The Perceived Impact of a Post-Secondary Education Program on Kenyan Catholic Sisters’ Understanding of Their Lives as Women Religious: A Case Study

Marywood University
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Women Religious in Africa

Have a positive impact on the welfare and wellbeing of those to whom they minister (McNally, 2016)

Serve in ministries in fields including education, social services, and health care (Wakahiu & Keller, 2011)

Minimal formal post-secondary education credentials or training (Wakahiu, 2015)
80% of women religious in sub-Saharan African congregations possess no post-secondary education credentials (Wakahiu & Shaver, 2015)
The Post-Secondary Education Program

PURPOSE
Provide sisters the opportunity to acquire post-secondary education

COMPONENTS
10 countries
22 partner colleges/universities
Workshops & cohort system

FACILITATION
Collaborative of US congregations of women religious and their respective colleges/universities

OUTCOMES
2013-2017: 541 sisters served
Participants report having a positive experience in the program
Prior Research: Program

Wakahiu & Kangethe, 2014, $N=18$; Wakahiu & Shaver, 2015, $N=17$

Both qualitative, analyzed the effectiveness of the program’s ability to provide African women religious post-secondary education.

No studies have addressed the post-secondary education program’s perceived impact on sisters’ understanding of their lives as women religious or view of themselves in ministry.
Add to growing body of literature available on women religious in Africa
Literature Review

Gender Disparity in Education
Kisaka (2015)
Odhiambo (2016)

Kenyan Women in Leadership
Kamunyu (2017)
Maloiy et al. (2016)

Life of a Kenyan Woman Religious
Smythe (2007)
Obi & Bolen (2017)

Education’s Impact on Understanding Religious Life
Pew Research Center (2017)
Gap in the Literature

No studies had explored how a post-secondary education program may impact Kenyan sisters’ understanding of their lives as women religious or view of themselves in ministry.
Methodology

CHAPTER THREE
QUALITATIVE
Collection of rich, descriptive data

CASE STUDY
Allows researchers to understand more about a particular case (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016)

MERRIAM
Emphasis on an individual’s interaction with their social world and specialization for analysis of educational programs (Merriam, 2001)

BOUNDARIES OF INQUIRY
Kenyan women religious participating in the same post-secondary education program since 2013
The Case: Program Participants in Kenya

Participants in Kenya
- 119 participants as of 2017
- 81 graduates as of 2017

Partners in Kenya:
- Catholic University of Eastern Africa
- Tangaza University College
- ChemChemi Ya Uzima Institute
Participants

Purposive “two-tier” sampling
• 13 post-secondary education program participants
• 4 staff members
Description of Participants

Post-Secondary Education Program Participants (N = 13)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Catholic University of Eastern Africa</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chemchemi Ya Uzima Institute</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tangaza University College</td>
<td>2</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Education</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Master’s Degree</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s Degree</td>
<td>10</td>
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Average Age: 40
Average Years in Religious Life: 16
Average Years Since Final Profession: 7
Data Collection Methods

Example Protocol Questions:
What compelled you to join religious life?
What impact, if any, do you feel your post-secondary education is having/has had on your understanding of religious life?
Inductive constant comparative method (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016)
- “Open coding”, purely descriptive
- Placed in themes through comparison
- Saturation was reached
Validity Issues

**DISCREPANT CASE ANALYSIS**
Following the “preponderance of evidence” when coming to conclusions during analysis (Patton, 2015)

**TRIANGULATION**
Multiple sources of data used to corroborate findings

**REACTIVITY**
Separate position from evaluation, informed consent & maintain confidentiality

**REFLEXIVITY**
“The researcher affects and is affected by the research process” (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016), awareness of inherent bias and assumptions
Findings

CHAPTER FOUR
CENTRAL RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. Has participation in a post-secondary education program transformed Kenyan sisters’ understanding of their lives as women religious?
2. Has participation in a post-secondary education program influenced how Kenyan women religious view themselves in their ministries?
Findings: Establishing Understanding

“Seeing how she was taking care of them, like they were her own children, I am seeing God in these people. So she really motivated me very much and I was very inspired. She actually impressed me.” -Participant C

Establishment of understanding of life as a woman religious and view of self in ministry.
Findings: Impact on Understanding

The post-secondary education program’s impact on sisters’ understanding of life as women religious and view of themselves in ministry.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Enhanced Ministry Abilities</th>
<th>Explicit Skills Learned</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>PROFESSIONAL SKILL DEVELOPMENT</strong></td>
<td>Increased knowledge or understanding of their ministry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ACADEMIC ABILITY</strong></td>
<td>Improvement of academic skills, ability to critically read, write and conduct research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CONGREGATION STRENGTHENING</strong></td>
<td>Increased capacity of congregations (i.e., financial skills, strategic planning)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SPIRITUAL UNDERSTANDING</strong></td>
<td>Comprehension of religious life and the Catholic faith</td>
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</table>
Enhanced Ministry Abilities

I needed to be educated, prior to (the program) I was chief accountant in 2013. I was in charge of 32 million shillings and the Italian Diocese wanted the congregation to manage more. There was no one trained to do so, so I needed to be educated. With no education, you are regarded as nothing.

Participant E
Empowerment

PERCEPTION OF PERSONAL CONTROL

SELF-CONFIDENCE
Increased confidence in abilities, feeling prepared for any circumstance

COURAGE
Alleviation of fear for the future or unknown

SELF-ESTEEM
Higher value of self
I can say that this has been the most important empowerment for me because to say the truth, before I was not a courageous woman. I had a lot of fears but now I am able to face any difficulties and any circumstance that I meet on my way.

Participant A
Relational Engagement

ABILITY TO ENGAGE WITH OTHERS

SOCIAL-INTERACTION
Increases in ability to communicate, relate to others, and appreciate/accept diversity

SELF-AWARENESS
Relative to relationships with others, an ability to see self in a larger world context, an understanding of others’ perceptions

LEADERSHIP
Better able to lead because of an increased understanding of others, being a role model for others, "bearing witness" and “living their faith”
We are people of different personalities, so to be able to handle and understand people and take them from where they are and help them...it really helps me to understand diversity, what it means to live and work with people with different varied opinion, different personality and it has helped me to understand that each person has something to offer.

Participant B
Conclusions

CHAPTER FIVE
Emergence of findings from the theoretical framework.
Increased sense of stewardship and service as a result of participating in the post-secondary education program

Sisters’ stated that their goal is to provide higher level of service to others, indicative of a servant leader

“The knowledge that I get is not something that I own. What I receive is something to be shared in my community.” –Participant H
Interpretation of Findings

Has participation in a post-secondary education program transformed Kenyan sisters’ understanding of their lives as women religious?

By developing as servant leaders, sisters:

• Have an increased appreciation of their roles within the Catholic Church, their congregations, and society
• Display characteristics of womanists and are able to advocate appropriately for their self-worth
• Experience congregational relationship improvement, as they express humility, gratefulness, and understanding related to the educational opportunity allotted to them

Has participation in a post-secondary education program influenced how Kenyan women religious view themselves in their ministries?

By developing as servant leaders, sisters:

• Are better able to identify the needs of the marginalized and more equipped to respond to their needs
Limitations

- Limited Generalizability
- Reliance on Self-Report
- Researcher Reactivity & Reflexivity
Implications

Program contributed to the development of servant leaders, which is beneficial not only to the sister but also to those she serves.

Long-term impacts have yet to be seen, additional developments continue to be possible.

Potentially, findings could be extended to African women in general promoting women’s empowerment throughout the continent and encouraging the achievement of worldwide gender equality.
Recommendations for Future Studies

**EXPAND PARTICIPANT POOL**
Allow for cultural comparison, determine if results are able to be replicated in the program’s other countries of operation

**OTHER POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION PROGRAMS**
Compare the unique characteristics of the program under study in this research

**LARGE SCALE QUANTITATIVE STUDY**
Use findings to create a quantitative assessment tool, allowing for a larger sample size and more definitive information collection

**POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION AND SERVANT LEADERSHIP IN THE LIVES OF WOMEN RELIGIOUS**
Enhance understanding of the cross-cultural differences in this area
Questions & Comments

CONTACT INFORMATION

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