual strengths while encouraging collective growth.

Recommendations for Future Research

For Researchers:

- Conduct longitudinal studies to assess the long-term effects of leadership styles on psycho-spiritual growth.

- Explore cross-cultural and inter-denominational leadership efficacy through comparative research.

- Investigate adaptive leadership's impact on psycho-spiritual outcomes in faith-based contexts.

For Religious Institutes:

- Support ethnographic and case studies on hybrid leadership approaches to identify best practices.

- Investigate the impact of servant leadership on spiritual well-being and psycho-spiritual competencies.

For Leadership Training Organizations:

- Study the interplay of cultural diversity and leadership effectiveness to enhance intercultural competence.

- Analyze the interaction between specific spiritual practices and leadership styles for specialized training programs.

By implementing these recommendations, leadership can be enhanced to nurture robust psycho-spiritual life skills within religious communities, supporting both individual and communal transformation to benefit the broader Church and society.

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Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to established ethical standards for research involving human subjects. Ethical approval was obtained the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI), Kenya, with the approval reference number-NACOSTI/P/25/416387). All participants provided informed consent after being fully briefed on the purpose, procedures, and confidentiality measures associated with the study. Efforts were made to ensure that participation was voluntary and that participants' privacy and confidentiality were protected throughout the research process.

Conflict of Interest: The author declares no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and publication of this article.

Data Availability: The data supporting the findings of this study are not publicly available due to ethical considerations and the sensitive nature of the research involving religious sisters. However, data can be made available upon reasonable request to the author, subject to appropriate permissions and ethical approvals.

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