

Relationship Between the Catholic Church's Reconciliation Programme and the Psycho-Spiritual Wellbeing of the Survivors of the Genocide Against the Tutsi in Cyangugu Diocese, Rwanda Embedded Mixed Method Research.

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ABSTRACT

The Catholic Church's reconciliation programme in Cyangugu Diocese refers to a set of coordinated pastorals, spiritual, psychosocial, and social interventions undertaken by Cyangugu Catholic Diocese after the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi. The intent of this programme was to build broken relationships, encourage forgiveness, heal trauma, restore spiritual belief, and to rebuild the community destroyed by the Genocide. This study sought to examine the relationship between the Catholic Church's Reconciliation Programme and the Psycho-spiritual Wellbeing of Survivors of the genocide against the Tutsi in Cyangugu Diocese, Rwanda. Guided by Trauma Theory (Herman, 1992) and Psycho-Spiritual Theory (Egunjobi, 2024), the study employed an embedded mixed-methods design. A total of 274 respondents participated in the quantitative strand through random sampling, while 37 participants were purposively selected for qualitative inquiry. Quantitative Data were collected using the Adapted Rwanda Reconciliation Barometer and Psycho-Spiritual Wellbeing Scale. Qualitative Data was collected through Focus Group Discussions and Semi-structured Interviews. Quantitative data were analysed using inferential statistics aided by SPSS, version 23. Qualitative data were analysed thematically. Pearson's correlation analysis showed statistically significant positive relationships between the Catholic Church's Reconciliation Programme and Psycho-spiritual Wellbeing of Survivors of the genocide in Cyangugu Diocese, Rwanda ($p < .01$), with correlation coefficients ranging from moderate to moderately strong ($r = .286$ to $.531$). In line with the embedded mixed methods design, qualitative findings supported quantitative findings and indicated that the reconciliation programme implemented by the Catholic Church in Cyangugu Diocese has played a significant role in promoting psycho-spiritual well-being of survivors of the genocide. The qualitative findings identified key strategies for strengthening the programme, and recommends greater inclusion of youth and context-responsive strategies to sustain reconciliation outcomes across generations.

Keywords: Reconciliation Programme, Psycho-Spiritual Wellbeing, Catholic Church, Survivors, Genocide.

BACKGROUND

The Catholic Church, also known as the Roman Catholic Church, is the largest Christian denomination with over 1.4 billion believers (Vatican News, 2026). The Church addresses spiritual issues and participates in humanitarian action such as providing aid, educating people, and providing health care services and reconciliation systems in different communities affected by conflicts, where the Church underscores human dignity, compassion, and forgiveness (Appleby, 2000).

On a global level, the Catholic Church is deeply involved in trauma recovery and reconciliation efforts in societies still reeling from conflict. Informed by its faith and moral beliefs, it relentlessly encourages forgiveness and esteem of human dignity (John Paul II, 1995). *Gaudium et Spes* emphasised the Church's duty to attend to mental health in addition to the social and spiritual strains that the individual encounters (Second Vatican II, 1965). The Church teaches a holistic view of healing that encompasses body, mind, and soul, seeing suffering as potentially redemptive when united to Christ's passion (Catholic Church, 1994). The Church's

global peacebuilding includes mediation in political conflicts, advocacy for disarmament, and support for refugees and migrants (Hollenbach, 2002). In conflict-affected countries, Bosnia and Herzegovina, East Timor, and Colombia, among others, the Catholic Church has often served as mediator and healer, helping communities confront past harms and rebuild trust (Appleby, 2000).

In Africa, the Catholic Church has left a profound legacy through its contributions to spiritual life, education, health, and social development. Historically, the Church played a central role in introducing formal education, establishing schools and universities, and promoting literacy (Ojo, 2019). Beyond these practical contributions, the church has been instrumental in peacebuilding, social justice advocacy, and community development, helping to shape ethical governance and foster reconciliation in post-conflict societies (Akintunde, 2018). The enduring impact of these initiatives demonstrates that the Catholic church is not only a religious institution but also a major agent of social transformation at the continental level.

The Second Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops stressed the Church's mission as a sacrament of reconciliation, justice, and peace (Synod of Bishops, 2009). In countries such as South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo, Catholic leaders have mediated ceasefires and supported transitional justice mechanisms (ReliefWeb, 2021). The Church regards reconciliation as a psycho-spiritual journey of forgiveness, restoration, and renewed relationships, not merely a political exercise. In post-apartheid South Africa, the Church supported the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, assisting victims and encouraging perpetrators toward forgiveness (Graybill, 2002).

In Rwanda, the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi devastated Rwanda, causing more than 1,364,020 deaths in approximately 100 days (Bizimana, 2014). After the genocide, Church initiatives included spiritual counselling, memorial liturgies, and community reconciliation programmes (Philpott, 2007). Reconciliation, as Carney (2015) argues, requires truthful confrontation and forgiveness, not forgetting or pretending harm did not occur. In post-genocide Rwanda, Dioceses like Cyangugu have implemented psycho-spiritual initiatives aiming to rebuild trust, encourage forgiveness, and accompany both survivors and perpetrators in healing and reconciliation (Longman, 2010). Church activities such as prison ministry, parish trauma counselling, and justice and peace commission have contributed to community healing (Carney, 2015).

These efforts are supported by partnerships with NGOs and government programmes providing counselling, housing assistance, and unity campaigns (National Unity and Reconciliation Commission [NURC], 2015). Habimana et al. (2023), studying reconciliation among the Mushaka Parish people in Cyangugu Diocese, and found that reconciliation initiatives significantly affected the psychosocial well-being of both survivors and perpetrators after the genocide. However, the researcher reported weak reconciliation prior to a dedicated reconciliation project. The process struggled with incomplete truth-telling, a shortage of trained mediators and counsellors, fear, and mistrust. Strategies included suspending sacraments to support Gacaca Nkirisitu, convening survivors and perpetrators to discuss grievances, and organising charity and solidarity funds. Their findings highlighted the importance of counselling sessions to enable honest dialogue and effective reconciliation.

This present study sought to establish the relationship between the Catholic Church's reconciliation programme and the psycho-spiritual wellbeing of the survivors of the genocide against the Tutsi in Cyangugu Diocese, Rwanda, by examining how the domains of the Adapted Rwanda Reconciliation Barometer, namely social trust, forgiveness, intergroup relations, justice and accountability, healing and trauma recovery, and church-led psycho-spiritual reconciliation support, relate to the domains of psycho-spiritual well-being, including self-awareness, connectedness, meaningfulness, compassion, and self-transcendence among the respondents.

Statement of the problem

Three decades after the Rwandan Genocide, the Catholic Church, one of the country's most influential institutions, remains engaged in post-genocide healing and reconciliation activities, including counselling, trauma workshops, spiritual retreats, and community reconciliation initiatives (Longman, 2010). In Cyangugu Diocese, the Church has initiated reconciliation and prison ministries that have encouraged genocide

perpetrators to acknowledge their responsibility and seek forgiveness. It has also convened survivors to voice grievances and be urged to abandon revenge in favour of forgiveness. Despite these visible efforts and apparent impacts in places like Cyangugu, the psycho-spiritual wellbeing of many genocide survivors remains fragile.

From April 7th of every year, all Rwandans take time to remember the Tutsi killed during the genocide and gathered around memorial sites all over the country to honour their lives and recall what happened to them, support survivors, and strengthen the unity through the “I am Rwandan”. During these gatherings, some survivors are retraumatised by hearing testimonies reminding what they passed through during 100 days of genocide.

Studies on post-conflict healing in Rwanda indicate that a considerable number of survivors continue to exhibit symptoms of psychological distress, unresolved trauma, and spiritual desolation. From the findings of the Rwanda Reconciliation Barometer (RRB, 2020), individual healing from wounds caused by the genocide and divisive politics was identified as a sector that still hinders reconciliation efforts, and the RRB shows that it remains a challenge. The number of those who do not feel healed yet significantly climbed up from 4.6% (2015) to 26.9% in 2020; it was 17.1% in 2010. According to data published by Kayiteshonga et al. (2022), post-traumatic stress disorder stands at 3.6% in general population but reaches 27.9% among genocide survivors. The same findings show that major depressive episodes (MDD) stand at 12% within the general population, but at 35% among genocide survivors.

This study seeks to establish the relationship between the Catholic Church’s reconciliation programme and the psycho-spiritual well-being of the Survivors of the genocide against the Tutsi in Cyangugu Diocese and to cover the gaps of its ineffectiveness by highlighting strategies that can enhance its effectiveness on the psycho-spiritual wellbeing of the Survivors of the genocide.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research was hinged on two theoretical frameworks, the Trauma Theory and the Psycho-spiritual Theory.

Trauma Theory

The Trauma theory (Herman, 1992) is a psychological and interdisciplinary framework that explains how traumatic experiences affect individuals, groups, and communities, and how healing and recovery can occur. It focuses on the emotional, cognitive, behavioural, social, and sometimes spiritual consequences of trauma (Herman, 1992). In this study, trauma theory analysed the psychological effects of genocide on individuals and communities, emphasising the enduring consequences of traumatic experiences. Herman emphasises that trauma, particularly that stemming from systematic violence or atrocities such as genocide, disrupts not only the psychological and emotional functioning of individuals but also the social fabric of communities.

Trauma manifests through symptoms such as intrusive memories, avoidance, emotional numbness, hyperarousal (anxiety, exaggerated startle), and, in complex trauma, difficulties with trust, self-worth, and relationships. Herman underscores that trauma is not solely psychological but also social and political, necessitating truth-telling, justice, and communal support alongside individual therapy (Herman, 1992). Herman distinguishes between single-incident traumas such as accidents, assaults, natural disasters and complex or chronic trauma such as Child abuse, domestic violence, war, and genocide. She argues that complex trauma leads to deep and pervasive psychological disruptions, affecting identity, emotional regulation, relational capacity, memory, and meaning-making. This form of trauma often produces what later became known as Complex Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (C-PTSD).

Herman proposes a three-stage recovery model: (1) Safety: Establishing physical and emotional security; (2) Remembrance and Mourning: Processing traumatic memories and grief; and (3) Reconnection: Rebuilding relationships, community ties, and meaning in life. These stages offer a structured pathway for survivors to process their experiences and rebuild their sense of self and community.

In the context of post-genocide Rwanda, the Catholic Church has emerged as a significant actor in the reconciliation and healing process through its reconciliation programme. The reconciliation programme is designed to promote dialogue, forgiveness, and communal restoration among survivors and perpetrators' families. By integrating Herman's stages of trauma recovery, the Church's initiatives can be understood not only as social or spiritual interventions but also as mechanisms that address the psycho-emotional dimensions of trauma. Safety: Herman asserts that recovery begins with establishing a sense of safety, both physically and psychologically. The Church's reconciliation programme provides structured spaces such as parish gatherings, counselling sessions, and faith-based workshops where survivors feel secure. These spaces serve as a space for survivors to share their stories without the fear of retribution or social stigma, setting up a primary gateway for emotional healing and mental health recovery of the bereaved (Buckley-Zistel, 2006).

Remembrance and Mourning: The second one is acknowledging and processing traumatic memories. The Catholic Church enables this through liturgical remembrance, memorial services, and leads spiritual reflection by providing opportunities for survivors to mourn lost loved ones and look back at painful memories publicly. These rituals correspond with Herman's (1992) concept of traumatic "trauma cannot be healed without telling the story", and so narrative is key to grieving and healing the psycho-spirit.

Reconnection: The last phase is reconnection to daily life and social life. By engaging survivors in charity, collective prayers, and working with former perpetrators on projects with others among these people, the Church promotes forgiveness, reconciliation, and community rebuilding. Herman (1992) emphasizes that returning to a supportive community is a factor in sustaining rehabilitation for the sake of ongoing healing, echoing the Church's joint aim of social wholeness and spiritual renovation.

The Catholic Church reconciliation programme also might make a big contribution to recovery from mental health issues, safety, remembrance and mourning, and healing and reconnection. psycho-spiritual well-being of survivors of the genocide and psychosocial integration, supporting not only personal healing but community reconciliation on a greater scale. Psycho-spiritual wellbeing encompasses emotional, cognitive, and spiritual domains and need to be explored and stimulated by established, faith-based interventions.

Studies indicate that survivors who participate in reconciliation programmes show better mental health outcomes, resilience, and spiritual fulfilment, supporting a focus on integrating trauma-informed principles into the religious practice. This demonstrates how much more effectively the religious components can be integrated when dealing with the trauma-inspired beliefs (Herman, 1992; Buckley-Zistel, 2006).

Psycho-Spiritual Theory

Psychospiritual Theory formulated by Egunjobi (2024) is based on three interrelated pillars: Psychology, spirituality, and culture. The psychological dimension addresses biological, psychological, and relational aspects (neurological and genetic influences, personality, cognition, emotion, behaviour). The relational aspect concerns connections to self, others, environment, and the divine. Achieving spiritual well-being requires competencies in personality dynamics, the interaction of thought-feeling-behaviour, and attention to intergenerational effects. PST deliberately integrates spiritual insight with psychological understanding to foster holistic healing. It regards humans as unified beings of body, mind, soul, and spirit and addresses emotional, cognitive, and existential struggles.

In many African and global contexts, spirituality is integral to identity and coping; neglecting this dimension can impede recovery. PST facilitates inner integration by exploring meaning-making, addressing existential anxiety, and navigating moral or spiritual crises within a safe, non-coercive therapeutic environment (Egunjobi & Udechukwu, 2025).

The collective rehabilitation of genocide survivors in Rwanda can be carefully understood through the integration of Trauma Theory and Psycho-spiritual Theory (PST). These theories connect structural psychological phases with comprehensive existential healing. Judith Herman's (1992) triphasic recovery model presents a significant macro-pathway that moves from safety to remembrance and mourning, ultimately leading to community reconnection. This pathway closely aligns with the framework of reconciliation

programme offered by the Catholic Church in Cyangugu Diocese. Nevertheless, due to the nature of complex trauma, which disrupts an individual's foundational ability to create meaning, this structural recovery is enhanced when combined with Egunjobi (2024) Psycho-spiritual Theory. This theory emphasizes healing across intertwined psychological, spiritual, and cultural aspects. By viewing the survivor as more than just a clinically traumatized individual but as an integrated entity encompassing body, mind, soul, and spirit, the Church's faith-based initiatives effectively transform the reconnection phase into a space for profound inner integration. This process aids in resolving existential anxiety and promotes holistic reconciliation within the Rwandan community.

Objective of the Study

To examine the Relationship between the Catholic Church's Reconciliation Programme and the Psycho-spiritual Well-being among Survivors of the genocide against the Tutsi in Cyangugu Diocese, Rwanda.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed an embedded mixed-methods design to examine relationship between the Catholic Church's reconciliation programme and psycho-spiritual well-being among survivors of the Genocide against the Tutsi in Cyangugu Diocese, Rwanda. In this study, the quantitative survey is the main strand, while the qualitative strand is embedded to offer in depth experiences, support and complement the quantitative findings (Creswell & Plano, 2018). Tashakkori and Teddlie (2010) argued that embedded designs are ideal when researchers need to test relationships or measure constructs while also exploring underlying processes and personal narratives.

Research Participants

The target population comprised of 865 genocide survivors actively participating in unity and reconciliation groups within Cyangugu Diocese. The sample size for quantitative strand consisted of 274 Survivors of the genocide against the Tutsi in Cyangugu Diocese, randomly chosen using Yamane's formula (1967). Purposive sampling selected 37 participants for qualitative strand.

Research Instruments

A research instrument is any tool, device, or structured mechanism used to collect data from participants systematically and reliably. It is designed to measure variables, capture responses, or gather information relevant to the research objectives (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The choice of instrument depends on the research design, the nature of the variables being studied, and the type of data required, whether quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-methods (Johnson & Christensen, 2017). In this research, the researcher used the Rwanda Reconciliation Barometer (National Unity and Reconciliation Comision, 2020) and the Psycho-Spiritual Wellbeing Scale (Egunjobi et al. 2024), the Focus Group Discussions and Interviews Guides.

Psycho-Spiritual Wellbeing Scale (P-SWBS) measures the psycho-spiritual wellbeing by combining psychological and spiritual insights in an integrative manner. P-SWBS is measured according to the subsets of awareness, connectedness, meaningfulness, compassion, and self-transcendence. The Psycho-Spiritual Wellbeing Scale is highly reliable 25 items; Spearman Brown Coefficient = .876; Guttman Split-Half coefficient = .850; at Cronbach's Alpha = .916 (Egunjobi et al. (2024).

The Rwanda Reconciliation Barometer (RRB) originally includes core reconciliation constructs such as: Social trust, Forgiveness, Intergroup relations, Justice and accountability, Healing and trauma recovery. In this study, the RBR was adapted by the researcher to include an additional dimension (Church -Led Psycho-Spiritual Reconciliation Support), which reflects prayer and sacraments, pastoral counselling, faith-based forgiveness, and Spiritual coping. The Validity of Rwanda Reconciliation Barometer refers to the extent to which the RRB accurately measures the concept of reconciliation among survivors. The RRB has demonstrated high internal consistency reliability in previous national and academic studies, with most dimensions achieving Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from 0.78 to 0.91, which exceeds the acceptable threshold of 0.70 for social science

research (NURC, 2020).

Focus Group Discussion (FGD) Guides and Interviews Guide: The researcher developed data collection tools, such as semi-structured interview guides with open-ended questions aligned to objective. Questions were around reconciliation and the psycho-spiritual healing and related themes.

Data collection procedure

Data collection began with securing an authorisation letter from the Psycho-Spiritual Institute (PSI), followed by the permissions from the Bishop of Cyangugu Diocese to collect data among survivors of the genocide against the Tutsi who are members of Unity and Reconciliation Groups in selected parishes and the Staff of the Diocesan Commission Justice and Peace within Cyangugu Diocese, which he shepherds. The researcher gave informed consent forms to participants outlining confidentiality, voluntary participation, and study objective to build trust, especially given the sensitivity of genocide, trauma, and reconciliation topics. Ethical sensitivity was paramount when researching vulnerable populations and faith-based communities (Billups, 2022). The researcher used the DCJP personnel trained to offer psycho-spiritual support so that they could intervene in cases of emotions and trauma.

Quantitative Data

The quantitative data were collected using self-administered questionnaires translated into Kinyarwanda, including the Adapted Rwanda Reconciliation Barometer and the Psycho-Spiritual Wellbeing scale. The Adapted Rwanda Reconciliation Barometer was developed by National Unity and Reconciliation Commission (2020) with 25 items, and the researcher added 10 items to adapt it to the church's mission, while the Psycho-Spiritual Wellbeing Scale was developed by Egunjobi et al. (2024) and consists of 25 questions based on 5 components of psycho-spiritual well-being.

Qualitative Data

The qualitative strand was collected using the Focus Group Discussions Guide and Interview Guide. Interviews and Focus Groups were scheduled in safe, private, culturally appropriate locations. With participants' consent, the researcher recorded and took the field notes to capture verbal and non-verbal cues. The researcher practiced active listening and reflexivity. APA (2024) recommends grounding interview protocols in research question while allowing emergent themes. The researcher developed data collection tools, such as semi-structured interview guides with open-ended questions aligned to objective. Questions were around reconciliation and the psycho-spiritual healing and related themes. Finally, interviews were translated from Kinyarwanda into English and transcribed verbatim, anonymised, securely stored, and organised into themes for analysis.

Data Analysis

Data analysis refers to the systematic process of organising, cleaning, coding, interpreting, and transforming data into meaningful insights that answer research question or test hypotheses. It involves applying logical, statistical, and interpretive techniques to identify patterns, relationships, and trends within the data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Mixed-method data analysis thus involves three key processes: Analysing quantitative data, analysing qualitative data, and integrating both datasets to develop meta-inferences that address the study's overarching questions (Fetters et al., 2013).

Quantitative Data

The research question sought to establish the relationship between the Catholic Church's reconciliation programme and the psycho-spiritual well-being of the survivors of the genocide against the Tutsi in Cyangugu Diocese, Rwanda. Specifically, the study examined how the domains of the Adapted Rwanda Reconciliation Barometer, namely social trust, forgiveness, intergroup relations, justice and accountability, healing and trauma recovery, and church-led psycho-spiritual reconciliation support, relate to the domains of psycho-

spiritual well-being, including self-awareness, connectedness, meaningfulness, compassion, and self-transcendence among the respondents. To address this research question, inferential statistics were performed using Pearson correlation in SPSS (23). Pearson correlation analysis was employed to examine the degree of association and determine the strength of the relationships between the domains of the catholic church’s reconciliation programme and the psycho spiritual well-being components.

Qualitative Data

For the qualitative strand, data analysis involves coding, categorizing, identifying emerging themes, and interpreting narratives to understand participants’ experiences and meanings (Braun & Clarke, 2021). For this study, qualitative data analysis was performed through thematic content analysis. This involved gathering and interpreting the qualitative data collected through FGDs and interviews according to themes based on the content of the data.

Mixed Methods Integration of Findings

Both quantitative and qualitative data sets were combined in a concurrent manner during the interpretation. As an embedded mixed-method investigation, the study incorporated qualitative data to complement and enrich the quantitative results. Following the statistical analysis, the research further explored participants’ experiences through Focus Group Discussions and interview questions. These qualitative findings are presented verbatim and organized into thematic categories to provide deeper insight and to substantiate the quantitative outcomes.

Presentation of Findings

Quantitative Findings

Quantitative findings were collected from 259 Survivors of the genocide against the Tutsi who responded to questionnaires. To address the research question, inferential statistics were conducted using Pearson correlation in SPSS (23). Pearson correlation analysis was employed to examine the relationship between the domains of the catholic church’s reconciliation programme and the psycho spiritual well-being components. Specifically, the study examined how the domains of the Adapted Rwanda Reconciliation Barometer, namely social trust, forgiveness, intergroup relations, justice and accountability, healing and trauma recovery, and church-led psycho-spiritual reconciliation support, relate to the domains of psycho-spiritual well-being, including self-awareness, connectedness, meaningfulness, compassion, and self-transcendence among the respondents as shown in Table 1.

		Self-awareness	Connectedness	Meaningfulness	Compassion	Self-Transcendence
Social Trust	Pearson Correlation	.454**	.286**	.328**	.320**	.337**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	259	259	259	259	259
Forgiveness	Pearson Correlation	.490**	.531**	.530**	.422**	.479**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	259	259	259	259	259
Intergroup Relationship	Pearson Correlation	.519**	.409**	.437**	.362**	.437**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	259	259	259	259	259
Justice and accountability	Pearson Correlation	.448**	.357**	.376**	.390**	.401**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	259	259	259	259	259

Healing and Trauma Recovery	Pearson Correlation	.520**	.437**	.441**	.393**	.440**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	259	259	259	259	259
Church Reconciliation Support	Pearson Correlation	.512**	.502**	.515**	.441**	.489**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	259	259	259	259	259

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

Table 1 shows a Pearson correlation analysis that was conducted to examine the relationship between the domains of the reconciliation programme and the components of psycho spiritual well-being among survivors of the genocide against the Tutsi in Cyangugu Diocese (N = 259).

The results revealed positive and statistically significant correlations between all reconciliation programme domains and the psycho-spiritual well-being components at the 0.01 level ($p < .001$).

The fact that the correlations are positive means that as participation in the Catholic Church's reconciliation programme increases, the levels of psycho-spiritual well-being among survivors also tend to increase.

Qualitative Findings

Embedded within the broader quantitative findings, qualitative data collected from 25 Survivors of the genocide participated in FGDs and 7 Staff members of Diocesan Commission Justice and Peace who participated in Interviews were analysed using thematic content analysis. The analysis revealed that rebuilding social trust was a prominent result of participating in the reconciliation programme. Most respondents reported that before implementing this programme, fear and suspicion had taken over relationships between survivors and perpetrators. Forgiveness was consistently identified as a central element of the reconciliation process. Participants described forgiveness as both a spiritual and psychological journey that allowed them to release the emotional burden they had carried since the genocide. Participants in FGDs reported significant improvements in relationships between survivors and perpetrators as a result of the catholic church's reconciliation programme. Respondents perceive justice mechanisms and accountability processes positively. Truth-telling and acknowledgement of responsibility were also highlighted as important elements of reconciliation. About healing and trauma recovery, participants in FGDs mentioned that the emotional and psychological support received was not enough to heal the trauma caused by the genocide.

During the interview, all participants agreed that the reconciliation programme has helped in healing the wounds caused by the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi, in self-acceptance, restoring inner strength, and rebuilding confidence in life, confidence in oneself, in others, and in the community in general.

Participants in both FGDs and Interviews formulated strategies organised into key themes reflecting participants' experiences, perceptions, and practical suggestions for enhancing reconciliation processes within the Cyangugu Diocese. Participants proposed strategies on how to strengthen the catholic church's reconciliation programme and psycho-spiritual well-being of the survivors of the genocide. Themes, such as holistic psycho-social and material support, strengthening survivor-centered approaches and voice inclusion, home-based pastoral care, capacity building and formation for church agents, strengthening collaboration with government and NGOs, Youth engagement in reconciliation activities, and awareness campaigns on mental health and reconciliation were mentioned.

Integration of Findings

With integration of quantitative and qualitative strands, it is apparent that there is a relationship between the Catholic Church's reconciliation programme and the psycho-spiritual well-being of the survivors of the genocide in Cyangugu Diocese, Rwanda. Quantitatively, this link is highlighted by robust, statistically

significant relationships ($p < .001$) across all dimensions, most notably between forgiveness and connectedness ($r = .531$) and meaningfulness ($r = .530$). Qualitatively, survivors bring the numbers to life by saying that forgiveness involves a deep spiritual and psychological journey of forgiveness and serves to actively free the soul from decades of trauma. However, a critical divergence emerges where statistical success meets lived reality. While the Catholic Church's reconciliation programme instils self-acceptance, inner strength, and the concept of justice as a way to tell the truth, participants observed that spiritual and emotional support alone cannot adequately heal the scars of complex trauma. The participants argue for a reconceptualization which promotes structural holism to help close this systemic gap. By implementing proposed strategies, reconciliation programme can make the diocese's spiritual landscape a more rooted, holistic refuge and an authentic, transformative space for spiritual recovery and for deep, enduring social reconciliation.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This study employed an embedded mixed-methods design to examine the relationship between the catholic church's reconciliation programme and the psycho-spiritual well-being of the survivors of the genocide against the Tutsi in Cyangugu Diocese, Rwanda.

Quantitative findings indicates that the majority of respondents were aged 46 years and above, representing 235 respondents (90.7%) of the total sample. Participants aged 36–45 years constituted 21 respondents (8.1%), while those aged 26–35 years were the smallest group, comprising only 3 respondents (1.2%). The cumulative percentage shows that only 9.3% of respondents were below 46 years of age, meaning that the study sample was overwhelmingly composed of older adults. It shows also that 162 respondents (62.5%) were female, while 97 respondents (37.5%) were male. This indicates that women constituted the majority of participants in the study. The predominance of female respondents in this study can be attributed to the demographic consequences of the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi, during which men were disproportionately targeted and killed. Additionally, women's active involvement in Church-based reconciliation and pastoral programmes may have contributed to their higher representation. The findings on educational level indicate that 217 respondents (83.8%) had primary education, 37 respondents (14.3%) had secondary education, and only 5 respondents (1.9%) held a diploma qualification. These findings indicate that the majority of respondents had only a primary education. This educational profile may be linked to the socio-economic and historical disruptions caused by the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi. The predominance of respondents with basic education suggests that the Catholic Church's reconciliation programme lacks intellectuals and youth. The findings indicated that 195 respondents (75.3%) were Catholics, 63 respondents (24.3%) were Protestants, and 1 respondent (0.4%) was Muslim. This shows that the majority of respondents were affiliated with the Catholic Church. The findings reveal ed that the majority of participants were Catholic, which aligns with the study's focus on the reconciliation programme within the Catholic Diocese of Cyangugu, Rwanda. The dominance of Catholic respondents suggested that the findings primarily reflect Catholic perspectives on psycho-spiritual well-being and reconciliation. However, the inclusion of Protestant respondents and Muslim indicated that reconciliation programme transcends denominational boundaries within the broader Christian community. The findings reveal that 186 respondents (71.8%) reported a middle economic status, 44 respondents (17.0%) reported a high economic status, and 29 respondents (11.2%) reported a low economic status. These results indicated that most respondents perceived themselves as belonging to the middle economic category, suggesting relative socio-economic recovery among survivors in the Diocese of Cyangugu. Nevertheless, a notable minority remains economically vulnerable, which may negatively influence their psycho-spiritual well-being and participation in the reconciliation programme.

The quantitative analysis revealed a significant relationship between the Catholic Church's reconciliation programme and psycho-spiritual well-being outcomes. In particular, a Pearson correlation analysis was conducted and revealed a positive and statistically significant correlation between all reconciliation programme domains and the psycho-spiritual well-being components at the 0.01 level ($p < .01$). The fact that the correlations are positive means that as participation in the Catholic Church's reconciliation programme components increases, the levels of psycho-spiritual well-being among survivors also tend to increase. Survivors who reported stronger experiences of forgiveness, trust, healing, and supportive church-led reconciliation activities are also more likely to report higher levels of compassion, meaning in life, spiritual

connection, and personal transformation.

The Catholic church's reconciliation programme in Cyangugu Diocese appeared to create environments where survivors rebuild trust, practice forgiveness, process trauma, and reconnect with others and with their faith, which are key elements of psycho-spiritual healing. These findings are consistent with the trauma recovery theory of Judith Lewis Herman (1992), which emphasizes that recovery from trauma involves rebuilding relationships and restoring social connections. This result also aligns and supports the psycho-spiritual well-being framework proposed by Egunjobi (2024), which highlights the importance of compassion, connectedness, self-awareness, meaningfulness, and self-transcendence as outcomes of holistic healing processes.

Social trust showed significant positive correlation with all psycho-spiritual well-being domains, including self-awareness ($r = .454, p < .001$), connectedness ($r = .286, p < .001$), meaningfulness ($r = .328, p < .001$), compassion ($r = .320, p < .001$), and self-transcendence ($r = .337, p < .001$).

These findings suggest that higher levels of trust among community members are associated with improved psychological and spiritual well-being among the survivors.

Forgiveness demonstrated moderate and significant positive correlations with all psycho-spiritual well-being domains, including self-awareness ($r = .490, p < .001$), connectedness ($r = .531, p < .001$), meaningfulness ($r = .530, p < .001$), compassion ($r = .422, p < .001$), and self-transcendence ($r = .479, p < .001$). This indicates that forgiveness plays a key role in enhancing emotional healing, relational harmony, and spiritual growth among respondents.

Intergroup relations were also positively and significantly associated with psycho-spiritual well-being, with correlations observed with self-awareness ($r = .519, p < .001$), connectedness ($r = .409, p < .001$), compassion ($r = .362, p < .001$), and self-transcendence ($r = .437, p < .001$). These findings indicate that improved relationships between social groups contribute to higher levels of personal awareness, compassion, and spiritual fulfilment.

Justice and accountability showed significant positive correlations with all domains of psycho-spiritual well-being, including self-awareness ($r = .448, p < .001$), connectedness ($r = .357, p < .001$), meaningfulness ($r = .376, p < .001$), compassion ($r = .390, p < .001$), and self-transcendence ($r = .401, p < .001$). These results suggest that perceptions of justice and accountability are associated with greater psychological and spiritual stability among survivors.

Healing and trauma recovery demonstrated moderate positive relationships with psycho-spiritual well-being domains, including self-awareness ($r = .520, p < .001$), connectedness ($r = .437, p < .001$), meaningfulness ($r = .441, p < .001$), compassion ($r = .393, p < .001$), and self-transcendence ($r = .440, p < .001$). These findings highlighted the importance of the Catholic Church's reconciliation programme in promoting both psychological recovery and spiritual well-being. This relationship can be understood within the framework of Trauma Theory, which explains trauma recovery as a process involving three major stages: Establishing safety, reconstructing the trauma narrative, and reconnecting with others. According to this theory, healing from traumatic experiences enables survivors to regain a sense of personal identity, rebuild trust in relationships, and restore meaning in life (Herman, 1992). Therefore, the findings support the proposition of Trauma Theory that recovery from trauma is not limited to the reduction of psychological distress but also involves the restoration of emotional, social, and spiritual dimensions of human well-being. In the context of survivors of the genocide against the Tutsi in Cyangugu Diocese, trauma healing initiatives appeared to facilitate not only psychological recovery but also deeper psycho spiritual transformation and growth.

Church-led psycho-spiritual reconciliation support showed significant positive correlations with all psycho-spiritual well-being domains, including self-awareness ($r = .512, p < .001$), connectedness ($r = .502, p < .001$), meaningfulness ($r = .515, p < .001$), compassion ($r = .441, p < .001$), and self-transcendence ($r = .489, p < .001$). These findings suggested that reconciliation initiatives facilitated by the Catholic Church in Cyangugu Diocese contributed positively to the spiritual growth and psychological well-being of the survivors.

After all, the quantitative findings indicated that the domains of the Catholic Church's reconciliation programme are positively and significantly associated with the psycho-spiritual well-being of survivors of the genocide against the Tutsi in Cyangugu Diocese, Rwanda. This suggests that reconciliation processes such as social trust, forgiveness, intergroup relations, justice and accountability, trauma healing, and church-led psycho-spiritual support contributed meaningfully to enhancing survivors' psycho-spiritual well-being.

These findings confirm earlier research suggesting that faith-based reconciliation programmes can positively influence psychological and spiritual outcomes among trauma survivors. Pargament et al. (2000) found a significant positive relationship between participation in religious interventions and emotional well-being among trauma survivors. Similarly, Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004) showed that structured spiritual programmes can predict a substantial proportion of variance in psycho-spiritual growth. African studies provide similar evidence. Tutu's (1999) evaluation of church-facilitated reconciliation processes in South Africa found that participants who actively engaged in church reconciliation initiatives reported higher levels of emotional relief and spiritual peace.

Likewise, Mukashema and Mullet (2010) demonstrated that genocide survivors in Rwanda who participated in church-based forgiveness programmes exhibited lower levels of trauma-related distress and greater psychological stability. The findings of the present study support these conclusions by demonstrating that reconciliation processes facilitated by the Catholic Church contribute significantly to survivors' psycho-spiritual well-being. In particular, forgiveness emerged as a central mechanism through which survivors release emotional burdens and rebuild relationships with others. Within the framework of Trauma Theory, forgiveness and reconciliation can be understood as part of the process of reconnection, where survivors gradually rebuild trust and social relationships after traumatic experiences. Similarly, the psycho-spiritual theory of Egunjobi (2024) highlights compassion and self-transcendence as indicators of spiritual maturity and psychological integration following adversity.

Qualitative findings show that participants in the Focus Group Discussion were drawn purposively from the quantitative respondents. 25 participants representing 89.28 % participated in FGD, and 7 participants responded to the interviews, representing 77.77%. The participants in the interviews were chosen purposively from the Staff of the Commission Justice and Peace within Cyangugu Diocese, which was entrusted to the reconciliation mission. Qualitative findings supported quantitative findings and indicated that the reconciliation programme implemented by the Catholic Church in Cyangugu Diocese has played a significant role in promoting psycho-spiritual well-being of survivors of the genocide.

Participants in FGDs indicated that rebuilding social trust was a prominent result of participating in the reconciliation programme. Most respondents reported that before implementing this programme, fear and suspicion had taken over relationships between survivors and perpetrators. But amid dialogue sessions, retreats, memorial liturgies, and forgiveness initiatives, participants expressed a slow rebuilding of trust.

The findings from interviews have also shown that the reconciliation programme initiated by the Catholic Church in the Cyangugu Diocese, Rwanda, has helped both survivors and families of perpetrators to confront the truth about the past, thereby reducing fear, suspicion, and strengthening social trust among perpetrators and survivors and within the community. Participants described forgiveness as both a spiritual and psychological journey that allowed them to release the emotional burden they had carried since the genocide. Respondents emphasized that the programme has contributed to rebuilding trust, hope, and peaceful coexistence among survivors and former perpetrators. Many participants explained that the catholic church's reconciliation programme helped them to forgive even those who had not personally asked for forgiveness. Some participants described forgiveness as a process inspired by their Christian faith and the teachings of the Church.

During the interview, all participants agreed that the reconciliation programme has helped in healing the wounds caused by the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi, in self-acceptance, restoring inner strength, and rebuilding confidence in life, confidence in oneself, in others, and in the community in general. They have added that the programme also enabled survivors to engage in activities or work with perpetrators so that life could continue.

These qualitative findings confirm the quantitative strand, which showed that there are positive and statistically significant correlations between all reconciliation programme domains and the psycho-spiritual well-being domains at the 0.01 level ($p < .001$). This finding means that as participation in the Catholic Church's reconciliation programme components increases, the levels of psycho-spiritual well-being among survivors also tend to increase. Survivors who reported stronger experiences of social trust, forgiveness, intergroup relations, justice and accountability, healing and trauma recovery, psycho-spiritual reconciliations support, forgiveness, trust, healing, and supportive church-led psycho-spiritual reconciliation support are also more likely to report higher levels of compassion, meaning in life, spiritual connection, and personal transformation.

Qualitative findings confirmed moderating variables of this study and introducing new intervening variables that may contribute to this dynamic. Moderating variables, such as the economic status of survivors, cultural beliefs and practice, and community participation influence the psycho-spiritual well-being of survivors. The findings revealed that 71.8% of respondents reported a middle economic status, 17.0% reported a high economic status, and 11.2% reported a low economic status. The findings indicated that most respondents reported a middle economic status, suggesting relative socio-economic recovery among survivors, which positively influences their psycho-spiritual well-being. The cultural beliefs and practices, such as "Ndi Umunyarwanda," I am Rwandan, also influenced participation in reconciliation and the psycho-spiritual well-being of the survivors. Community participation was also mentioned during FGDs. It is reported that during Reconciliation Day, the parish community is invited, and their presence facilitates personal and community healing.

The study introduced two new intervening variables from the qualitative data, where participants emphasized the need for psycho-social and material support, as well as Government and NGO interventions for the holistic healing of survivors. Survivors emphasized that trauma recovery is multidimensional, affecting physical, emotional, social, and spiritual aspects of life, thus requiring an integrated approach to psycho-spiritual well-being. Participants also noted that challenges such as poverty, health issues, and housing cannot be addressed by the Church alone. Therefore, coordinated partnerships with government and NGOs, civil society, and international organisations are needed to enhance resource mobilization and ensure comprehensive support.

The findings from the qualitative data revealed a comprehensive set of participant-driven strategies aimed at strengthening the Catholic Church's reconciliation programme and enhancing the psycho-spiritual well-being of survivors of the genocide against the Tutsi in the Cyangugu Diocese.

First, the study found a strong emphasis on the need for holistic psycho-social and material support. Participants highlighted that effective healing must go beyond spiritual interventions to include psychological care, medical assistance, and socio-economic support. Survivors emphasized that trauma recovery is multidimensional, affecting physical, emotional, social, and spiritual aspects of life, thus requiring an integrated approach to well-being.

Second, the findings underscored the importance of strengthening survivor-centered approaches and voice inclusion. Participants consistently stressed that the Catholic Church's reconciliation programme should actively involve survivors in decision-making processes.

The inclusion of survivors' voices through consultation, dialogue, and structured listening mechanisms was identified as essential for ensuring that interventions are relevant, responsive, and grounded in real needs.

Third, the study revealed the necessity of home-based pastoral care. Many survivors remain isolated due to trauma, stigma, or fear, limiting their participation in parish-based reconciliation programme. Participants proposed that the Church adopt a proactive approach by reaching out to survivors in their homes and communities, thereby fostering trust, providing personalized support, and ensuring inclusivity.

Fourth, capacity building and continuous formation for Church agents emerged as a critical strategy. The findings indicated that reconciliation work requires specialized skills in trauma healing, counselling, mediation, and psycho-spiritual accompaniment. Participants emphasized the need for ongoing training, professional competence, and the careful selection of personnel with the appropriate skills and vocation for

reconciliation ministry.

Fifth, the study identified strengthening collaboration with government institutions and NGOs as essential for addressing the complex needs of survivors. Participants noted that challenges such as poverty, health issues, and housing cannot be addressed by the Church alone. Therefore, coordinated partnerships with stakeholders such as government bodies, civil society, and international organizations were recommended to enhance resource mobilization and ensure comprehensive support.

Sixth, the findings highlighted youth engagement in reconciliation activities as a significant gap and priority area. Participants observed that youth participation in the Catholic Church's reconciliation programme remains limited due to factors such as mobility, economic pressures, and generational differences. Engaging young people was seen as crucial for sustaining reconciliation efforts and fostering a culture of peace among future generations.

Finally, the study emphasized the importance of awareness campaigns on mental health and reconciliation. Participants noted that limited understanding of trauma and mental health issues continues to hinder participation in the Catholic Church's reconciliation programme. They recommended continuous sensitization, education, and research-informed interventions to reduce stigma, increase awareness, and ensure that the catholic church's reconciliation programme is responsive to the evolving needs of survivors.

Overall, these findings demonstrated that enhancing the psycho-spiritual well-being of survivors of the genocide in the Catholic Diocese of Cyangugu, Rwanda, requires a holistic, participatory, and multi-stakeholder approach that integrates spiritual, psychological, social, and economic dimensions of healing. These findings revealed that reconciliation is experienced as a holistic process involving psychological, social, and spiritual dimensions. Survivors emphasized that healing goes beyond emotional recovery to include physical well-being, social reintegration, and spiritual restoration. The programme was therefore perceived as effective when it addressed the totality of the human person.

Practical Implication

The findings of this study offer a foundation for future empirical research and practical pastoral reconciliation programmes in different societies torn by genocide, conflicts, and wars. The findings demonstrated that the Catholic Church's Reconciliation Programme played a significant and transformative role in enhancing the psycho-spiritual well-being of survivors in Cyangugu Diocese. The programme has contributed to healing by fostering forgiveness, restoring relationships, rebuilding trust, and strengthening survivors' relationships with God.

Through its various activities, it has enabled many survivors to move from trauma and isolation toward hope, meaning, and peaceful coexistence. At the same time, the study revealed that reconciliation is not a one-time achievement but a continuous and dynamic process that requires sustained effort at individual, community, and institutional levels. While notable progress has been made, the persistence of trauma, social inequalities, and gaps in participation indicates that the process remains incomplete for some survivors. By implanting the proposed strategies, the catholic church's reconciliation programme can contribute to the psycho-spiritual well-being of survivors of different assaults.

Limitations and Future Research

While this study has provided valuable insights on relationship between the Catholic Church's reconciliation programme and Psycho-spiritual Wellbeing of the Survivors of the genocide against the Tutsi in the Cyangugu Diocese, it also encountered some limitations and revealed several areas for further study due to the complexity of the reconciliation process.

The findings of this study were limited to a specific geographical and institutional context, which may not fully capture the diversity of experiences and approaches across other dioceses or post conflicts regions. Therefore, future research is needed to expand the scope, explore emerging issues, and generate more comprehensive and

comparative evidence that can inform policy, practice, and faith-based interventions in post-conflict settings.

The second limitation was linked to the language. The majority of participants in this study were at the primary level; they could not understand English. To collect data, the researcher was asked to translate all instruments from English into Kinyarwanda to facilitate communication. There is a need to research the perceptions of reconciliation programme among intellectual survivors of the genocide to capture their views and perceptions.

The last limitation was associated with the demographics of the study. The sample skewed toward older adults of low literacy. Although this offered a depth of lived experience from direct survivors, the research findings may not reflect young people's experiences or those of people not of age during the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi. Future studies could explore the long-term impact of the reconciliation programme on younger generations who did not directly experience the genocide to assess intergenerational transmission of trauma and healing

CONCLUSION

This study examined the relationship between the Catholic church's reconciliation programme and the psycho-spiritual wellbeing of the survivors of the genocide against the Tutsi in Cyangugu Diocese, Rwanda. It focuses on survivors of the genocide against the Tutsi who are members of Groups of Unity and Reconciliation within selected parishes in Cyangugu Diocese. Integration of quantitative and qualitative findings show that there is a clear relationship between the Catholic church's reconciliation programme and the psycho-spiritual wellbeing of survivors of the genocide in Cyangugu Diocese. The programme has contributed to healing by fostering forgiveness, restoring relationships, rebuilding trust, and strengthening survivors' relationships with God. The programme created environments where survivors rebuild trust, practice forgiveness, process trauma, and reconnect with their perpetrators and with their faith, which are key elements of psycho-spiritual healing. Reconciliation programme has enabled many survivors to move from trauma and isolation toward hope, meaning, and peaceful coexistence. At the same time, the study revealed that reconciliation is not a one-time achievement but a continuous and dynamic process that requires sustained effort at individual, community, and institutional levels. While notable progress has been made, the persistence of trauma, social inequalities, and gaps in participation indicates that the process remains incomplete for some survivors.

Furthermore, the study underscored that effective reconciliation must be holistic, inclusive, and contextually grounded. Approaches that fail to address the interconnected psychological, social, spiritual, and material needs of Survivors risk limiting the depth and sustainability of healing. In particular, the limited involvement of youth and intellectual groups highlighted the need for more intentional and adaptive strategies. Overall, the Catholic Church remains a central and credible actor in promoting reconciliation and psycho-spiritual healing. However, its continued effectiveness depends on its ability to evolve, listen to survivors, and collaborate with other stakeholders in addressing both visible and hidden dimensions of post-genocide trauma.

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