

Assessing Psychological Growth Following Adversity: The Prevalence of Post-Traumatic Growth among Comboni Missionary Sisters

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.100500281>

Received: 15 May 2026; Accepted: 20 May 2026; Published: 29 May 2026

ABSTRACT

Comboni Missionary Sisters serving in the East Africa Province are frequently exposed to cumulative adversities that challenge their psychological and spiritual well-being. While trauma is often framed through negative outcomes, post-traumatic growth (PTG) describes the constructive psychological evolution that can emerge from the struggle with adversity. This study investigated the degree and nature of PTG among Sisters serving in Uganda and South Sudan, exploring how missionary vocation influences the transformative process. The study was grounded on stress and coping theory and PTG theory. The study employed an embedded mixed-methods design. Quantitative data were collected from 63 participants using the Post-Traumatic Growth Inventory, followed by semi-structured interviews with 10 purposively selected Sisters to provide interpretive depth. Findings revealed a moderately high degree of PTG ($M=75.13$), with the most significant gains identified in Spiritual Change (79.7%), Personal Strength (74.4%), Appreciation of life (71.3%), and Relating to Others (71.0%). Conversely, New Possibilities (66.8%) was the least pronounced domain. Qualitative themes elucidated that growth is driven by spiritual anchoring, cognitive reframing, and communal solidarity. The data suggest that for religious missionaries, transformation is primarily an inward "renovation" of existing identity rather than an outward life redirection. PTG in this context is a communal and vocational endeavour. Fostering long-term resilience among missionaries requires a deliberate integration of trauma-informed formation, professional counselling, and robust community-based support systems.

Keywords: Post Traumatic Growth, Comboni Missionary Sisters, East Africa Province, Missionary Trauma, Mixed-Methods.

INTRODUCTION

Post-traumatic growth (PTG) represents a process where individuals, after experiencing adversity, may emerge with a greater sense of personal strength, improved relationships, a renewed appreciation for life, a spiritual or existential growth and the identification of new life pathways (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996). Rather than the mere absence of distress, post-traumatic growth represents a positive transformation emerging from the struggle with trauma (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). This change is neither direct nor automatic; instead, it is a gradual, volitional process shaped by an individual's support systems, coping strategies, and the personal meaning they attribute to their experience (Shakespeare-Finch & Lurie-Beck, 2014). Furthermore, rather than a permanent endpoint, PTG is a variable, personally mediated process; indeed, a range of studies (Ballah, 2023; Hassan, 2022; Jayawickreme et al., 2021; Zoellner & Maercker, 2006) indicates that moderate growth is the most frequent outcome.

At the global level, research has increasingly focused on the cognitive drivers of transformation. A significant longitudinal study by Landi et al. (2022) explored this during the COVID-19 pandemic in Italy, examining how psychological flexibility acts as a precursor to growth. By tracking 382 adults across two data collection

points in 2020, capturing both the post-lockdown window and the subsequent case surge, the researchers found that initial levels of psychological flexibility were significant predictors of future PTG, particularly for those experiencing severe post-traumatic stress.

Interestingly, this correlation was not observed in participants with only mild stress, suggesting that the "machinery" of growth is most active during high-stakes adversity. The study highlighted that adaptability often requires individuals to recalibrate their mental and behavioural responses through values-based action and mindfulness. While Landi et al. provide a strong cognitive-behavioural framework, their secular lens does not account for how religious commitment and vocational identity might serve as primary forms of flexibility within a religious community.

Expanding the scope beyond cognitive adaptation, Hoover and Metz (2024) integrate the concept of moral injury into the traditional PTG framework. They define this injury as the profound psychological and spiritual distress caused by ethical betrayals or challenges to one's core belief system. Analyzing narratives from military and healthcare populations, they argue that profound transformation occurs when individuals move beyond simple recovery to "moral repair." This involves a deliberate search for meaning through communal and therapeutic supports, such as chaplain-led care or values-based counselling.

Their findings imply that PTG is a process of profound personal evolution where emerging resilience begins to overshadow the ethical fractures endured. Hoover and Metz warn that ignoring these deep-seated challenges can trigger existential despair or mental health crises. While their conceptual work is noteworthy for emphasizing the "healing of the conscience," it lacks empirical validation in non-Western, non-military contexts. This underscores a need to explore how women in religious life, governed by ethical and spiritual vows, transcend moral adversity through faith-based resilience.

Despite the optimism surrounding PTG, recent critical reflections have questioned the authenticity of reported growth. Jayawickreme et al. (2021) offer a rigorous critique, questioning whether reported PTG always corresponds to enduring personality change or if it is merely a "coping narrative." By compiling global data from numerous studies, they challenge the assumption that trauma automatically leads to measurable development. They warn that self-reported surveys may often confuse temporary adaptation with significant growth, urging researchers to adopt mixed-methods and longitudinal designs that integrate behavioural and external observations. Their call for methodological rigor, specifically mixed-methods designs that integrate behavioural observations, is vital. However, their predominantly Western orientation limits engagement with the communal factors that define growth in mission-driven contexts.

Within the African context, the literature shifts toward how localized identities and social structures mediate the degree of growth. Sinalo (2019, as cited in MacAulay, 2021) offers a seminal perspective on post-genocide Rwanda, moving beyond trauma-centric narratives to focus on the reconstruction of gender-specific identities. By analyzing 42 testimonies, Sinalo demonstrates that growth is often a gendered process: while men re-established communal ties through a rebuilt national identity ("Rwandicity"), women exhibited growth through grassroots activism and the reclamation of personal agency.

This work is vital because it treats traumatic events not as mere crises, but as the "machinery" behind fundamental identity shifts. It implies that for the Comboni Missionary Sisters, their spiritual mission could function similarly to "Rwandicity," providing a shared vocational purpose that facilitates growth. Yet, Sinalo's work is limited by its cross-sectional nature. There remains a gap in understanding how personal accounts of growth are constructed through specific theological and institutional lenses over time.

Further south, Schuitmaker et al. (2023) examined the relationship between attachment styles and PTG among university students in Johannesburg. Their study of 233 undergraduates revealed that insecure attachment, specifically anxious attachment, was powerfully connected to a diminished experience of overall PTG. Interestingly, avoidant attachment specifically hindered progress in the relational domain of growth. While these findings offer significant insights into how early-life psychological structures impact recovery, their applicability to religious life requires careful contextualization. Unlike students, CMS members are formed by

long-term community life. This unique environment may mitigate the negative effects of insecure attachment, yet the reliance on single-point quantitative surveys in previous research fails to track this complex trajectory.

The psychological mechanisms of growth are further elucidated by Eze et al. (2020) in their study of 859 internally displaced persons from Nigeria's Tiv community. Their research highlights how the disruption of "core beliefs" predicts growth, particularly when mediated by deliberate rumination. They found that intentional reflection was a primary driver of spiritual transformation and the identification of new life possibilities. This is highly relevant to the present study, as missionary sisters systematically incorporate deliberate rumination into their daily spiritual practices and theological reflections. While relevant, as missionary sisters systematically incorporate reflection into spiritual practice, a critical distinction exists: the Nigerian study focused on abrupt terror attacks, whereas the CMS face sustained, mission-specific adversity. Current literature lacks depth in understanding how religious coping influences PTG dimensions within these sustained conflict environments.

Research conducted in East Africa underscores the critical role of social support and community-integrated healing. Hassan (2022) investigated the manifestation of PTG among divorced women in Omdurman, Sudan, using a qualitative narrative approach. The study identified specific "turning points" where intentional decisions to reconstruct self-worth and independence led to a renewed sense of personal agency. Hassan's work emphasizes that varied support systems do more than provide comfort; they actively rebuild the self-efficacy stripped away by trauma. While Hassan highlights the role of support systems in rebuilding self-efficacy, the findings are limited by a small, non-random sample and a focus on marital trauma. There is a need to explore whether the communal lifestyle of the CMS parallels these therapeutic processes using standardized metrics to allow for wider generalizability.

In Northern Uganda, research has taken a more critical look at the long-term impact of conflict. Lowes et al. (2020) utilized a quasi-experimental design to examine how kidnapping and displacement altered the economic traits of survivors. Their findings cast doubt on more optimistic interpretations of PTG; while most economic preferences remained unchanged, risk tolerance saw a significant decline that was inconsistent with traditional PTG predictions. This study serves as a valuable caution against assuming that growth is uniformly positive or universally applicable across all life domains.

The intersection of institutional support and psychological recovery was further explored by Liebling et al. (2020) in their study of South Sudanese refugees in Northern Uganda. Their findings revealed that emotional healing and a renewed sense of dignity were highest when support was both faith-integrated and community-driven. This suggests that for the CMS, existing structures like pastoral care, spiritual direction, and communal living could similarly influence how PTG is maintained following adverse life experiences. However, both studies (Liebling et al., 2020; Lowes et al., 2020) often overlook the specific vocational dimension and lack direct measures of positive growth.

Across global, regional, and local literature, the degree of PTG emerges as a variable, multidimensional process shaped by cognitive, relational, and spiritual resources. However, a significant academic void remains: literature regarding PTG in South Sudan is extremely scarce. Due to the country's prolonged political instability, researchers have historically prioritized the study of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and immediate crisis intervention over positive psychological transformation.

The current study addresses these multi-layered gaps by analyzing the degree of PTG among Comboni Missionary Sisters (CMS) in the East Africa Province. Specifically looking at how religious vocation and community bonds serve as catalysts for recovery, this research provides the necessary evidence to understand the nature of growth in one of the world's most challenging mission contexts. Furthermore, the CMS represent a unique population: they experience continuous, mission-specific adversity within a life defined by communal living, religious vocation, and theological meaning-making. Grounded in the post traumatic growth theory, the current study employs an embedded mixed-methods design. By integrating quantitative PTG metrics with qualitative narrative interviews, this research investigates the degree of PTG among the CMS, exploring how

their spiritual mission and communal life function as the "machinery" for sustained resilience in the East Africa Province.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study utilized an embedded mixed-methods design, a framework where one data set provides a supportive, contextualizing role for the other (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). In this research, qualitative interview data were embedded within a primary quantitative cross-sectional framework. This approach was selected to leverage the statistical breadth of survey data regarding the degree of Post-Traumatic Growth (PTG), while simultaneously capturing the nuanced, lived experiences of the Comboni Missionary Sisters (CMS). This dual lens allows for a comprehensive understanding of how specific types of growth (e.g., spiritual, relational) are constructed within the mission field.

Location of the Study

The research was conducted within the East Africa Province of the CMS, focusing on missions across Uganda and South Sudan. These neighbouring nations offer a unique landscape of adversity; while Uganda presents a mix of relative stability and socio-economic challenges, South Sudan remains a high-risk humanitarian context characterized by systemic instability and conflict. Having maintained a continuous presence in these regions since 1918 and 1919, respectively, the Sisters represent a repository of long-term vocational resilience in volatile settings.

Target Population and Sampling

The target population comprised all 104 Comboni Missionary Sisters serving in the East Africa Province. A census method was utilized, inviting the entire population (N=104) to participate. This ensured a full representation of the Province's diverse nationalities, age groups, and years of service, minimizing sampling bias in the assessment of growth degrees. Purposive sampling was employed to select 10 participants for in-depth semi-structured interviews. Selection criteria included diversity in age, nationality, and length of missionary service to ensure rich, reflective narratives that offered interpretive depth to the statistical findings.

Instruments of Measure

The Post-Traumatic Growth Inventory (PTGI) (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996) was used to assess growth across five domains: *Relating to Others*, *New Possibilities*, *Personal Strength*, *Spiritual Change*, and *Appreciation of Life*. The 21-item scale utilizes a six-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (*no degree of change*) to 5 (*very great degree of change*). Semi-structured interview guides were developed to explore the "symbolic weight" of adversities and the nature of subsequent transformation. These guides featured open-ended questions designed to elicit detailed descriptions of the transition from struggle to growth, ensuring consistency while allowing for unique thematic insights to emerge.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, and frequencies, were used to establish the degree of PTG reported across the five domains using SPSS Version 23. Qualitative data were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using thematic analysis. This involved a recursive process of coding to identify recurrent patterns in how the Sisters' vocational identity and communal life influenced their growth. In alignment with the embedded design, the two datasets were initially analyzed independently. Integration occurred during the interpretation phase, where qualitative themes were used to explain and illustrate the quantitative results, providing a synthesized understanding of the "degree" of growth within the specific cultural and religious context of East Africa.

RESULTS

The study aimed to investigate the degree and nature of PTG among Sisters serving in Uganda and South Sudan. The study began by presenting the demographic profile of the participants followed by the findings of the study.

Demographic Profiles of Participants

Demographic data were collected to contextualize the experiences of the Comboni Missionary Sisters (CMS). Of the 104 sisters invited to participate, 63 completed the survey, representing a 60.6% response rate. A purposively sampled subgroup of 10 sisters participated in the qualitative phase to provide interpretive depth to the quantitative findings.

Table 1 Demographic Distribution of Questionnaire Participants (N=63)

Item	Category	N.	Percentage (%)
Age Bracket in Years	30 - 40	11	17.5%
	41 - 50	15	23.8%
	51 - 60	15	23.8%
	61 - 70	9	14.3%
	71 +	13	20.6%
Years Spent in Religious Life	0 - 10	11	17.5%
	11 - 25	17	27.0%
	26 - 40	22	34.9%
	41 +	13	20.6%
Ministry context	Health	16	25.4%
	Pastoral	23	36.5%
	Education	16	25.4%
	Other	8	12.7%
Nationality Grouped by Region of Origin	Africa	33	52.4%
	Europe	23	36.5%
	Latin America	7	11.1%
	Total	63	100%

As shown in Table 1, the sample is primarily middle-aged, with 47.6% (n=30) of participants aged between 41 and 60. Notably, a significant portion (20.6%) was aged 71 or older, contributing a wealth of missionary longevity and historical perspective to the data. The cohort is highly experienced; over half of the participants (55.5%) have spent more than 25 years in religious life. Ministry roles were diverse, with pastoral work being

the most prominent (36.5%), followed by health and education. Furthermore, the sample reflects the international character of the Congregation, with African-born sisters comprising the majority (52.4%), followed by sisters from Europe and Latin America.

For the qualitative phase, ten participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure varied perspectives across age, ministry, and origin. These participants were assigned codes (A1–A10) to ensure anonymity.

Table 2 Demographic Distribution of Interview Participants (N=10)

Criteria of Inclusion	Description	Number	Percentage
Region of Origin	Africa	4	40%
	Europe	4	40%
	Latin America	2	20%
Ministeriality	Pastoral Ministry	3	30%
	Teaching Ministry	3	30%
	Health Ministry	2	20%
	Formation Ministry	2	20%
Age Bracket	30 - 40	1	10%
	40 - 50	3	30%
	50 - 60	4	40%
	60 +	2	20%
	Total	10	100%

The interview cohort was intentionally balanced, with the majority falling in the 50–60 age bracket (n=4). This deliberate selection was designed to provide an in-depth exploration of how lived experiences of growth vary across different vocational stages and cultural backgrounds.

Degree of Post-Traumatic Growth among Comboni Missionary Sisters

This section analyzes the degree of Post-Traumatic Growth (PTG) reported by Comboni Missionary Sisters following adverse life events in the East Africa Province. While the Post-Traumatic Growth Inventory (PTGI) is traditionally a continuous measure (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996), this study interprets scores to identify the specific intensity and domains of transformation. Using descriptive statistics (Mean and Standard Deviation), Table 3 outlines the distribution of growth across the five PTGI domains.

Table 3 Degree of Post Traumatic Growth among Comboni Missionary Sisters in East Africa Province (N=63)

Scale	Maximum Score	Mean	% of Maximum	Standard Deviation
Relating to Others	35	24.86	71.0%	4.15
New Possibilities	25	16.71	66.8%	3.68

Personal Strength	20	14.89	74.4%	2.44
Spiritual Change	10	7.97	79.7%	1.32
Appreciation of Life	15	10.70	71.3%	2.54
Total PTG	105	75.13	71.5%	14.13

As illustrated in Table 3, the Total PTG mean score was 75.13 (SD = 14.13), indicating a moderately high overall degree of growth. This suggests that the majority of participants experienced meaningful psychological and spiritual shifts following adversity. The moderate standard deviation (14.13) indicates that while growth was widespread, its intensity varied based on individual processing and the quality of communal support.

Domain Analysis and Qualitative Integration

Spiritual Change: The Primary Catalyst

Spiritual transformation emerged as the most significant area of growth (M=7.97; 79.7% of potential). These figures suggest that, above all else, the enduring legacy of these sisters' hardships was a radical deepening of their faith and a far more resolute trust in the divine. Rather than just a side effect of their struggle, this spiritual evolution became the central outcome of their journey. The narrow margin of variation (SD=1.32) points to a collective spiritual evolution rather than isolated experiences. For these women, faith functions as the primary lens for processing pain, integrate it into their life story, and eventually move beyond it. This quantitative spike is mirrored in qualitative themes of "radical surrender": "I am powerless in front of what I am facing. ... My only power is God. I have to rely on Him, I have to trust Him" (A6). Another sister reinforced this:

In the situation of war, to trust more in God, because we are in His hand, and to take life as it is. To be able to be flexible, because each day you may have a programme and then it is upside down (A5).

Personal Strength and Psychological Stamina

The Personal Strength subscale reached 74.4% of its maximum (M=14.89). This suggests a substantive shift in secondary appraisal, where internal self-efficacy begins to exceed external stressors. These statistics effectively validate the qualitative themes of endurance, giving empirical weight to the narratives of those who survived and served amidst the volatility of war, personal illness and human suffering of the people they were ministering to. Sisters reported a newfound ability to set precise boundaries and manage emotional responses: "I have learned to stand firm, to be more assertive, and to strengthen my personal boundaries without feeling guilty" (A1). And in the words of participant A2: "I became more and more aware of my true self. So I don't take anymore things personally. I am less afraid in daily life."

Relating to Others: Compassion through Struggle

The Relating to Others domain (M=24.86 out of a possible 35) reflects robust growth in interpersonal functioning. However, the higher standard deviation (4.15) suggests that this shift varied significantly from person to person, probably influenced by the diverse realities of community life. Many sisters described an evolution from mere "tolerance" to deep, empathy-driven compassion:

I have grown in compassion, both for the victims and the perpetrators, though violence comes from the devil. It is his destructive power at work. But I can say that this traumatic experience has helped me to grow in compassion towards myself and towards others (A9).

Appreciation of Life and Existential Awakening

With a mean of 10.70 (71.3% of its maximum), this domain signifies that their experiences have sharpened their awareness of life's delicate nature, replacing a routine existence with a deep, newfound gratitude for the

present moment. Adversity acted as a catalyst for an existential awakening, where the fragility of life heightened its perceived worth: "I am more patient and very grateful for what I am and I have, moment by moment" (A2).

New Possibilities: Transformation within Vows

Participants scored lowest in New Possibilities ($M=16.71$; 66.8%). This "modest" growth likely reflects the structural reality of religious life; the vow of obedience and institutional discernment create "pre-determined" vocational trajectories. While their internal worlds expand, their external life choices remain anchored. Nonetheless, some sisters described renewed vocational clarity and a transformed approach to mission.

I feel that by accepting, by surrendering, I am also growing humanly/ psychologically. When I go to visit the sick here at the hospital, I share with them my experience. I tell them not to be afraid. I advice them to surrender to God and to trust the doctors and follow what the doctors tell them. When you have cancer you have no time for regret or blame, you have to accept. When you accept, things will change (A6).

Another sister shared:

I have also learned to see the challenges as stepping stones on my journey. I am even able to bless for the people with whom I struggled in community life. Maybe if I did not have those challenges, I could not be the person I am today (A7).

DISCUSSION

The findings from the East Africa Province indicate that Comboni Missionary Sisters demonstrate a degree of Post-Traumatic Growth (PTG) that aligns with the moderate-to-high levels documented in broader clinical and social research (Jayawickreme et al., 2021; Zoellner & Maercker, 2006). However, the growth observed in this cohort is uniquely inextricably linked to a faith-based communal identity. In this context, the chronic nature of adversity in Uganda and South Sudan is inseparable from the spiritual meaning the participants assign to their struggle.

Consistent with the functional descriptive model of Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004), PTG did not emerge as a direct consequence of trauma, but through deliberate cognitive, emotional, and spiritual processing. The non-uniform growth patterns observed (evidenced by the standard deviations in Table 3) reveal a complex interplay between a sister's internal worldview and her external communal environment. This supports the frameworks of Landi et al. (2022) and Shakespeare-Finch and Lurie-Beck (2014), which identify psychological flexibility, in this case, spiritual adaptability, as the engine through which personal interpretation and social support are transformed into meaningful growth.

A central conclusion of this study is the overwhelming primacy of Spiritual Change as both a domain of growth and a primary framework for integration. For the CMS, spirituality functions as a "meta-framework" that bridges the gap between individual endurance and communal identity. While existing literature (Hoover & Metz, 2024) suggests that moral repair is vital for healing, these findings elevate spiritual meaning-making from a "coping strategy" to a structural necessity. The qualitative themes of "radical surrender" suggest that growth is achieved not by overcoming the crisis, but by integrating the crisis into a narrative of divine providence.

The lower scores in the New Possibilities domain ($M=16.71$) offer a compelling contribution to PTG theory. While secular cohorts often report growth through "life redirection" or "new career paths," the structured nature of religious vocation, governed by institutional commitments and the vow of obedience, naturally constrains external life changes. This suggests a localized "refining" of PTG theory: in religious contexts, transformation is primarily inward and relational rather than outward. Rather than changing their "course" in life, the sisters experience a "renovation" of their existing vocational identity, emerging with a more spiritually stable sense of self.

The qualitative findings illustrate that for these participants, growth and distress are not mutually exclusive. The "symbolic weight" of adversity led to a more robust emotional maturity and a refined capacity for compassion, even toward perpetrators (as noted by Participant A9). From a stress and coping perspective (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), these results suggest that PTG is driven by high-level adaptive reappraisal. Spiritual disciplines such as "acceptance" and "trust" serve as the primary cognitive tools through which crises are navigated, effectively bridging the gap between psychological endurance and theological conviction.

Ultimately, PTG among the Comboni Missionary Sisters emerges through a multifaceted layering of spiritual reflection and interpersonal connection. The inherent variability of their recovery is counterweighted by the stability of community structures. This suggests that for this population, vocational commitment is not merely a lifestyle, but the primary mechanism through which resilience is maintained and trauma is transformed into a state of flourishing.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the degree of Post-Traumatic Growth (PTG) among Comboni Missionary Sisters in the East Africa Province. The findings demonstrate that despite the chronic and severe nature of the adversities encountered, the Sisters report a moderately high degree of growth ($M=75.13$), with the most profound transformations occurring in the domains of Spiritual Change, Personal Strength, and Appreciation of Life. The results suggest that for this population, PTG is not an accidental by-product of survival but a deliberate process of vocational integration. The uneven distribution across domains, specifically the primacy of spiritual evolution over "new possibilities", highlights that growth in religious life is characterized by an inward renovation of identity rather than an outward change in life direction. Ultimately, the study confirms that a shared missionary calling and a robust spiritual framework function as the primary engines of resilience, allowing for flourishing even within volatile humanitarian contexts.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the finding that PTG is mediated by communal support and spiritual meaning-making, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. **Trauma-Informed Formation.** Leadership should integrate formal training on emotional literacy and meaning-making into both initial and ongoing formation cycles. Since growth is "non-uniform," sisters need diverse tools to process lived experiences through both psychological and theological lenses.
2. **Institutional Well-being Policies.** Religious and mission-driven institutions should develop formal policies for missionary transition support. This includes mandatory psychological debriefings after critical incidents and "sabbatical" periods following high-risk missions to allow for the cognitive and emotional processing necessary for PTG to occur.
3. **Facilitated Communal Processing.** Given the high scores in "Relating to Others," local communities should establish structured peer-support reflection sessions. These safe spaces allow for the collective "symbolic weighing" of adversity, transforming individual struggle into communal strength.
4. **Integration of Psychosocial Support.** Congregations should bridge the gap between spiritual "anchoring" and professional psychological care by ensuring access to culturally and spiritually sensitive counselling services, recognizing that psychological health is a prerequisite for sustained spiritual growth.

Limitations And Suggestions For Further Research

While this study offers a synthesized understanding of Post-Traumatic Growth (PTG) within the East Africa Province, several methodological boundaries and areas warranting further investigation must be acknowledged:

Sample Specificity and Generalizability: The quantitative sample for this study was drawn exclusively from the Comboni Missionary Sisters serving within the East Africa Province. While a census method was utilized to ensure full representation of this specific population, the findings may not fully generalize to missionaries from different religious congregations, geographical regions, or diverse cultural backgrounds. Future research should utilize larger, more diverse samples involving missionaries across multiple congregations to improve the generalizability of these findings.

Longitudinal Research and Ongoing Stress: This study utilized a cross-sectional framework within its embedded mixed-methods design, capturing data at a single point in time. Because PTG is an evolving, variable process, future studies should employ longitudinal designs to track the developmental trajectory of growth over time. This would allow researchers to observe how PTG evolves across different stages of a sister's missionary life and examine how it dynamically interacts with ongoing stress or continuous trauma exposure.

Expanding the Scope of Psychological Measures: The primary focus of this investigation was to establish the degrees and domains of positive psychological transformation via the Post-Traumatic Growth Inventory (PTGI). However, the instruments did not account for concurrent clinical or systemic strain. Incorporating additional standardized psychological measures related to burnout, depression, anxiety, and baseline resilience alongside PTG metrics would provide a more comprehensive, holistic understanding of missionary well-being.

Comparative Analysis: Comparative research between religious missionaries and lay humanitarian staff would clarify how a specific religious "calling" uniquely influences the processing of trauma compared to secular professional motivations.

Isolating Mediating Variables: Further empirical investigation is needed to isolate the predictive strength of specific variables, such as relational attachment styles and institutional support, in facilitating transformation within religious communities.

Operationalizing Qualitative Themes: The unique qualitative themes identified in this study (specifically *Spiritual Anchoring* and *Relational Solidarity*) should be operationalized into measurable scales. Testing these new scales would help verify their applicability and validity in other mission-driven or high-adversity contexts.

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