



## Priestly philosophical formation and psychological well-being of catholic priesthood candidates at Queen of Apostles Philosophy Centre, Jinja, Uganda: A convergent parallel design.

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### Abstract

#### Background

This study was purposed to establish the relationship between priestly philosophical formation and psychological well-being of catholic priesthood candidates at Queen of Apostles Philosophy Centre, Jinja, Uganda.

#### Methodology

A convergent parallel design through qualitative and quantitative approaches was adopted. The findings were drawn from qualitative data collected through interviews with 12 formators and 56 seminarians who participated in the survey, as well as secondary data from reports and literature.

#### Results

The findings reveal mean ( $M = 2.4143$ ,  $SD = 1.40958$ ) a potential gap in the relational dynamics between formators and seminarians; ( $M = 2.3499$ ,  $SD = 1.29156$ ), formation activities may not be adequately tailored to foster a sense of belonging, practical preparation, or spiritual growth among seminarians; ( $M = 2.1643$ ,  $SD = 1.29274$ ) formation rules are perceived as overly restrictive, potentially undermining seminarians' psychological well-being and vocational development; ( $M = 3.7500$ ,  $SD = 1.32501$ ) urgent need to address the psychological challenges faced by seminarians in formation; ( $M = 3.9607$ ,  $SD = 1.22751$ ) seminarians' awareness of their psychological needs and their support for proactive strategies to address these needs. Formation activities, formation rules (FR), and psychological well-being (PW) reveal a strong negative correlation of  $r = -0.859$  and  $-0.883$ , which is statistically significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), as indicated by the p-value of 0.000. In other words, stricter formation activities and formation rules might be associated with lower levels of psychological well-being among the participants.

#### Conclusion

This study concludes that there is no statistically significant relationship between formators' attitude and psychological well-being, although there is a strong negative relationship between formation activities, formation rules, and psychological well-being.

#### Recommendation

The study recommends that seminary leadership and formators should provide continuous training in pastoral counseling, emotional intelligence, and mental health first aid.

**Keywords:** Priestly philosophical formation, Psychological well-being, Formators' attitude, Formation activities, Formation rules, Stress management, Emotional intelligence

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## Introduction

The psychological well-being of individuals in religious vocations, particularly Catholic priesthood candidates, has garnered increasing attention in both psychological and theological research. This interest is underscored by the unique challenges faced by these candidates, including the demands of their spiritual formation, the expectations of their future roles, and the psychological stresses associated with living a celibate lifestyle (Benson et al., 2019).

Priestly formation encompasses not only spiritual and theological education but also philosophical training, which aims to cultivate a holistic understanding of human existence, morality, and the nature of the divine (Doran, 2021). The philosophical aspects of priestly formation can significantly influence candidates' psychological well-being by providing them with frameworks for understanding their experiences, coping with stress, and fostering resilience (VanderWeele, 2017).

Research indicates that a strong philosophical foundation can enhance candidates' self-awareness, emotional intelligence, and interpersonal skills, which are vital for their future pastoral roles (Smith, 2018). Furthermore, the integration of philosophical inquiry into theological education may promote critical thinking and reflective practices, contributing positively to the mental health of priesthood candidates (Miller, 2020).

Globally, the psychological well-being of Catholic priesthood candidates has been influenced by various factors, including societal expectations, theological training, and the demands of celibacy. In the early 20th century, the Catholic Church began to recognize the importance of psychological health in the formation of priests, leading to the integration of psychological assessments into the selection process (Holland, 2016). The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) was pivotal in reshaping priestly formation, emphasizing holistic development, including psychological and philosophical dimensions (Pope Paul VI, 1965). This shift encouraged a more profound understanding of the interplay between philosophy, spirituality, and mental health.

In Europe and North America, the late 20th century saw increasing attention to the psychological well-being of clergy, particularly in light of scandals and crises within the Church. Studies indicated that inadequate psychological support could lead to burnout and mental health issues among priests (Sullivan, 2015). As a response, many seminaries began incorporating psychological training alongside philosophical education, recognizing that philosophical frameworks could provide candidates with

tools for coping with the stresses of the priesthood (Miller, 2020).

In Africa, the psychological well-being of priesthood candidates is shaped by cultural contexts and the unique challenges faced by the Church. The integration of indigenous philosophies into priestly formation has become increasingly important, as it allows candidates to reconcile their cultural identities with their spiritual callings (Mbiti, 2019). Research indicates that candidates who receive training that respects and incorporates their cultural backgrounds tend to exhibit higher levels of psychological well-being (Nwosu, 2020). Furthermore, the emphasis on community and relationality in many African cultures supports the development of emotional intelligence and resilience among candidates.

In Uganda, the psychological well-being of Catholic priesthood candidates is influenced by both local cultural practices and the broader challenges of societal change. The Catholic Church in Uganda has made strides in addressing the mental health needs of its clergy, particularly in the context of HIV/AIDS and other social issues (Kagimu, 2018). Philosophical formation in Ugandan seminaries often includes discussions on ethics and morality, which help candidates navigate the complexities of modern life while maintaining their spiritual commitments (Okwakol, 2021). Studies show that candidates who engage in philosophical reflection alongside their spiritual formation report higher levels of satisfaction and lower levels of stress (Mugisha, 2022). Hence, the need for this study to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on this topic.

At the contextual level, Queen of Apostles Philosophy Centre in Jinja is one of the institutions that provide philosophical formation to Catholic priesthood candidates (Queen of Apostles Philosophy Centre, 2022). The Centre provides a philosophical formation program that lasts for three years, in which Catholic priesthood candidates are equipped with adequate knowledge, skills, and values that will prepare them to become effective priests (Queen of Apostles Philosophy Centre, 2022). Despite the remarkable efforts the Centre makes to raise effective priests, there is a need for more research on the specific relationship between the Centre's priestly philosophical formation and the psychological well-being of its students. As a result, this study aimed to fill this gap by exploring the relationship between priestly philosophical formation and psychological well-being of catholic priesthood candidates at Queen of Apostles Philosophy Centre, Jinja, Uganda.



## Research hypothesis

H01: There is no statistically significant effect of formators' attitudes on the psychological well-being of catholic priesthood candidates at Queen of Apostles Philosophy Centre, Jinja, Uganda.

H02: There is no statistically significant effect of formation activities on the psychological well-being of catholic priesthood candidates at Queen of Apostles Philosophy Centre, Jinja, Uganda.

H03: There is no statistically significant relationship between formation rules and the psychological well-being of catholic priesthood candidates at Queen of Apostles Philosophy Centre, Jinja, Uganda.

## Materials and methods

### Research design

In this study, a convergent parallel design was utilized because it supports mixed methods to establish the relationship between priestly philosophical formation and the psychological well-being of catholic priesthood candidates at Queen of Apostles Philosophy Centre, Jinja, Uganda. This approach enabled the researcher to collect quantitative and qualitative data concurrently, saving time and resources (Creswell, 2012). A mixed methods design was applied. After both analyses were completed, the results were compared to draw overall conclusions. The combination of both qualitative and quantitative approaches in this study facilitated the gathering of richer and more detailed data on the phenomena being studied.

### Study setting

The study was carried out at Queen of Apostles Philosophy Centre, Jinja, Uganda. The Centre is located in the eastern region of the country and about 80 kilometers to the east of Kampala, the capital city of Uganda. The latitude and longitude of the study area are 0.4433° N and 33.2033° E, respectively. The study area is about 20 acres in area with a population of approximately 200-250 students and staff. The Centre is located in a quiet environment and is conducive to philosophical formation and other scholarly activities, which makes it a perfect area for this study. In addition, Jinja, Uganda, is a suitable location for this research due to

the following reasons: Queen of Apostles Philosophy Centre is one of the largest specialized centres for philosophical formation in Uganda, which makes it a representative sample of Catholic priesthood candidates in the country. Jinja is a strategic location, being the second-largest city in Uganda and a major hub for education and research. Generally, the geographical scope of this study was a focused and manageable area for data collection and analysis, and at the same time, it serves as a representative sample of Catholic priesthood candidates in Uganda.

### Study population

This study targeted two specific groups at Queen of Apostles Philosophy Centre, Jinja, Uganda, namely, the seminarians and the formators.

### Study sample

The sample size was determined using Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) table of sample size determination from a population of 100 participants and computed using the following formula:

$$S = \frac{NP(P)(1 - P)}{(NP - 1) \left(\frac{B}{C}\right)^2 + P(1 - P)}$$

Where  $S$  = Sample size

$NP$  = Population size

$P$  = Population proportion magnitude yielding the maximum possible sample size

$B$  = Sampling error which is 5% = 0.05

$C$  = Level of confidence at 95%. The standard of confidence used by most researchers is 1.960.

Thus,

$$S = \frac{100(0.5)(1 - 0.5)}{(100 - 1) \left(\frac{0.05}{1.960}\right)^2 + 0.5(1 - 0.5)}$$

$$S = \frac{100(0.5)(0.5)}{(99)(0.00065077) + 0.5(0.5)}$$

$$S = \frac{25}{0.06442623 + 0.25}$$

$$S = \frac{25}{0.31442623}$$

$$S = 80$$



**Table 1: Sampling frame**

Category of respondents	Population	Calculation	Sample	Sampling techniques
Seminarians	80	$\frac{80}{100} \times 80 = 64$	64	Simple Random Sampling
Formators	20	$\frac{20}{100} \times 80 = 16$	16	Purposive Sampling
Total	100		80	

*Source: Primary Data (2025)*

### Sampling techniques

The study adopted purposive sampling and simple random sampling techniques. Purposive sampling was used for the formators, whereas simple random sampling was used to select the seminarians, ensuring that each individual had an equal chance of being selected. These approaches helped in capturing the responses from the participants who have relevant knowledge and experiences, while at the same time ensuring that each sample is given an equal representation from the general population.

### Inclusion criteria

The study considered only participants who were enrolled as seminarians or formators at Queen of Apostles Philosophy Centre, Jinja, Uganda. Willingness of participants was considered to ensure voluntary agreement to participate in the study and provide informed consent. For formators, a minimum of two years of experience in philosophical formation was required to ensure they have adequate knowledge and insights into the subject matter.

### Exclusion criteria

Individuals who were not currently enrolled at the Queen of Apostles Philosophy Centre were excluded from the study. Also, formators with less than 2 years of experience in philosophical formation were excluded to ensure that only those with sufficient background knowledge are included.

### Efforts to address potential sources of bias

Sampling selection bias was reduced by using simple random sampling for selecting seminarians to ensure that every individual had an equal chance of being included, and purposive sampling was utilized for formators to ensure that they had relevant knowledge and experience. This enhanced the validity of the study without introducing bias in selection. Also, the questionnaire was piloted before the

main study, and every ambiguity was clarified, and clarity was ensured before the main study. Again, the adoption of mixed method approaches reduced the bias of single methods and supported the triangulation of results. Anonymity and confidentiality of all participants' responses were maintained throughout the study, which encouraged honest and unbiased responses.

### Data collection methods and instruments

This study utilized a survey for quantitative data and an in-depth interview for qualitative data collection methods. These methods were used to gather data from the participants while ensuring that the process for data gathering was structured and objective in nature.

### Questionnaire

Seminarians answered the questions that were given. This captured written responses. The self-administered questionnaire was arranged into sections for the respondents to rate their responses with a Likert scale of 1 = strongly disagree, 2 disagree, 3 undecided, 4 agree, 5 = strongly agree. This provided an important result about the relationship between initial philosophical formation and psychological well-being of the candidates of Catholic Priesthood at the Centre of study, Queen of Apostles Philosophy Centre, Jinja, Uganda.

### Interviews

The study also employs an interview guide to collect qualitative data from the formators at Queen of Apostles Philosophy Centre, Jinja, Uganda. The interview guide was open-ended questions structured to address matters about priestly philosophical formation and psychological well-being of the candidates of the Catholic priesthood in Queen of Apostles Philosophy Centre, Jinja, Uganda. The information obtained here augmented the information



derived from the questionnaires and enhanced the understanding of the research topic.

## Data quality control

### Validity

To ensure validity, the Content Validity Ratio (CVR) or index was computed by subjecting the questionnaire to expert judgment. Content experts evaluated the questionnaire based on their experience, and the Content Validity Index (CVI) was computed using the following formula:

$$CVI = \frac{\text{Number of valid items}}{\text{Total number of items}}$$

$$CVI = \frac{25}{27}$$

**Table 2: Reliability statistics**

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.900	25

Source: Field data (2025)

The test indicated that Cronbach's alpha range is at  $\alpha = 0.900$ . This means a high level of internal consistency for the scale with this specific study instrument. A Cronbach's alpha score of  $\geq 0.60$  is generally considered reliable. A high Alpha value indicates high reliability, confirming that the questionnaire consistently measured what it was supposed to measure.

## Procedure for data collection

Following proposal approval, an approval letter was issued by both the School of Graduate Studies of the first and third researcher and the rector of the Queen of the Apostles Philosophical Center, Jinja, permitting the study to be carried out.

## Data analysis

The qualitative data collected were thoroughly analyzed and followed a systematic approach of analysis, particularly using thematic analysis. This entails a search for themes within the data, using an open coding approach to identify patterns and meanings. The analysis process involved labeling and categorizing the data into themes that were in line with the research objectives. This enabled the study to uncover rich insights and meaningful themes. In this respect,

$$CVI = 0.93$$

This instrument was valid with a high positive validity of 0.93, which is an acceptable threshold. Therefore, this instrument was valid for the study. This process made it easier to ensure that the items in the questionnaires accurately measure the intended concept, making the results of the study credible.

## Reliability

To establish reliability, a pilot test was conducted, and the questionnaires were pre-tested. Using the SPSS program, the Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha (Alpha) was calculated to determine the internal consistency and reliability of the questionnaires.

the study adopted this approach with a view to discovering the underlying and possibly more refined factors that constitute the phenomena of interest and obtaining views helpful in designing and implementing appropriate strategies and interventions.

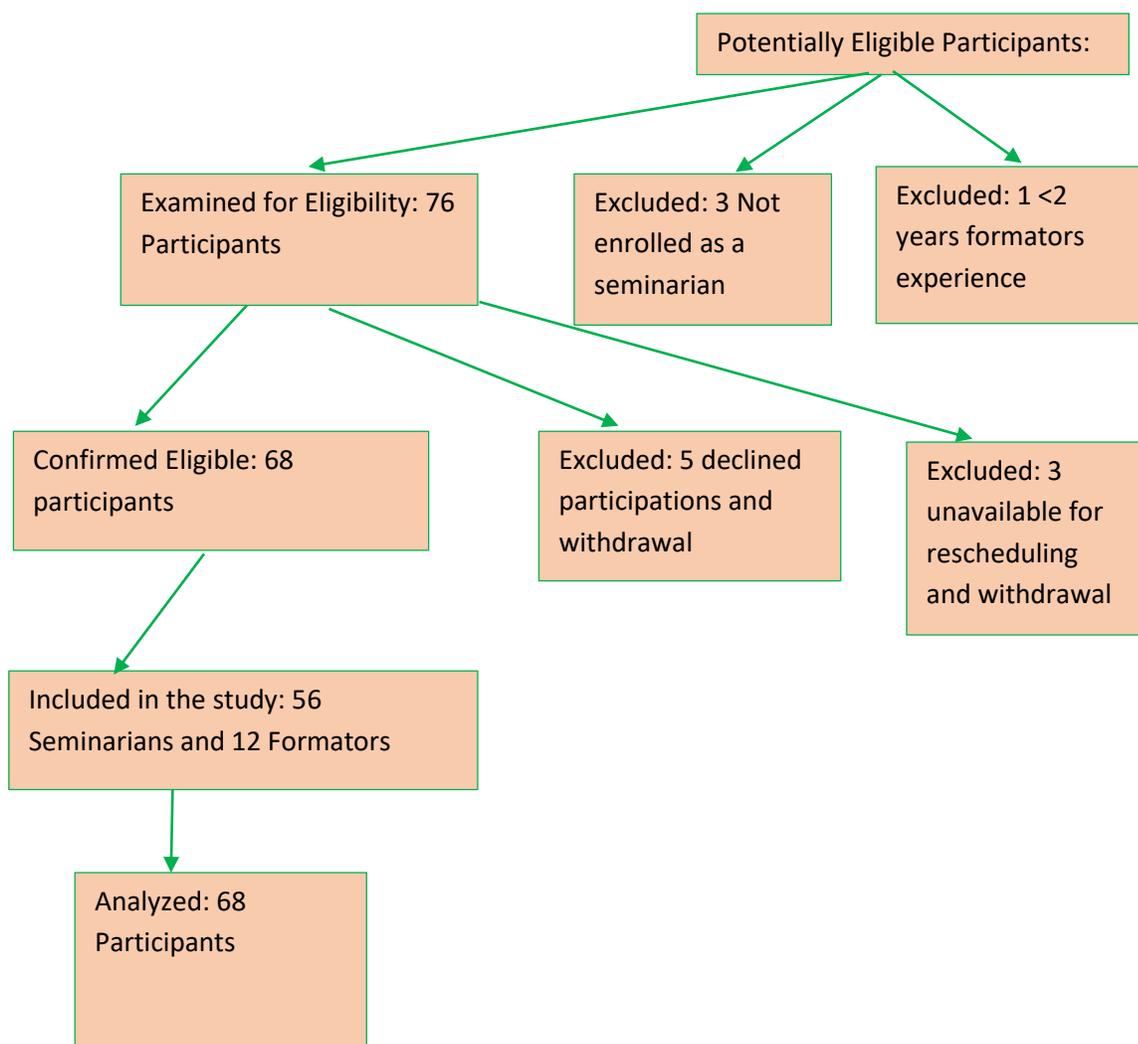
The quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and inferential methods, including correlation and regression analysis, which were used to test the hypothesis. The collected data were presented clearly and concisely, making use of frequency, mean, and standard deviation tabulation. This analysis was done with SPSS version 26.

## Research ethical considerations

Research ethical approval was issued on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of December 2024 by the University of Kisubi committee from the school of graduate studies and research. In this study, participants' rights were respected, and informed consent was obtained; ensured sensitive and respectful questioning was ensured; respondents' privacy and dignity were promised and observed; and potential harm or exploitation was ensured, ensuring voluntary participation. Such a commitment to ethical research fostered optimum cooperation, respect for the principle of autonomy, and the dignity of all the participants.

## Findings

### Participant flow



**Fig. 1: Participant flow**

The quantitative data were analyzed from 56 seminarians, while the qualitative data were collected through interviews and analyzed from 12 formators.



## Response rate

**Table 3: Return rate**

Methods	Category	Actual sample	Participation Frequency	Percentage returns
Quantitative	Seminarians	64	56	88
Qualitative	Formators	16	12	75
Total		80	68	82

**Source:** Field data (2025)

This table shows the response rates for two different research methods, quantitative and qualitative, categorized by participant type. The quantitative method involved 64 seminarians, with 56 eligible participants, yielding 88% return rate. The qualitative method involved 16 formators, with 12 eligible participants, resulting in a 75% return rate.

Overall, out of 80 participants, 68 responded, giving a total return rate of 82%.

## Demographic analysis

**Table 4: Participants' age**

Age	Frequency	Percentage
18-24 years	36	64
25-30 years	20	36
31-35 years	0	0
36-40 years	0	0
41++ years	0	0

**Source:** Field data (2025)

This table provides a breakdown of participant responses by age group. The majority of respondents (64%) were in the 18–24 age group, followed by 36% in the 25–30 range. No responses were recorded from participants aged 31 and above, suggesting that the participant pool was predominantly younger individuals.

The study analyzed descriptive data based on the 5-point Likert Scale of 1 strongly disagree, 2 disagree, 3 undecided, 4 agree, and 5 strongly agree. The mean scores were rated based on 3 as neutral, below 3 as disagreed, and above 3 as agreed with the statements. Finally, the average mean score was calculated by adding up the total mean and dividing by the number of counts in the battery.

## Descriptive analysis

**Table 5: Descriptive ratings on formators' attitudes**

Item	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
My formators care much about my progress and show concern for my well-being	56	1.8571	1.34067
My formators always encourage me to work hard towards achieving my dream	56	3.2321	1.47699
My formators are easy to approach and always willing to listen to my issues	56	2.2321	1.36170
My formators encourage positive and supportive community life amongst seminarians	56	2.4286	1.66086
My formators always recognize my capacity to make my own choices in my vocation to the priesthood	56	2.3214	1.20766
Avg. Mean		2.4143	1.40958

**Source:** Field data (2025)



The descriptive statistics for the construct of formators' attitude reveal varied perceptions among seminarians regarding the support and approachability of their formators. The item with the lowest mean score ( $M = 1.8571$ ,  $SD = 1.34067$ ) indicates that seminarians generally disagree that their formators care much about their progress and show concern for their well-being. This low mean, coupled with a relatively high standard deviation, suggests a lack of consensus among respondents, with some seminarians perceiving a significant lack of care from formators. This finding is concerning, as formators' concern for seminarians' well-being is critical for fostering a supportive formation environment conducive to vocational discernment and personal growth.

In contrast, the highest mean score ( $M = 3.2321$ ) was observed for the item stating that formators encourage seminarians to work hard toward achieving their dreams. This mean, which is slightly above the neutral point (3), suggests a moderate level of agreement that formators provide motivational support. However, the high standard deviation indicates variability in responses, implying that while some seminarians feel encouraged, others may perceive less encouragement, potentially due to differences in formators' approaches or individual seminarians' expectations.

The rest of the variables, that is, formators' approachability ( $M = 2.2321$ ), encouragement of community life ( $M = 2.4286$ ), and recognition of seminarians' autonomy in vocational choices ( $M = 2.3214$ ,  $SD = 1.20766$ ), all have mean scores below the neutral point, indicating a tendency toward disagreement. The high standard deviation for the community life item ( $SD = 1.66086$ ) suggests significant variability, possibly reflecting inconsistent experiences across different formation houses or formators. These findings suggest that seminarians perceive formators as somewhat distant, less approachable, and not fully supportive of community life or individual autonomy.

Overall, the average mean ( $M = 2.4143$ ,  $SD = 1.40958$ ), the results highlight a potential gap in the relational dynamics between formators and seminarians. The low mean scores, particularly for care and concern, suggest that formators may need to enhance their pastoral and relational skills to better support seminarians' holistic development. The variability in responses underscores the need for further qualitative investigation to understand the factors contributing to these perceptions, such as formators' training, institutional culture, or individual seminarians' expectations.

From both the qualitative interviews and quantitative data, it became clear that the attitudes of formators play a significant role in shaping the mental and emotional states of seminarians.

Formators consistently emphasized the importance of empathy, understanding, and personal attention when working with seminarians. In the interviews, formators noted that a positive, supportive attitude helps create a sense of security and trust, which is essential for the psychological well-being of seminarians. They also mentioned that a formator who demonstrates a genuine concern for the emotional and psychological welfare of the candidates helps alleviate feelings of isolation, stress, and anxiety.

This underscores the significance of formators' involvement in the emotional and psychological development of seminarians. One formator described how empathetic engagement and openness create an atmosphere where seminarians feel comfortable...

*"Empathy will help them in voicing concerns, especially when they face personal difficulties that might affect their academic or spiritual life." (Formator 1)*

Formators who demonstrated a rigid, authoritative attitude, on the other hand, were often perceived as less approachable, and this negatively impacted the candidates' psychological well-being. Many seminarians expressed feeling disconnected from formators who lacked compassion or failed to acknowledge their emotional needs. The qualitative data clearly indicated that seminarians who felt supported and understood by their formators were better able to cope with the pressures of their formation journey.

The findings from this objective align with existing literature on the importance of positive teacher-student relationships in educational settings. Numerous studies have found that students, including seminarians, thrive in environments where they feel cared for and supported by their instructors. This emotional support acts as a buffer against stress, enhances students' motivation, and fosters a sense of belonging within the academic community.

For seminarians, this support is even more critical, given the unique challenges they face during their formation period. The transition to religious life involves a rigorous intellectual and spiritual journey that can often be overwhelming. The attitudes of formators, therefore, play a central role in mitigating these challenges and fostering a healthy emotional and psychological environment. As such, the data suggests that formators should adopt a balanced approach, combining both authority and empathy, to promote seminarians' well-being.

**Table 6: Descriptive rating of formation activities**

Item	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Group prayers, recreation, and other community life activities create some sense of belonging and happiness among us seminarians	56	2.1607	1.27603
The subjects taught in the formation house are appropriate and beneficial in preparing me for my future role as a priest	56	2.3393	1.25447
The pastoral exposure and the outreach program are most beneficial because they provide me with practical ways of serving others	56	2.3214	1.19251
Spiritual exercises such as personal reflections, retreats, and recollections provided by the formation house are of great help	56	2.3571	1.45763
I feel very comfortable with the formation activities that take place in the formation house	56	2.5714	1.27717
Avg. Mean		2.3499	1.29156

**Source:** Field data (2025)

The descriptive statistics for Formation Activities indicate that seminarians have mixed perceptions of the activities provided in the formation house, with all mean scores falling below or slightly above the neutral point (3). The lowest mean score ( $M = 2.1607$ ,  $SD = 1.27603$ ) was observed for the item stating that group prayers, recreation, and community life activities create a sense of belonging and happiness. This suggests that seminarians generally disagree that these activities foster a strong sense of community, which is critical for their emotional and psychological well-being. The standard deviation indicates moderate variability, suggesting that some seminarians may experience these activities more positively than others, possibly due to differences in the design or implementation of community activities across formation houses.

The highest mean score ( $M = 2.5714$ ,  $SD = 1.27717$ ) was recorded for comfort with formation activities, indicating a slight tendency toward neutrality. This suggests that while seminarians do not strongly endorse the formation activities, they also do not strongly oppose them. The moderate standard deviation reflects some diversity in experiences, which may be influenced by individual preferences or the specific activities offered.

The items related to the appropriateness of subjects ( $M = 2.3393$ ,  $SD = 1.25447$ ), the benefits of pastoral exposure ( $M = 2.3214$ ,  $SD = 1.19251$ ), and the helpfulness of spiritual exercises ( $M = 2.3571$ ,  $SD = 1.45763$ ) also show mean scores below the neutral point, indicating a general perception that these activities are not fully meeting seminarians' needs. The relatively high standard deviation for spiritual exercises suggests significant variability, possibly reflecting differences in the quality or frequency of these activities or individual seminarians' spiritual inclinations.

From the average scores ( $M = 2.3499$ ,  $SD = 1.29156$ ), these findings suggest that the formation activities may not be

adequately tailored to foster a sense of belonging, practical preparation, or spiritual growth among seminarians. The low mean scores highlight a need for reevaluating the design and delivery of these activities to ensure they align with seminarians' vocational and personal development goals. The variability in responses warrants further investigation into the factors influencing these perceptions, such as the relevance of the curriculum, the structure of community activities, or the availability of pastoral opportunities.

Formators highlighted several key activities that they believed were vital in supporting seminarians' psychological well-being. These included "group prayers and spiritual exercises," which were cited as essential for fostering a sense of community and offering spiritual solace. Regular group prayers, retreats, and reflections were mentioned as providing seminarians with opportunities to reflect on their spiritual journey, which, in turn, helped them process their emotions and experiences.

Communal living was often seen as both a challenge and a source of strength. One formator added:

*"While some seminarians initially found communal living difficult, many later expressed appreciation for the sense of solidarity it provided."* (Formator, 2)

Being part of a community allowed seminarians to share their struggles and successes, reducing feelings of isolation. Several formators and seminarians spoke highly of the pastoral exposure programs, where seminarians engage with local communities in outreach activities. These activities not only provided practical experience in the field but also gave seminarians a sense of purpose and fulfillment as they applied their philosophical and theological learnings in real-world contexts.

Comparatively, in terms of quantitative findings, responses to the statement, "Formation activities such as group prayers and spiritual exercises help in maintaining my psychological well-being," were overwhelmingly negative, with a low

percentage of participants indicating strong agreement. The sense of belonging generated by these activities, as echoed by the formators, was frequently mentioned as a key factor in promoting mental well-being. To some extent, results from the seminarians' survey reported that participation in group activities fostered strong bonds among them, which helped to alleviate feelings of loneliness and stress.

The importance of formation activities in promoting psychological well-being is well-documented in the literature on spiritual formation and religious education. Group prayers, spiritual exercises, and community life contribute to seminarians' sense of belonging, spiritual growth, and emotional support. These activities allow seminarians to process their personal challenges in a safe

and supportive environment, enhancing their mental resilience.

Pastoral exposure also plays a significant role in maintaining psychological well-being, as it gives seminarians a sense of purpose and achievement. The opportunity to engage in meaningful service work helps seminarians connect their formation to real-life applications, which can provide both emotional fulfillment and professional development. Moreover, communal living offers a space for seminarians to support one another emotionally, which is critical in combating feelings of loneliness and isolation. The collaborative nature of these activities, coupled with the shared goals of spiritual and intellectual growth, fosters a sense of solidarity among seminarians, making them more resilient to stress and adversity.

**Table 7: Descriptive rating on formation rules**

Item	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Strict schedules and the structure of our formation do not make me feel burned out	56	2.0357	1.33436
Having rules of limited personal expression does not discourage me from open dialogue	56	2.1071	1.13904
Excessive pressure to excel academically is not overwhelming, potentially not compromising my mental health and well-being	56	2.4107	1.44947
Strict rules regarding behavior do not create in me an environment of fear or anxiety, but rather growth and learning	56	2.3393	1.35213
The formation rules on mandatory participation without a forum for my personal preference do not make me resentful	56	1.9286	1.18869
<b>Avg. Mean</b>		<b>2.1643</b>	<b>1.29274</b>

**Source:** Field data (2025)

The descriptive statistics for Formation Rules reveal that seminarians generally perceive the rules and structures of the formation process as challenging, with all mean scores falling below the neutral point (3). The lowest mean score ( $M = 1.9286$ ,  $SD = 1.18869$ ) was observed for the item stating that mandatory participation without a forum for personal preference does not cause resentment. This strong disagreement suggests that seminarians feel restricted by the lack of opportunities to express their preferences, which may hinder their sense of agency and engagement in the formation process. The moderate standard deviation indicates some variability, possibly reflecting differences in how strictly rules are enforced across formation houses.

The highest mean score ( $M = 2.4107$ ,  $SD = 1.44947$ ) was recorded for the item stating that academic pressure is not overwhelming or compromising mental health. While this score is still below neutral, it suggests a slightly more neutral perception compared to other items. The high standard deviation indicates significant variability, which may reflect

differences in academic expectations or individual seminarians' coping mechanisms.

The remaining items, strict schedules not causing burnout ( $M = 2.0357$ ,  $SD = 1.33436$ ), rules of limited expression not discouraging dialogue ( $M = 2.1071$ ,  $SD = 1.13904$ ), and behavioral rules not creating fear or anxiety ( $M = 2.3393$ ,  $SD = 1.35213$ ) also show mean scores indicating disagreement. These findings suggest that the strict rules and structures of the formation process may contribute to feelings of burnout, restricted expression, and anxiety among seminarians.

Overall, average scores ( $M = 2.1643$ ,  $SD = 1.29274$ ) the results indicate that the formation rules are perceived as overly restrictive, potentially undermining seminarians' psychological well-being and vocational development. The low mean scores and moderate to high standard deviations highlight the need for a more flexible and participatory approach to rule-setting in formation houses. These findings underscore the importance of balancing discipline

with opportunities for personal expression and dialogue to foster a growth-oriented environment.

Qualitative results showed that formation rules at Queen of Apostles Philosophy Centre include strict schedules, limited personal expression, and mandatory participation in various religious and academic activities.

The strictness of formation rules was a recurring theme in the interviews. One of the formators stated:

*“These rules were designed to instill discipline, focus, and order in seminarians’ lives.” (Formator 3)*

However, formators were also conscious of the need to balance structure with flexibility. While the rules were seen as beneficial in maintaining order and ensuring that seminarians adhered to their formation schedules, some seminarians expressed concerns about feeling overly restricted by the rules, which could contribute to stress, anxiety, and resentment.

The quantitative data revealed that a significant portion of seminarians felt that the formation rules sometimes created an environment of anxiety. Responses to the statement, "Strict rules regarding behavior do not create in me an environment of fear or anxiety, but rather growth and

learning," showed mixed results, with a substantial number of seminarians indicating disagreement. This suggests that while some seminarians accepted the rules as a necessary part of their formation, others found them to be a source of emotional strain.

On the one hand, they provide structure and help seminarians focus on their intellectual and spiritual growth. On the other hand, excessive rigidity can lead to feelings of oppression and anxiety. This finding supports existing research on the importance of balancing discipline with personal freedom in educational settings. When rules are perceived as overly controlling, they can contribute to emotional distress, whereas rules that are framed as part of the formation process can enhance feelings of safety and purpose.

The key to achieving this balance lies in ensuring that seminarians understand the purpose behind the rules and feel that they are part of the formation process. When rules are applied with empathy and flexibility, they can enhance the candidates’ emotional well-being by fostering a sense of responsibility and self-discipline without causing undue stress.

**Table 8: Descriptive rating on psychological well-being**

Item	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Studies and the sometimes formation is stressful, making me anxious and stressed, so I don't want to fail	56	3.4286	1.46296
Strict community life and rules can make me feel frustrated and confined	56	3.8571	1.39386
Sometimes feelings of loneliness make me break emotionally and feel isolated	56	3.8214	1.23740
When I get issues, I fear sharing so that it doesn't affect my vocation, and it makes me unhappy and dissatisfied	56	3.8393	1.21770
Living with different people is difficult, creating emotional unrest and intolerable acts that make me feel suffocated and disappointed	56	3.8036	1.31315
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>3.7500</b>	<b>1.32501</b>

**Source:** Field data (2025)

The descriptive statistics for psychological well-being indicate significant challenges faced by seminarians, with all mean scores above the neutral point (3), suggesting agreement that the formation environment negatively impacts their mental health. The highest mean score (M = 3.8571, SD = 1.39386) was observed for the item stating that strict community life and rules make seminarians feel frustrated and confined. This strong agreement highlights the restrictive nature of the formation environment, which may contribute to feelings of entrapment and reduced psychological well-being. The high standard deviation suggests variability, possibly reflecting differences in individual resilience or the intensity of community life across formation houses.

The lowest mean score (M = 3.4286, SD = 1.46296), while still above neutral, was recorded for the item stating that studies and formation cause stress and anxiety due to fear of failure. This indicates that academic and formation pressures are significant stressors for seminarians. The high standard deviation suggests diverse experiences, possibly influenced by individual academic abilities or the rigor of the curriculum.

The other variables, feelings of loneliness leading to emotional breakdown and isolation (M = 3.8214, SD = 1.23740), fear of sharing issues due to vocational concerns (M = 3.8393, SD = 1.21770), and difficulties living with others causing emotional unrest (M = 3.8036, SD = 1.31315), also show mean scores indicating agreement. These findings suggest that seminarians experience

significant emotional and psychological challenges, including loneliness, fear of judgment, and interpersonal difficulties, which may undermine their well-being and vocational discernment.

Average scores ( $M = 3.7500$ ,  $SD = 1.32501$ ) underscore the urgent need to address the psychological challenges faced by seminarians in formation. The high mean scores and moderate to high standard deviations highlight the pervasive

nature of these issues and the variability in experiences, which may be influenced by individual differences, formation house cultures, or support systems. The findings call for targeted interventions to promote mental health, such as counseling services, peer support groups, and more open communication channels within the formation environment.

**Table 9: Descriptive rating of effective strategies**

Item	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Regular psychological check-ups on the priesthood candidates can help tackle their psychological problems early enough	56	4.1964	1.16650
Educating the priesthood candidates on stress and anger management, as well as emotional intelligence, is essential for their psychological well-being	56	4.0357	1.22050
Effective community life activities help in maintaining the psychological well-being of the priesthood candidates	56	3.8750	1.32202
Training the students on self-awareness and healthy relationships is important for their psychological well-being	56	3.8750	1.25136
Collaboration between formators and mental health experts can be very useful in enhancing the psychological well-being of the priesthood candidates	56	3.8214	1.17716
Avg. Mean		3.9607	1.22751

**Source:** Field data (2025)

The descriptive statistics on effective strategies reveal strong support among seminarians for interventions aimed at improving their psychological well-being, with all mean scores above the neutral point (3). The highest mean score ( $M = 4.1964$ ,  $SD = 1.16650$ ) was observed for the item advocating regular psychological check-ups to address psychological problems early. This strong agreement underscores seminarians' recognition of the need for proactive mental health support within the formation process. The moderate standard deviation suggests a relatively high level of consensus, indicating that this strategy is widely endorsed.

The item on educating seminarians about stress and anger management and emotional intelligence also received strong support ( $M = 4.0357$ ,  $SD = 1.22050$ ), suggesting that seminarians value skills-based training to enhance their emotional resilience. The moderate standard deviation indicates some variability, possibly reflecting differences in seminarians' prior exposure to such training or their perceived need for it.

The items on effective community life activities ( $M = 3.8750$ ,  $SD = 1.32202$ ), training in self-awareness and healthy relationships ( $M = 3.8750$ ,  $SD = 1.25136$ ), and collaboration between formators and mental health experts ( $M = 3.8214$ ,  $SD = 1.17716$ ) also show mean scores indicating agreement, though slightly lower than the top two items. These findings suggest that seminarians see value in

holistic approaches that combine community-building, personal development, and professional mental health support. The moderate to high standard deviations indicate variability, which may reflect differences in seminarians' experiences of community life or access to mental health resources.

Overall, average scores ( $M = 3.9607$ ,  $SD = 1.22751$ ). The high mean scores for this construct highlight seminarians' awareness of their psychological needs and their support for proactive strategies to address these needs. The findings suggest that formation houses should prioritize mental health interventions, such as regular psychological assessments, skills-based training, and collaboration with mental health professionals, to support seminarians' well-being and vocational development. The variability in responses underscores the need for tailored interventions that account for individual and institutional differences.

Formators and seminarians proposed several strategies to improve the psychological well-being of seminarians. These included psychological counseling, which many formators suggested as a way to help seminarians tackle their personal issues and receive professional guidance on managing stress, anxiety, and other emotional challenges. Several participants highlighted the importance of teaching seminarians stress management techniques. Providing workshops or training on how to cope with academic and spiritual pressures could empower seminarians to better



manage their emotions and maintain a healthy balance between their intellectual and emotional well-being. Some formators emphasized the importance of creating formal peer support systems, where seminarians could share their experiences and offer mutual support. These programs could foster a deeper sense of community and emotional resilience. The strategies identified in this study align with best practices for supporting the psychological well-being of individuals in demanding academic or religious environments. Psychological counseling is particularly important in religious formation contexts, where seminarians may struggle with personal doubts, spiritual crises, or emotional challenges. By providing access to professional counseling, the institution can help seminarians address these issues in a constructive and healthy manner. Stress management workshops would also be an effective addition to the formation program. These workshops could

provide seminarians with practical tools for managing their emotions, dealing with academic pressures, and balancing their spiritual lives. Peer support programs are another valuable strategy, as they encourage seminarians to lean on each other for emotional support, reducing feelings of isolation and fostering a sense of community.

### Inferential analysis

Pearson correlation coefficient was run in order to determine if there was a statistically significant relationship between the variables of formators' attitude, formation activities, formation rules, and the dependent variable of psychological wellbeing. The results of the null hypothesis were recorded as shown in table 10.

**Table 10: Correlation between Formation Attitude (FAT) and Psychological Well-being**

Correlations		FAT	PW
FAT	Pearson Correlation	1	-.114
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.403
	N	56	56
PW	Pearson Correlation	-.114	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.403	
	N	56	56

Source: Field data (2025)

The correlation analysis between Formators Attitude (FAT) and Psychological Wellbeing (PW) reveals no correlation of -0.114, which is statistically insignificant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), as indicated by the p-value of 0.403.

Negative correlation (-0.114): This suggests that Formators Attitude (FAT) does not affect Psychological Wellbeing (PW).

Statistical significance (p = 0.403): The p-value is > 0.01, indicating that there is no statistically significant effect between Formators' Attitude and Psychological Wellbeing. Thus, the hypothesis was retained, and the finding rejected, meaning there is no statistically significant effect between the formator's attitude and psychological well-being.

**Table 11: Correlation between Formation Activities (FAC) and Psychological Well-being**

Correlations		FAC	PW
FAC	Pearson Correlation	1	-.859**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	56	56
PW	Pearson Correlation	-.859**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	56	56

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Field data (2025)

The correlation analysis between formation activities (FAC) and psychological well-being (PW) reveals a strong negative correlation of -0.859, which is statistically significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), as indicated by the p-value of 0.000.

Negative correlation (-0.859): This suggests that as formation activities (FAC) increase, psychological well-being (PW) tends to decrease. In other words, stricter

formation activities might be associated with lower levels of psychological well-being among the participants.

Statistical significance ( $p = 0.000$ ): The p-value is less than 0.01, indicating that the correlation observed is highly unlikely to have occurred by chance, and there is a strong inverse effect between formation activities and psychological well-being. Thus, the hypothesis was rejected.

**Table 12: Correlation between Formation Rules (FR) and Psychological Wellbeing (PW)**

Correlations		FR	PW
FR	Pearson Correlation	1	-.883**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	56	56
PW	Pearson Correlation	-.883**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	56	56

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

**Source:** Field data (2025)

The correlation analysis between formation rules (FR) and psychological well-being (PW) reveals a strong negative correlation of -0.883, which is statistically significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), as indicated by the p-value of 0.000.

Negative correlation (-0.883): This suggests that as formation rules (FR) increase, psychological well-being (PW) tends to decrease. In other words, stricter formation rules might be associated with lower levels of psychological well-being among the participants.

Statistical significance ( $p = 0.000$ ): The p-value is less than 0.01, indicating that the correlation observed is highly unlikely to have occurred by chance, and there is a strong inverse relationship between formation rules and psychological well-being. Hence, the hypothesis was rejected, and findings retained that there is a statistically negative association between formation rules and psychological well-being.

**Table 13: Regression analysis**

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R-Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.921 <sup>a</sup>	.847	.839	.24099

a. Predictors: (Constant), *FAT*=Formation Attitude, *FAC*= Formation Activities, *FR*= Formation Rules

**Source:** Field data (2025)

The model summary presents several measures of the goodness of fit for the regression model with the dependent variable (psychological wellbeing) and 3 independent variables: formators' attitude (FAT), formation activities (FAC), and formation rules (FR). The following is a brief interpretation of the model summary:

Therefore, the adjusted R-square for this model is 0.839, which means that the 3 predictor variables collectively explain 83.9% of the variation in psychological wellbeing, adjusted for the number of predictors in the model. This indicates that the model is a good fit.

**Table 14: ANOVA<sup>a</sup>**

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	16.779	3	5.593	96.304	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	3.020	52	.058		
	Total	19.799	55			

a. Dependent Variable: Psychological Well-being

b. Predictors: (Constant), *FAT=Formation Attitude*, *FAC= Formation Activities*, *FR= Formation Rules*

**Source:** Field data (2025)

### Interpretation of ANOVA results

The analysis of variance (ANOVA) table provides information on the relationship between the dependent variable, psychological well-being (PW), and the independent predictors: formators' attitude (FAT), formation activities (FAC), and formation rules (FR).

Regression Sum of Squares = 16.779: This represents the variation explained by the independent variables (FAT, FAC, FR) in predicting Psychological Wellbeing (PW).

F-value = 96.304: This is the ratio of the mean square of the regression to the mean square of the residual. A higher F-

value suggests that the model explains a significant amount of the variation in psychological well-being (PW).

Significance (Sig.) = 0.000: This p-value is less than 0.01, indicating that the regression model is statistically significant, and at least one of the predictors (FAT, FAC, FR) significantly contributes to explaining the variation in psychological wellbeing (PW).

The ANOVA results suggest that the model, including formators' attitude (FAT), formation activities (FAC), and formation rules (FR), is a statistically significant predictor of psychological well-being (PW). The independent variables combined explain a large portion of the variation in PW, and the model is highly significant.

**Table 15: Coefficients table**

Coefficients <sup>a</sup>		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
Model		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	5.996	.192		31.288	.000
	Formators attitude	-.046	.064	-.040	-.710	.481
	Formation Activities	-.395	.091	-.408	-4.340	.000
	Formation Rules	-.559	.093	-.558	-6.039	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Psychological Well-being

**Source:** Field data (2025)

### Interpretation of coefficients

The coefficients table provides information about the relationship between the independent variables (formators' attitude (FAT), formation activities (FAC), formation rules (FR) and the dependent variable psychological wellbeing (PW).

Constant (Intercept): The constant value is 5.996, which represents the baseline level of Psychological Wellbeing (PW) when all the predictors (FAT, FAC, FR) are zero. The t-value of 31.288 is significant (p = 0.000), indicating the constant is significantly different from zero.

### Formators Attitude (FAT)

Unstandardized Coefficient (B) = -0.046: This suggests that for each one-unit increase in formators' attitude (FAT), psychological well-being (PW) increases by -0.046 units.

Standardized Coefficient (Beta) = -0.040: This is the effect of FAT in standardized terms, indicating no significant effect.

t-value = -0.710, p = 0.481: The p-value is greater than 0.05, indicating that Formators Attitude (FAT) is not statistically significant in predicting psychological wellbeing (PW).

### Formation Activities (FAC)

Unstandardized Coefficient (B) = -0.395: This suggests that for each one-unit increase in formation activities (FAC), psychological well-being (PW) decreases by 0.395 units.

Standardized Coefficient (Beta) = -0.408: This indicates a moderate negative effect of formation activities (FAC) on psychological well-being (PW).

t-value = -4.340, p = 0.000: The p-value is less than 0.01, indicating that formation activities (FAC) are statistically significant in predicting psychological well-being (PW).

### Formation Rules (FR)

Unstandardized Coefficient (B) = -0.559: This suggests that for each one-unit increase in formation rules (FR), psychological well-being (PW) decreases by 0.559 units.

Standardized Coefficient (Beta) = -0.558: This indicates a strong negative effect of formation rules (FR) on psychological well-being (PW).

t-value = -6.039, p = 0.000: The p-value is less than 0.01, indicating that formation rules (FR) are statistically significant in predicting psychological well-being (PW).

Formation activities (FAC) and Formation Rules (FR) are statistically significant predictors of psychological well-being (PW), with FAC and FR having negative effects.

Formators' attitude (FAT) is not statistically significant in predicting psychological well-being (PW).

This analysis highlights that formation activities (FAC) and formation rules (FR) are associated with a negative effect on psychological well-being (PW) and calls for effective strategies for improvement.

### Discussion

The findings from both the questionnaire responses and the in-depth interviews indicate that formators' attitudes have a profound impact on the psychological well-being of seminarians. However, the hypothesis and regression results

showed no statistically significant relationship. Respondents who described their formators as empathetic, encouraging, and attentive showed higher levels of psychological well-being. On the contrary, those who described formators as rigid, authoritarian, or emotionally distant reported increased levels of stress, anxiety, and isolation.

These results affirm the significance of the formator-seminarian relationship as noted by earlier scholars (Kigenyi, 2019; Mwanga, 2020; Okello, 2022). The Social Cognitive Theory supports this, positing that individuals learn and internalize behaviors through observation and modeling (Bandura, 1986). Formators, by virtue of their roles, serve as models for seminarians, influencing not only their spiritual formation but also their psychological states.

On the other hand, Kigenyi's (2019) findings diverged from the current study findings, showing that formators' attitudes had a significant positive correlation with the psychological well-being of Catholic priesthood candidates. This showed that different contexts bring different results; thus, the reason why this current study was crucial in its unique context was that it showed no significant association between the formator's attitude and psychological well-being.

Similarly, Mwanga (2020), in line with the qualitative results, concur that the good attitude of the formators actually played a remarkable role in enhancing the psychological well-being of Catholic priesthood candidates. This study was particularly important to the current study as it explains the role of formators' attitudes on the psychological well-being of Catholic priesthood candidates. In contrast to Okello's study, Ochieng (2023) established that formators' attitudes had a significant influence on the psychological well-being of the Catholic priesthood candidates. Additionally, Acholi (2024) was also not in line with these study findings. It showed that priestly philosophical formation had a significant positive correlation with the psychological well-being of Catholic priesthood candidates.

Formation activities such as spiritual direction, group prayers, retreats, communal living, pastoral outreach, and academic engagements were frequently cited by seminarians as essential in promoting their psychological well-being. These activities provided a structured and meaningful context for self-reflection, identity development, and spiritual growth. Both statistical and qualitative data suggested that the sense of community and shared purpose derived from these activities plays a central role in reducing stress and enhancing emotional stability.

These findings are aligned with earlier research by Okello and Acaye (2021), Njoroge and Mwangi (2020), and Ocen



and Alele (2022), who found that well-structured formation activities facilitate not only spiritual maturity but also emotional wellness.

Contextually, Mwanga and Kinyua (2019) study wasn't in line with this study's findings, as it revealed that formation activities had a positive correlation with psychological well-being, while this current study showed a strong negative correlation. This settles the gap in understanding the contextual knowledge of Queen of the Apostles Philosophical Centre, Jinja.

Conversely, Njoroge and Mwangi (2020) study had a similar view to the current study in fostering seminarians' psychological health by means of spiritual direction as a vital pillar so that they can gain purpose and meaning in their lives.

Another point of departure was Okello and Acaye (2021) study, which showed a positive association of community life on psychological well-being, suggesting that community life is essential to accommodate seminarians and to offer them support through the social relations that are inevitable in communities. This study focused on formation activities within their different formation houses, and it showed a negative association that inversely impacts their psychological health. Addressing this gap is crucial as formators emphasized enabling seminarians to achieve a holistic formation while participating in activities that support their mental and emotional well-being.

The study uncovered that while formation rules are essential for instilling discipline and responsibility, overly rigid and non-negotiable rules tend to have a detrimental effect on seminarians' mental health. A significant proportion of respondents indicated that some rules made them feel stifled, emotionally suppressed, or unable to express their personal opinions freely.

The correlation analysis revealed a strong negative relationship between overly strict formation rules and psychological well-being. This finding is consistent with the studies by Adeyinka (2020) and Ogbonnaya (2023), who observed that formation systems lacking flexibility often contribute to psychological distress among candidates. The implication is that seminary programs must strike a balance between structure and flexibility to safeguard the emotional well-being of candidates.

Also, the study findings confirm Hoge (2002) study, which indicates that formation rules significantly affect the psychological well-being of the seminarians. In addition, Ogbonnaya (2023) study was consistent with the current study as it showed that there was a significant relationship between the two variables. According to the study, flexible formation rules led to an increase in the level of well-being

of the candidates for the Catholic priesthood. This study was relevant in the present research as it helps to understand the relationship between formation rules and the psychological well-being of Catholic priesthood candidates.

The study identified a range of strategies that could be integrated into the formation curriculum to enhance seminarians' psychological health. These include providing access to professional counseling, creating peer support systems, incorporating stress management and emotional intelligence training, and offering flexible recreational opportunities.

These recommendations mirror those suggested by Rulla (2019), Adebayo (2020), and Okoro (2022), who advocate for a more holistic formation that incorporates emotional and psychological dimensions alongside spiritual and intellectual ones. These strategies are not only supported by theory but are also contextually relevant to the unique pressures faced by seminarians.

In line with this study, Okafor (2020) indicated that spiritual direction had a positive impact on the psychological well-being of Catholic priesthood candidates, particularly in terms of reducing stress and anxiety. This study was relevant to the current study because it highlights the importance of spiritual direction in promoting the psychological well-being of Catholic priesthood candidates.

Similarly, Mwanga (2023) was also consistent in confirming that spiritual practices such as prayer, meditation, and reflection are effective strategies to bolster the psychological well-being of Catholic priesthood candidates. This study was relevant to the current study because it highlights the importance of spiritual practices in promoting psychological well-being, though context variation also played an important role in the differentiation from the current study.

## **Conclusion**

The findings from this study have demonstrated that the psychological well-being of Catholic priesthood candidates is intricately tied to the dynamics of their priestly philosophical formation.

The study concludes that there is no statistically significant relationship between the formator's attitude and psychological well-being. Although qualitative results showed that a nurturing and empathetic formation environment contributes positively to emotional resilience, a rigid and unresponsive structure may lead to psychological strain. Also, formators who maintain open communication, show empathy, and offer constructive feedback significantly bolster the psychological well-being of seminarians.



Secondly, there is a strong negative relationship between formation activities and psychological well-being. It concurs that formation activities that are well-structured and engaging foster not only spiritual maturity but also emotional growth. The study also authenticated that there is a strong negative correlation between formation rules and psychological well-being. It further confirmed that formation rules must be designed with flexibility and dialogue, allowing seminarians to participate actively in shaping their journey.

Lastly, integrating counseling services and mental health awareness programs into the seminary system will go a long way in addressing the psychological needs of seminarians.

### Recommendations

Seminary leadership and formators should provide continuous training in pastoral counseling, emotional intelligence, and mental health first aid. A system for anonymous feedback from seminarians on the formation process should be established, enabling their voices to influence policy safely and honestly.

Additionally, formation activities that promote emotional openness and peer bonding, such as group discussions, team retreats, and recreation, should be strengthened and more intentionally integrated into the schedule. The rules governing formation life should be periodically reviewed, with room for personal expression and dialogue.

Church authorities and policymakers are encouraged to institutionalize psychological wellness programs as a formal and mandatory part of seminary formation. These programs should be adequately funded and supported, ensuring access to professional mental health services across all seminaries. Furthermore, formation programs should reflect cultural sensitivity, taking into account the African context and the unique psychological needs of candidates in that environment.

Researchers and academics should take the lead in developing seminary-specific psychological assessment tools that are culturally appropriate and theologically grounded. In addition, they should organize academic forums and workshops that allow for the exchange of best practices in holistic priestly formation. These forums can serve as platforms for building a stronger academic and pastoral network focused on seminarians' well-being.

### Contribution to knowledge

This research fills a significant gap in the literature by focusing on the African seminary context, specifically Queen of Apostles Philosophy Centre, Jinja, Uganda. It

provides empirical evidence that links specific elements of philosophical formation to psychological outcomes. The study also adds methodological value by using a mixed-methods approach to explore both statistical trends and in-depth experiences. This dual perspective allows for a nuanced understanding that can inform both policy and practice in seminaries.

### Areas for further studies

This study opens up several avenues for further research. Firstly, longitudinal studies could be conducted to assess how psychological well-being evolves from the beginning of philosophical formation through to ordination. Such studies would provide deeper insight into the long-term effects of formation programs.

Secondly, comparative studies could be carried out across different seminaries within and outside Uganda to understand how cultural, institutional, and socio-economic variables affect formation and psychological health. This would help develop context-specific models of seminary formation.

Future research could explore the impact of specific formation activities such as pastoral exposure, academic coursework, or spiritual direction on distinct psychological dimensions like self-esteem, resilience, and anxiety. This would aid in refining the formation curriculum.

Additionally, further research could explore the influence of peer relationships, community dynamics, and informal social networks within seminaries on candidates' psychological well-being. Given that formation is not only formal but also deeply social, these aspects are critical to understanding the full picture.

Finally, more studies using qualitative or ethnographic approaches could offer richer insights into the lived experiences of seminarians, especially those who may be silently struggling with psychological challenges. Such studies would help institutions become more proactive and inclusive in their formation models.

### Final remarks

The psychological well-being of Catholic priesthood candidates is a subject of growing concern within the Church and academic discourse. As seminarians prepare for a life of service, their mental and emotional health must not be overlooked. This study affirms that a holistic, supportive, and contextually sensitive formation program is essential for nurturing resilient, compassionate, and spiritually mature priests. The insights gained here are not only relevant to



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### Original Article

Queen of Apostles Philosophy Centre but are transferable to similar institutions across Africa and beyond.

By placing seminarians' mental health at the core of formation planning and execution, the Church can foster a new generation of priests who are not only spiritually grounded but also emotionally healthy and pastorally effective.

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### Data, materials, and/or code availability

All datasets upon which this study's results were generated are readily available upon reasonable request through the corresponding email of the authors.

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There was no funding awarded for this study. All expenses were catered for by the authors.

### Conflict of interest

The authors have no conflict of interest to declare regarding this study.

### Author contributions

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