

Citation: Ndung'u, M. P. (2021). The Role of Religious Strategies in Coping with Stress, and Enhancement of the Psychological Well Being of Life Sentenced Inmates in Maximum Prisons in Kenya. *Journal of African Interdisciplinary Studies*, 5(4), 81 - 97.

The Role of Religious Strategies in Coping with Stress, and Enhancement of The Psychological Well Being of Life Sentenced Inmates in Maximum Prisons in Kenya

By

Ndung'u Muring'u Paul
Egerton University, Njoro, Kenya
Email: kimsleykoech@gmail.com

Abstract

Prisoner serving life sentence go through many difficult experiences. They have to acclimatize with the fact of spending a very long time or life time in prison. They have also to adapt to the prison environment with all its deprivations, challenges and stresses. They are affected psychologically, physically, socially and emotionally. The purpose of this study was to establish the influence of religious coping strategies on the psychological well-being of life sentenced inmates in maximum security prisons in Kenya. Cognitive behavioural theory and Logotherapy theory guided this study. This study was a descriptive survey. The target population was life sentenced inmates in nine maximum security prisons in Kenya. The accessible population was 4,487 life sentenced inmates. The sample size of the life sentenced inmates was 365 which was selected through systematic sampling. In addition, 30 specialized prison officers were purposively selected. Thus, the total sample size was 395 respondents. The study collected data using questionnaires for life sentenced inmates, an adapted psychological well-being scale for life sentenced inmates and an interview schedule for specialized prison officers. Validity of instruments was ensured through construction of relevant instruments based on the objective of the study. A pilot study was conducted to ensure reliability of the instruments in Naivasha maximum security prison and Nakuru women prison the instruments were subjected to Cronbach coefficient alpha. The Cronbach alpha for the instruments was 0.824. The overall response rate for the study was 95.1% Data was analyzed through descriptive statistics and inferential statistics aided by Statistical Package for Social Studies (SPSS) version 24. The research question was adequately answered. Regression, spearman's rank order (r_{ho}) correlation and ANOVA were also used in analysis. The findings of the study indicate that religious coping strategies influence the psychological well-being of life sentenced inmates. The overall mean of the constructs was 3.45. The study recommends that; policy makers and stakeholders of correctional and rehabilitation of inmates prioritize on the psychological well-being of lifers for effective rehabilitation and reintegration of the inmates.

Keywords: Kenya, Religious Strategies, Coping, Psychological Well-Being, Lifers

Citation: Ndung'u, M. P. (2021). The Role of Religious Strategies in Coping with Stress, and Enhancement of the Psychological Well Being of Life Sentenced Inmates in Maximum Prisons in Kenya. *Journal of African Interdisciplinary Studies*, 5(4), 81 - 97.

The Role of Religious Strategies in Coping with Stress, and Enhancement of The Psychological Well Being of Life Sentenced Inmates in Maximum Prisons in Kenya

By

Ndung'u Muring'u Paul

Introduction

The United Nations human Rights declaration of 1948 listed all the rights that a human being must enjoy. Among those rights is the right to worship that means that every human being in whichever circumstances of life he or she finds him or herself must be allowed to practice and participate in prayers and worship in his or her desired way. It is for this reason that prisoners too are granted the right to worship. Many governments accord this right to prisoners by either having chaplains who are employed by the government to minister to the prisoners at the correctional institution or grant entry permits to external voluntary religious personnel, to visit the prisons from time to time for the purpose of ministering to persons in prison (Larbode, 2006). Among the human universal rights to the prisoners is the right to worship and have religious rites and rituals. Religious activities are helpful in assisting prisoners cope and manage stress. Religion also serves as a strategy of ensuring to a certain extent the psychological well being of the prisoners. Religious practices in prison are also helpful in rehabilitation and reintegration of prisoners back to the society.

Life sentenced who are also referred to as lifers, spend long or the entire of their lives since incarceration in prison. It is possible that among other programs in prison religious activities and programs help them in the coping with stress, behavior medication and enhance their psychological well-being. This study sought to establish whether religious strategy is helpful to the life sentenced inmates in maximum security prisons in Kenya in coping with stress and enhancement of their psychological well-being.

Statement of the Problem

Life imprisonment is viewed by many human rights champions as infringing on the human right to life and freedom. In Kenya there are suggestions for the abolishing of indeterminate life imprisonment with reference to the Kenyan reviewed constitution (2010) which guarantees every Kenyan, right to life and human dignity among other rights. One in seven prisoners in the world has a serious mental health condition. Protecting mental well-being and addressing mental ill-health are the two most challenging issues worldwide yet many prisons do not have the resources to provide adequate mental health care for either prisoners or staff. High prevalence of psychiatric ill-health among prison inmates may often inhibit their behaviour modification and rehabilitation. The concern ought to be on whether the coping strategies in prison promote the psychological well-being of life sentenced inmates. Mental disorders may be prevalent in prison populations and they could be related to factors such as previous mental illness before incarceration, poor access to mental health in prison and the many depriving conditions in the prison environment. Prolonged adaptation to the deprivations of prison life may also lead to psychological disturbances. The ongoing climate of trauma could create anxiety, phobias, suicidal tendencies, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) among the life sentenced inmates who previously may not have had serious mental issues. The rehabilitative programs in prisons which have strategies such as

Citation: Ndung'u, M. P. (2021). The Role of Religious Strategies in Coping with Stress, and Enhancement of the Psychological Well Being of Life Sentenced Inmates in Maximum Prisons in Kenya. *Journal of African Interdisciplinary Studies*, 5(4), 81 - 97.

physiological, sociological, psychological and spiritual strategies are aimed at helping life sentenced inmates cope with stress. This study intended to establish whether the selected coping strategies influence the psychological well-being of life sentenced inmates.

Objective of the study

To establish the Role of religious strategies in coping with stress, rehabilitation and enhancement of the psychological well-being of life sentenced inmates.

Review of Related Literature

Religion is often experienced as a source of insight or point of reference of life, it can include belief in irrelevant realities or experiences of the inspirational nature of the world (Okpalaenwe, 2014). The use of religious faith as a tool for inmates' adjustment and treatment is certainly not a new, many prisons and jails in the United States engaged chaplains since the establishment of the prison system (Sundt, Dammer and Cullen, 2002). The chaplain's availability in the prisons conveys the meaning that the religious services are important for the welfare of inmates (Nyaberi, Kilonzo and Gumo, 2019). Adherents of religion turn to the divine and spiritual activities as a way of coping with stress and for most of them things that are beyond human control can only be directed and solved by God. Spiritual Religious strategy is probably one of the most important way of coping with stress. Research has shown that religion even surpasses education as one of the most frequently used strategies in jails and prisons throughout the US (Johnson, 2008; Nyaberi, Kilonzo and Gumo 2019). Religiousness appears to have a stronger effect among persons with greater exposure to stressful events and conditions (Fisher, 2019). Santrock (2005) opined that although people in some religious sects avoid conventional medicine, individuals in the religious mainstream enjoy a link between religion and physical health. Researchers have found that religious commitment helps to moderate blood pressure and hypertension (Santrock, 2005).

Religious thoughts can play a role in maintaining hope and stimulating motivation for recovery. Prayer might be associated with positive health related changes in the face of stress, such as decreased perception of pain and reduced muscle tension (Santrock, 2003). Research has shown for example, that people who attend religious services more than once in a week live longer than those who do not (Antony, 2003). A 1998 study by doctors at Duke University, North Carolina, found that people who attended church weekly were less likely to be hospitalized than those who went to the church less often (Jones, 2002). Karl Max, who was a German philosopher and Economist, is quoted to have referred to religion as the 'opiate of the people' (Luchte, 2009). Fanatical tendencies would confirm the statement of Karl Max while realistic non fanatical religion would lead to optimism, hope and strength to bear with challenges and set backs of life.

Religious rituals and worship services bring together like-minded persons on regular basis for activities to which they ascribe; shared beliefs, which can enhance trust among the faithful (Fisher, 2019). In most cases these individuals also share beliefs and they feel a sense of control over their own situation, helping them cope with depression and anxiety (Johnnson, 2011). Studies have shown that traditional beliefs and religious norms can foster unity among congregants (Stroebe, 2011). Religious groups may be ideal sites in which to form friendship bonds and develop enduring social networks (Lim and Putman, 2010). Social interactions within religious groups may also foster valuable mental resources that can aid in coping with stressful events and conditions (Ellison, Bradshaw, Kuyel & Marcum, 2012).

Citation: Ndung'u, M. P. (2021). The Role of Religious Strategies in Coping with Stress, and Enhancement of the Psychological Well Being of Life Sentenced Inmates in Maximum Prisons in Kenya. *Journal of African Interdisciplinary Studies*, 5(4), 81 - 97.

Religious congregations offer opportunities for members to cultivate new skills of leadership and public speaking (Schwandel, 2002). Religious congregations also afford formal support systems including various programs and ministries that are designed to channel various types of assistance to persons in need especially the sick and those in prison (Trinitapoli, 2005). Spiritual practices conducted within set ups such as prison may enhance religious belief systems and augment the role of personal spiritual disciplines thus enhancing the faith commitments of individuals (Fisher, 2019). One of the tenets of logotherapy that was postulated by logotherapists, was the spiritual aspect that enables man/woman survive even in very tough conditions as he searches for the meaning of life. Spirituality, though in logotherapy is referred to as “noetic” is the uniquely human dimension of logotherapy (Frankl, 2016).

Religious Activities as Stress Coping Strategies

Santrock (2005), reported that, a study found that some individuals with HIV AIDS who lived much longer than expected had used religion as a coping strategy, participating in religious activities, such as praying, and attending church services. Johnson (2011) observed that many inmates especially those who face the greatest social isolation, faith-based services may offer a reliable social support in prison. Most studies (Dye and Aday, 2019; Jang and Duwe, 2016; Johnson, 2011), suggest that religious beliefs may provide people in prison support, hope and a way to make sense of their situation. Clear and Sumter (2003) found out that inmates religiosity significantly increase their ability to cope with incarceration and significantly decreased their incidences indiscipline and infractions. Johnson (2004) in a research found that most inmates most actively involved in prison fellowship (PF) bible studies in four US prisons had fewer adjustment problems and enjoyed good health compared to the control group and compared to inmates who were only moderately involved in PF bible studies. Santrock (2005) further observed that the social connections promoted by religious activity can prevent anxiety and depression and can help to prevent loneliness. Positive thinking and cultivation of hopefulness in life are values that are emphasized in religious circles and to a great deal help in coping with stress.

According to the United Nations declaration on human rights (UNHDR) of 1948 to which most nations of the world ascribe, religion, is one of the fundamental freedoms that human persons must be accorded (Laborde, 2006). Persons in prison should also be given opportunity and access to religion without institutional inhibitions. Every prisoner shall, ought to be given opportunity to fulfill the needs of his spiritual life (Benedict, 2010). This in a way may assist them not only in rehabilitation but also in enhancing their positive view to life and hopefulness. It probably enables them find meaning in life and in a way to cope with stress while in prison, they may come into terms with the self and their situation as well as relate in a healthier way with their peers (Atabong, 2007). This study therefore hoped to determine whether religious strategies of coping with stress among the life sentenced inmates in maximum security prisons in Kenya, has influence on their psychological well being.

Research Methodology

The study employed descriptive Survey research design. A sample of 365 lifers and 30 prison officers from maximum security prisons participated in the study. The sample in the study was selected through systematic and purposive sampling. The lifers were distributed in all the prisons using proportionate sampling. The prison officers were purposively selected so as to

Citation: Ndung'u, M. P. (2021). The Role of Religious Strategies in Coping with Stress, and Enhancement of the Psychological Well Being of Life Sentenced Inmates in Maximum Prisons in Kenya. *Journal of African Interdisciplinary Studies*, 5(4), 81 - 97.

include chaplains, welfare officers, counselors and clinical health officers. Data from the selected sample was collected using open ended and partly structured questionnaires, interview schedule and psychological well being scale. The rationale of using questionnaires was due to the big number of lifers and the interview schedule was for the purpose of gathering in depth information from the prison officers.

The psychological well being scale was used to measure the psychological wellness of the lifers. The pilot study was conducted in Naivasha maximum prison. The data from the pilot study was used to compute the Cronbach Alpha coefficient for the reliability of the instruments. The instruments were considered reliable as they yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.824 Quantitative data was coded and computed and analyzed by use of descriptive and inferential statistics with the aid of the statistical package for social sciences version 20. Qualitative analysis was done by determining the patterns and trends from the information gathered through the interview schedule and the psychological well being scale. The data analysis result was presented on frequency tables and by prose narrations.

Results of the Study

The study was meant to find out whether religious strategies have an influence on the psychological well being of life sentenced inmates in maximum security prisons in Kenya. The following were the results of the study.

The Demographic Characteristics of the Survey Respondents

The prisoners' questionnaires that were distributed were 365, however 15 were returned without being filled in probably due to illiteracy or disinterest among some inmates. Thus, the actual questionnaires that were returned fully completed by lifers were 350.

The background characteristics of interest in this study were: gender, age, religion, level of education before imprisonment, level of education while in prison and duration of sentence that had been served at the time of the study. The variables were recorded into categorical variables and their distribution was presented. Table 1 presents the gender of the survey respondents;

Table 1: Gender of the Survey Respondents (Life sentenced inmates)

Variable	Categories	Percent	Number
Gender	Male	91.1%	319
	Female	8.9%	31
		100	350

Source: Research Data

Table 1 indicates that the sample comprised 91% males and 8.9 % females. This indicates that male offenders in maximum security prisons are more in number than female offenders, this is further corroborated by the fact that among the nine maximum security prisons in Kenya only one is a female maximum-security prison (Kenya Prisons Service, statistics office, 2020). The researcher administered the questionnaires to all the female life sentenced inmates that were in Langata female maximum-security prison. This is close to an earlier statistic; of all prison inmates in Kenya; female inmates' population in Kenya was 6.3% of

Citation: Ndung'u, M. P. (2021). The Role of Religious Strategies in Coping with Stress, and Enhancement of the Psychological Well Being of Life Sentenced Inmates in Maximum Prisons in Kenya. *Journal of African Interdisciplinary Studies*, 5(4), 81 - 97.

the population (World Prison Brief, 2019). Table 2 presents the age in categories of the respondents.

Table 2: Age of the Survey Respondents (Lifers)

Variable	Categories	Percent	Number
Age in categories	37 or younger	31.1%	109
	38 - 47 years	33.1%	116
	48 or older	35.7%	125
		100	350

Source: Research Data

Table 2 indicates ages of the respondents; the youngest respondent was aged 18 years and the oldest 76 years old while the average age was 44 years.

The variable on the religious affiliation was of importance to the study. Table 3 presents the religious affiliations of the survey respondents.

Table 3: Religious affiliation of the Respondents (Lifers)

Variable	Categories	Percent	Number
Religion	Christian	90.6	317
	Muslim	8.0	28
	Hindu	0.0	0
	Other	1.4	5
		100	350

Source: Research Data

Table 3 indicates the religious inclination of the respondents, the religious inclination of the respondents as a variable was important because the objective of this study was to find out how the life sentenced inmates cope with stress through spiritual strategies and the influence on the psychological well being of the life sentenced inmates. This study found out that Christians were 90.6%, Muslims 8% and others were 1.4%. This is closely consistent with the religious population statistics of Kenya where Christians constitute 85.5 % of the population while Muslims are 10.9% while others which include, Baha'i, Jews, Buddhists and indigenous religious inclinations constitute 1.37% (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2019). This may also indicate that in accordance to the United Nations Human Rights Declarations of 1948, the freedom of worship which is a fundamental right for every human being is adhered to in the Prisons in Kenya as they are accorded opportunity to pray and worship (Kenya Prisons CAP 90).

Citation: Ndung'u, M. P. (2021). The Role of Religious Strategies in Coping with Stress, and Enhancement of the Psychological Well Being of Life Sentenced Inmates in Maximum Prisons in Kenya. *Journal of African Interdisciplinary Studies*, 5(4), 81 - 97.

Table 4: Level of education of the Respondents before imprisonment

Variable	Categories	Percent	Number
Level of education before imprisonment	Not Gone to School	8.3	29
	Primary School	68.6	240
	Secondary School	17.1	60
	Tertiary Level	6	21
		100	350

Source: Research Data

Table 4 indicates the level of education of the lifers before imprisonment, majority of the respondents (68.6%) had primary school level of education, (17%) had Secondary school education, and (6%) had tertiary education level while (8.3%) had not gone to school at all. This indicates that a considerable number of life-sentenced inmates were illiterate (8.3%), while a bigger number of the inmates had only some primary school education. This probably could be a factor as to why they were in prison, perhaps they may not have had the capacity of good decision making in certain circumstances or probably were ignorant of the law which implies that they did not quite understand the consequences of breaking the law. Prison service in Kenya offers learning opportunity for inmates as part of the rehabilitative work (Mabel, 2014). Table 5 presents the level of education of the lifers while at prison.

Table 5: Level of education of the Respondents while in imprisonment

Variable	Categories	Percent	Number
Level of education before imprisonment	Not Gone to School	2.5	9
	Primary School	68.0	238
	Secondary School	20.6	72
	Tertiary Level	8.9	31
		100	350

Source: Research Data

Table 5 indicates the level of education of the lifers while at prison. The case was slightly different from variable on the level of education before incarceration, in prison (68%) had primary education, (20%) secondary school, (8.9%) tertiary level while (2.5%) had not gone to school. The changes in the percentages may indicate part of the rehabilitative work of prison which means some acquire formal education while in prison. Previous study (Maina & Mugambi, 2019) established that many prisoners have negative previous experiences of education and are likely to have dropped out of school early. In other studies, it was established that the U.S. prison population is largely drawn from the most disadvantaged part of the nation's population: mostly men under age 40, disproportionately minority, and poorly educated (Travis, Western & Redburn, 2014). This might probably have been the case for some of the life sentenced inmates in this study. However, 2.5% were not in any form of school even in prison probably they had recently been incarcerated and had not yet been placed to school or probably were not interested with schooling. The survey respondents were at various stages in duration of their sentence. Table 6 presents the duration of sentence of the respondents.

Citation: Ndung'u, M. P. (2021). The Role of Religious Strategies in Coping with Stress, and Enhancement of the Psychological Well Being of Life Sentenced Inmates in Maximum Prisons in Kenya. *Journal of African Interdisciplinary Studies*, 5(4), 81 - 97.

Table 6: Duration of sentence that had been served by the survey respondents

Variable	Categories	Percent	Number
Sentence served so far in categories	7 or fewer years	31.7	111
	8 - 12 years	40.6	142
	13 or more years	27.7	97
		100	350

Source: Research Data

Table 6 indicates the duration that the lifers had served by the time of the study, the minimum duration of sentence that had been served was 1 year and the maximum was 26 years while 10 years was the average duration that most lifers had been in prison.

Citation: Ndung'u, M. P. (2021). The Role of Religious Strategies in Coping with Stress, and Enhancement of the Psychological Well Being of Life Sentenced Inmates in Maximum Prisons in Kenya. *Journal of African Interdisciplinary Studies*, 5(4), 81 - 97.

Table 7: Spiritual Coping Mechanism on the Psychological Well-Being of Life Sentenced Inmates

Religious Ways of Coping with Stress	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	Standard Deviation
I handle my problems through spiritual activities	55 (15.7%)	55 (15.7%)	59 (16.9%)	69 (19.7%)	112 (32%)	3.37	1.461
I have learnt to pray a lot here in prison	30 (8.6%)	35 (10%)	76 (21.7%)	105 (30%)	104 (29%)	3.62	1.244
I participate in praise and worship in prison	48 (13.7%)	28 (8%)	91 (26%)	99 (28.3%)	84 (24%)	3.41	1.307
I enrolled in spiritual programs in prison	47 (13%)	52 (15%)	55 (15.7%)	100 (28.6%)	96 (27%)	3.42	1.376
I read the sacred scriptures often	44 (13%)	41 (12%)	63 (18%)	88 (25.1%)	114 (33%)	3.57	1.329
Being in the prison church/Mosque/other place of prayer gives me a lot of peace	29 (8.3%)	29 (8.3%)	82 (23.4%)	104 (29%)	106 (30%)	3.65	1.224
I am happy when I am prayed for	27 (7.7%)	35 (10%)	75 (21%)	123 (35.1%)	90 (25%)	3.61	1.191
I am happy when church groups visit prison	30 (8.6%)	45 (13%)	89 (25%)	108 (31%)	78 (22%)	3.45	1.212
I preach to others here in prison	42 (12%)	71 (20%)	33 (9.4%)	92 (26.3%)	112 (32%)	3.46	1.421
I participate in spiritual seminars/retreats here in prison	52 (15%)	72 (21%)	80 (23%)	45 (13%)	101 (29%)	3.20	1.431
I live in the hope that God will help me come out of prison	40 (11%)	37 (11%)	70 (20%)	111 (32%)	92 (26%)	3.51	1.295
I have been in leadership of the Church/Mosque/other here in prison	79 (22.6%)	61 (17.4%)	32 (9.1%)	80 (22.9%)	98 (28%)	3.16	1.551
Overall Mean						3.45	

Source: Research Data

Citation: Ndung'u, M. P. (2021). The Role of Religious Strategies in Coping with Stress, and Enhancement of the Psychological Well Being of Life Sentenced Inmates in Maximum Prisons in Kenya. *Journal of African Interdisciplinary Studies*, 5(4), 81 - 97.

Religious Stress Coping strategies and the Psychological Well-Being of Life Sentenced Inmates

The objective of the study sought to find out the role of religious strategy in coping with stress, rehabilitation and enhancement of the psychological well-being of life sentenced inmates. To achieve this; the study through the questionnaire had religious related constructs to the inmates which were responded to in a 5-point Likert scale. Table 7 shows the findings.

Table 7 shows that 55(15.7%) respondents strongly disagreed that they handled their problems through spiritual activities, 55(15.7%) of the respondents disagreed, 59(16.9%) of the respondents were neutral, 69(19.7%) of the respondents agreed while 112(32%) of the respondents strongly agreed. Majority of the respondents were in agreement that they handled their problems through spiritual activities. (mean of 3.37), variation in how their problems were handled with respect to spiritual activities was 1.461. Thus, respondents were in agreement that they coped with stressors in prison through spiritual strategies. Many inmates benefit from the spiritual programs that are designed to not only rehabilitate the inmates but also to help them with the stressors of incarceration. This is in agreement with a study that found out that spiritual counselling is emphasized in prisons in Kenya (Wekesa, 2012). A similar study by Kerley (2014) indicated that in the prisons in the US religious activities help the inmates to cope with incarceration stressors. Many people turn to the divine when faced by calamities, disasters or difficulties of any kind. The turning to the divine is either due to the realization that personal efforts and striving have been futile or due to the realization that there is a higher power superior to the human being who can intervene in the lives of all creatures. Religious activities are believed to be helpful as a tool of rehabilitation in prisons. Many studies indicate that religious activities have a great role to play also in coping with stress and difficult situations such as incarceration or terminal illness.

The study sought to find out whether lifers also coped through prayers in prison, 30(8.6%) of the respondents strongly disagreed, 35(10%) of the respondents disagreed, 76(21.7%) of the respondents were neutral, 105(30%) of the respondents agreed and 104(29.7%) of the respondents strongly agreed. Majority of them therefore were in agreement that they have learnt to pray (mean of 3.62), variation in coping through prayers was 1.244. One of the major activities of religious coping is prayers. The lifers indicated that they pray a lot in prison and that through their prayers they feel connected to the divine. Chaplain 1 who was interviewed indicated that inmates are engaged in prayers as a way of coming into terms with themselves as well as with others and with the divine.

Prisoners pray a lot. They pray every morning and evening in their wards. They organize themselves for prayers. They have leaders among them who lead the others in prayers. This is helpful to them as it helps them to be at peace with self and with each other.

As for whether they participate in praise and worship 48 (13.7%) of the respondents strongly disagreed that they participated in praise and worship in prison, 28(8%) of the respondents disagreed, 91(26%) of the respondents were neutral, 99(28.3%) of the respondents agreed and 84(24%) of the respondents strongly agreed. Most of the respondents agreed that they participated in praise and worship (mean of 3.41), variation in participation was 1.307. Praise and worship in Kenya are the common spiritual engagement and since the

Citation: Ndung'u, M. P. (2021). The Role of Religious Strategies in Coping with Stress, and Enhancement of the Psychological Well Being of Life Sentenced Inmates in Maximum Prisons in Kenya. *Journal of African Interdisciplinary Studies*, 5(4), 81 - 97.

prison community is similar to the outside community, they too engage in praise and worship.

Regarding whether the lifers had enrolled in spiritual programs in prison, 47(13.4%) of the respondents strongly disagreed, 52(14.9%) of the respondents disagreed, 55(15.7%) of the respondents were neutral, 100(28.6%) of the respondents agreed and 96(27.4%) of the respondents strongly agreed. Majority of the respondents were in agreement that they had enrolled in spiritual programs (mean of 3.42), variation in enrolment was 1.376. Spiritual programs such as fellowship, meeting together in small Christian communities is important as it is through such gatherings as well as in the classes of learning particular doctrines of religion that individual lifers are able to give hope to each other as well as encourage each other on issues such as forgiving and letting go and reconciliation (Atabong,2007).

The study sought to find out whether the respondents read the sacred scriptures often, 44(12.7%) of the respondents strongly disagreed, 41(11.7%) of the respondents disagreed, 63(18%) of the respondents were neutral, 88(25.1%) of the respondents agreed and 114(32.6%) of the respondents strongly agreed. Majority of the respondents were therefore in agreement that they read the sacred scriptures 3.57, variation in reading the sacred scriptures was 1.329. Reading the word of God is consoling, strengthening and motivating. Prisoners that read the scriptures got insights on perseverance and reliance on the higher power. According to a study by Levitt and Loper (2002) prisoners engaged in religious activities such as reading the word of God and this enabled them adjust to their incarceration. However, there were inmates who engaged in religious activities in order to get prison resources (Aday, Krabil & Ryder (2011). Chaplain 2 who was interviewed in this study indicated that some of the inmates were not stable and serious in their religious commitment as they had other motives.

Some of the inmates hop from one religion to the other and from one denomination to another. For instance, there are some who are Muslims during Ramadhan and Christians during Christmas festivities. This is because there are many charitable organizations that visit the prison with many items to assist prisoners.

The importance of religion in helping inmates cope with their incarceration and cope with the prison environment cannot be gainsaid. Nevertheless, just as it is with the free community outside prison, different persons have their own motives of being religious.

Concerning whether being in the prison church/Mosque/other place of prayer gave them a lot of peace, the findings showed that, 29(8.3%) of the respondents strongly disagreed, 29(8.3%) of the respondents disagreed, 82(23.4%) of the respondents were undecided, 104(29.7%) of the respondents agreed and 106(30.3%) of the respondents strongly agreed. Majority of the respondents were in agreement with the statement that they had peace when in sacred places (mean of 3.65), variation in the peace while at the sacred places was 1.224. In Kenyan prisons there are designated rooms that are set up for the purpose of prayers and worship. Different religious groupings are also allowed to build churches or mosques in prison for the purpose of their followers to have places of worship and have the religious rites such as baptisms administered to the inmates in prison as it was pointed out by prison welfare officer 1;

Citation: Ndung'u, M. P. (2021). The Role of Religious Strategies in Coping with Stress, and Enhancement of the Psychological Well Being of Life Sentenced Inmates in Maximum Prisons in Kenya. *Journal of African Interdisciplinary Studies*, 5(4), 81 - 97.

Muslims have their own mosque in here, the Catholics have their church, the protestants and the Seventh Day Adventists too, those that are able to put up a structure for their followers are normally shown a place where to put up the structure after following all the laid down procedures. They even join hands with inmates who offer their masonry skills or hand work toward construction of a church structure or mosque in prison.

The lifers were happy when prayed for, 27(7.7%) of the respondents strongly disagreed, 35(10%) of the respondents disagreed, 75(21.4%) respondents were neutral, 123(35.1%) of the respondents agreed and 90(25.7%) of the respondents strongly agreed. Majority of the respondents agreed that they were happy when prayed for (mean of 3.61), variation in the happiness brought about by prayers was 1.191. Inmates were involved in prayers and this kept them optimistic that God would intervene in their lives.

The study sought to find out whether the respondents were happy when church groups visit prison, 30(8.6%) of the respondents strongly disagreed, 45(12.9%) of the respondents disagreed, 89(25.4%) of the respondents were neutral, 108(30.9%) of the respondents agreed and 78(22.3%) of the respondents strongly agreed. Majority of the respondents were in agreement that they were happy when church groups visit (mean of 3.45), variation in the happiness brought about by church visits to prison was 1.212. Maintaining social relationship outside of prison is difficult given the restricted means and moments to communicate (Bronson, 2008). Visits from family and friends are also in most cases limited to once a month (Nyandoro, 2013) as such fellow prisoners are often the only directly available sources to fulfill the need for social connection (Viggiani, 2003). Studies have shown that traditional beliefs and religious norms can foster unity among congregants (Stroebe, 2011; Benedict, 2010) religious groups may therefore be helpful for lifers to form friendship and develop connectivity and leadership skills that can be helpful in the event of release of the lifer (Lim and Putman, 2010; Benedict, 2010). Through the opportunities offered in social forums members cultivate new skills such as serving in leadership roles and committees, making contact with the wider community, organizing or coordinating collective efforts, public speaking and building self-esteem (Schwadel, 2002). All these may be important and helpful to lifers to have meaning and purpose in life despite the life imprisonment.

The study sought to find out whether lifers preached to others in prison, 42(12%) of the respondents strongly disagreed, 71(20.3%) respondents disagreed, 33(9.4%) respondents were undecided, 92(26.3%) of the respondents agreed and 112(32%) of the respondents strongly agreed. Majority of the respondents were in agreement that they as lifers preached to others (mean of 3.46), variation in preaching was 1.421. Spiritual level is probably the most important way of coping with stress, previous research had shown that religion even surpasses education as the most promoted and accepted program in jails and prisons in America (Nyaberi, Kilonzo & Gumo 2019; Johnson, 2008). Religiousness appears to have a stronger effect among persons with greater exposure to stressful events and conditions (Fisher, 2019). In most cases these individuals also share beliefs and they feel a sense of control over their own situation, helping them cope with depression and anxiety (Johnson, 2011). Studies have shown that traditional fundamental beliefs and religious norms can foster unity among congregants (Stroebe, 2011). Religious groups are suitable forums in which lifers form friendship bonds and make lasting social connections and support (Lim & Putman, 2010).

Citation: Ndung'u, M. P. (2021). The Role of Religious Strategies in Coping with Stress, and Enhancement of the Psychological Well Being of Life Sentenced Inmates in Maximum Prisons in Kenya. *Journal of African Interdisciplinary Studies*, 5(4), 81 - 97.

Concerning whether the respondents participated in spiritual seminars/retreats in prison, the findings showed that, 52(14.9%) of the respondents strongly disagreed, 72(20.6%) of the respondents disagreed, 80(22.9%) of the respondents were undecided, 45(12.9%) of the respondents agreed and 101(28.9%) of the respondents strongly agreed. Majority of the respondents were in disagreement that they participated in spiritual seminars/retreats (mean of 3.20), variation in participation was 1.431. The interaction with members of the church inside and outside of the prison could enhance the lifer's self-acceptance. Sparrow and Knight (2006) opined that self-acceptance is a prerequisite for health, happiness and success. Self-acceptance enables an individual to have high regard and respect for others and so genuinely be able to understand and accept others, even when they are very different from self. There are studies that indicated that where incidences of suicide have happened in prison, it could partly be attributed to the feeling of rejection and abandonment by family members and friends (Musyoka, 2013). Religious activities, connections and spiritual support could fill in this vacuum of rejection.

The study sought to find out whether the lifers, live in the hope that God will help them come out of prison, 40(11.4%) respondents strongly disagreed, 37(10.6%) respondents disagreed, 70(20%) respondents were undecided, 111(31.7%) respondents agreed and 92(26.3%) respondents strongly agreed. Majority of the respondents were in agreement that they live in the hope that God will help them come out of prison (mean of 3.51), variation in the hope that God will help them out of prison was 1.295. Lifers are uncertain of whether they will ever come out of prison, their release is hypothetical and not guaranteed, in that sense they may feel as though all their efforts and strivings were in vain. Most inmates are imprisoned for life without any possibility of parole (Ogeto, 2009). One in nine people in prison in America, is serving a life sentence, and nearly a third of lifers will never have a chance at Parole hearing; they probably might die in prison (Willis and Zaitzow, 2015; Capers, 2012). In such cases lifers may view life as meaningless as they have only to move about and interact only with those within the intimidating walls of prison. Maslow's concept of actualization implied that; knowing who you are, where you are going, having a sense of well-being and being all that you can be is living a purposeful life (Sparrow and Knight, 2006). This study found lifers in maximum security prisons in Kenya to be optimistic of their release from prison either through pardon by the head of state or through petition. This in turn perhaps may enhance their purposefulness in life as they have a future to look forward to; a future beyond the walls of the correctional facility. Most human beings tend to the higher power (God) when they face challenges in life. This may seem to be the same case for lifers, however their turning to God in spiritual activities and programs such as fellowships, prayers and reading of the sacred scriptures does not only help them cope with stress but also keeps them optimistic and calm thereby helping in the issue of discipline and lessen prison infractions.

The study sought to find out whether lifers have been in leadership of the Church/Mosque/other prayer group in prison, 79(22.6%) respondents strongly disagreed, 61(17.4%) respondents disagreed, 32(9.1%) respondents were undecided, 80(22.9%) respondents agreed and 98(28%) respondents strongly agreed. Majority of the respondents were in agreement that they had been in leadership (mean of 3.16), variation in leadership was 1.551. These findings confirm the findings of Trinitapoli (2005) who in his study found out that religious congregations also afford formal support systems including various programs and ministries that are designed to channel various types of assistance to persons in

Citation: Ndung'u, M. P. (2021). The Role of Religious Strategies in Coping with Stress, and Enhancement of the Psychological Well Being of Life Sentenced Inmates in Maximum Prisons in Kenya. *Journal of African Interdisciplinary Studies*, 5(4), 81 - 97.

need especially the sick and those in prison. Many studies have in the recent past focused on the role of religiosity and spirituality in the prison context (Johnson; 2011 Dye, Kranbill & Dayron, 2014). These studies are of the opinion that religious beliefs and behaviors may provide people in prison support, hope and a way to make sense of their situation. Studies by Benedict (2010) observed that individuals who professed spiritual beliefs without the framework of organized religion often had poorer mental health outcomes than individuals who were not religiously affiliated. Johnson (2004) in a study found out that the inmates who seriously participated in Bible studies in American prisons had fewer adjustment problems compared to inmates who were only moderately involved in PF bible studies.

Citation: Ndung'u, M. P. (2021). The Role of Religious Strategies in Coping with Stress, and Enhancement of the Psychological Well Being of Life Sentenced Inmates in Maximum Prisons in Kenya. *Journal of African Interdisciplinary Studies*, 5(4), 81 - 97.

Table 8 presents the one-way ANOVA results of the religious coping strategies;

Table 8: One-way ANOVA

Religious Coping strategies		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
I handle my problems through religious activities	Between Groups	70.779	4	17.695	9.052	.000
	Within Groups	674.409	345	1.955		
I have learnt to pray a lot while in prison	Between Groups	47.688	4	11.922	8.351	.000
	Within Groups	492.529	345	1.428		
I participate in praise and worship in prison	Between Groups	89.532	4	22.383	15.230	.000
	Within Groups	507.043	345	1.470		
I enrolled in spiritual programs in prison	Between Groups	82.515	4	20.629	12.258	.000
	Within Groups	580.582	345	1.683		
I read the sacred scriptures often	Between Groups	79.207	4	19.802	11.741	.000
	Within Groups	581.881	345	1.687		
Spiritual activities are important for me	Between Groups	63.996	4	15.999	9.995	.000
	Within Groups	552.221	345	1.601		
Being in the place of prayer gives me peace	Between Groups	75.356	4	18.839	14.514	.000
	Within Groups	447.813	345	1.298		
I am happy when I am prayed for	Between Groups	74.920	4	18.730	15.377	.000
	Within Groups	420.234	345	1.218		
I happy when religious groups visit us in prison	Between Groups	89.319	4	22.330	18.193	.000
	Within Groups	423.450	345	1.227		
I preach to fellow inmates	Between Groups	86.957	4	21.739	12.136	.000
	Within Groups	617.983	345	1.791		
I participate in choir in prison	Between Groups	84.802	4	21.201	14.302	.000
	Within Groups	511.415	345	1.482		
I participate in spiritual seminars/retreats	Between Groups	3.297	4	.824	.400	.809
	Within Groups	711.300	345	2.062		
I take care of cleanliness of the place of worship	Between Groups	35.206	4	8.802	3.890	.004
	Within Groups	780.648	345	2.263		
I live in hope that one day God will help me come out of prison	Between Groups	111.836	4	27.959	20.365	.000
	Within Groups	473.638	345	1.373		
I have been in leadership of the prayer group	Between Groups	15.100	4	3.775	1.579	.179
	Within Groups	824.617	345	2.390		

Source: Research Data

Table 8 indicates that most of the p values were less than 0.05, an indication that all the religious coping strategies were significant in addressing the psychological wellbeing of lifers in prison except for two strategies, that is, attending seminars $F(4,345) = 0.400$ with a P value of 0.809 and being in leadership $F(4, 345) = 1.579$ with a P value of 0.179 which had a p value that was greater than 0.05. It is probable that workshops and seminars in prisons are

Citation: Ndung'u, M. P. (2021). The Role of Religious Strategies in Coping with Stress, and Enhancement of the Psychological Well Being of Life Sentenced Inmates in Maximum Prisons in Kenya. *Journal of African Interdisciplinary Studies*, 5(4), 81 - 97.

not common and therefore are not frequently used as part of religious coping. According to a study by Ilechukwu and Ugwuozor (2017) religious education and seminars in Nigeria bring together inmates and offer them an opportunity for ethical and moral direction. Religious assemblies in prisons also provide forum for social inclusivity which is not so common in correctional facilities. Although in this study leadership responsibilities are not significant for the psychological well-being of lifers, studies by Benedict (2010) indicate that religion forums in prison give opportunity to the prisoners to sharpen their leadership skills. The sharpening of leadership skills in turn lead to self-esteem and confidence for the prison inmates.

Conclusion

The role of religious strategy as a way of coping with stresses experienced by lifers in maximum security prisons is vital. The study established that the religious activities include prayers, reading sacred scriptures, enrollment in spiritual/religious classes, interaction with faith-based organizations, involvement in praise and worship, leadership roles and taking care of the places of worship, participation in choir and preaching. Participation in the religious activities in prison does not only help in coping with stress of incarceration but also leads to behavior modification, optimism and effective rehabilitation. It also improves on the discipline of the inmates as well as reduction of tension and prison infraction. Furthermore, it is a suitable tool for reintegration of the lifers back into the society in case of release. Nevertheless, there are inmates who engage in religious activities with other motives. One of the major motives is for the inmates to access some resources that are brought to prisons by well-wishers; such inmates are known to hop from one religion or denomination for selfish temporal or short-lived gains.

Recommendations

This paper recommends that since religious activities are helpful to the life sentenced inmates in coping with stress more robust programs such as organization of seminars and spiritual workshops be made available to the lifers. This in turn would engage them more in matters of self-discipline and enhancement of the psychological well-being. Interaction with visiting religious groups and organizations ought also to be encouraged by the administrators of the correctional facilities so as to foster hope, social network with the outside community.

Citation: Ndung'u, M. P. (2021). The Role of Religious Strategies in Coping with Stress, and Enhancement of the Psychological Well Being of Life Sentenced Inmates in Maximum Prisons in Kenya. *Journal of African Interdisciplinary Studies*, 5(4), 81 - 97.

References

- Aday, R. Krabill, J. & Dayron, D. O. (2014). Religion in the lives of older women serving life in prison, *Journal of women and Aging* 26 (3): 238-256
- Antony, J. (2003). *Psychotherapies in Counselling*. Anugraha: Anugraha Publications.
- Atabong, J. (2007). *Opening New Doors: Pastoral Work in Prison*. Yaoundé: Pauline Publishers.
- Benedict, A. (2010). Using trauma-informed practices to enhance safety and security in women's correctional facilities. <https://www.bja.gov/Publications/NRCJIW-InformedPractices.pdf>
- Bronson, E. F. (2008). He ain't my brother... he's my friend, friendship in medium security prison. *Critical Issues in Justice and Politics*, 1(1), 63-74.
- Capers, B. (2012). *Defending Life without Parole: America's New Death Penalty?* New York, NY: University Press.
- Clear, T. R. & Sumter, M.T. (2002). Prisoners, prison and religion: religion and adjustment to prison, *Journal of offender rehabilitation*, 35 pp. 127-159
- Dye, H. M., & Aday, H. R. (2019). *Women Lifers: Lives Before, Behind and Beyond Bars*, United Kingdom: Rowman & Little field Publishing Group Inc.
- Ellison, C. G., Bradshaw, M., Kuyel, N., & Marcum, P.J. (2012). Attachment to God, stressful- life events and changes in psychological distress, *Review of religious research*, 53 pp. 493-511.
- Fisher, N. (2019). Science says religion is good for your health, retrieved on 13th April 2020 from https://www.forbes.com/sites/nicole_fisher/2020/03/29/science-says-religion-is-good-for-your-health/4f32a4763d2
- Frankl, V. (2016). *Man's Search for Meaning: An Introduction to logotherapy*. Mumbai, India: Better Yourself Books.
- Ilechukwu, C.L., & Ugwuozor, C. F. (2017). Utilization of religious philosophy education in uplifting the image of prison inmates and curtailing ex-prisoners recidivism. *Sage Journals* <https://doi.org/10.1177/215824401730109>
- Johnson, B. R. (2008). Not by government or faith alone: rethinking prisoner re-entry. *Correctional Compendium*, 17-18
- Johnson, B. R. (2011). Religious programs and recidivism among former inmates in prison fellowship programs: a long term follow-up study. *Justice Quarterly* 21 pp. 329-353
- Jones, J. (September, 2002). Why doctors now believe that faith heals. *Readers Digest*, 9(2) pp. 101-106.
- Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (2019). <http://knbs.or.ke>-469
- Kerley, K. (2014). *Religious Faith in Correctional Contexts*, Boulder, Co. Frist Forum Press.
- KPS (Kenya Prisons Service Standing Order CAP 90). Nairobi: Government Press.
- KPS (Kenya Prisons Service Statistic Office, 2020).
- KPS (Kenya Prisons Service Strategic Plan 2008-2012). Nairobi: Government Press.
- Laborde, P. (2004). Counter-terrorism and human rights, human rights of prisoners, Rome, Vatican City, *Pontificio Consiglio della Giustizia e della Pace*. 1 (2) 205.
- Lim, C., & Putnam, D. R. (2010). Religion, social networks and life satisfaction, *American Sociological Review* 75:914-933.
- Luchte, J. (2009). Marx and the sacred, *the journal of Church and the State*, P 51(3):413.
- Mabel, W. (2014, July 23). Prison unlock inmate's creative side, *The Daily Nation* p 3.

Citation: Ndung'u, M. P. (2021). The Role of Religious Strategies in Coping with Stress, and Enhancement of the Psychological Well Being of Life Sentenced Inmates in Maximum Prisons in Kenya. *Journal of African Interdisciplinary Studies*, 5(4), 81 - 97.

- Maina, P. W., & Mugambi, M. M. (2019). Factors influencing implementation of inmates' vocational training projects in Kenya: a survey of prisons in eastern region, *International academic journal of information sciences and project management*. 3(3), 210-234
- Musyoka, A. (2013). *Impact of Prison Reforms on Rehabilitation of Offenders in Kenya: The case of Naivasha maximum security prison*, (Master thesis), University of Nairobi.
- Nyaberi, M. L., Kilonzo, S. & Gumo, S. (2019). The current situation of pastoral programs in the prisons in Western Kenya counties. *Sociology and Anthropology*, Maseno University, 7(3) pp. 111-125.
- Nyandoro, H. T. (2013). *Blind Justice: A True Story of An Innocent Man Sentenced to Hang, and His Untiring Quest for Justice*. Nairobi: Global Africa Corporation Ltd.
- Ogeto, N. A. (2009). *The impact of prison reforms on the inmate's rehabilitation programs in Kenya: A case study of Kamiti and Langata prisons*. (A masters thesis), Nairobi University.
- Okpalaenwe, E. (2014). *Psychological Counselling for Africa*. Nairobi: CUEA Press
- Santrock, J.W. (2003). *A topical Approach to Lifespan Development* (2nd ed.). Boston: McGraw-Hill, Companies, Inc.
- Santrock, J.W. (2005). *Psychology* (7th ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill, Companies, Inc.
- Shwandel, P. (2002). Testing the promise of the churches: income inequality in the opportunity to learn civic skills in the church. *Journal of the scientific study of religions*, 41 pp.563-573
- Sparrow, T., & Knight, A. (2006) *Applied EI: The Importance of Attitudes in Developing Emotional Intelligence*, California CA: John Willey and Sons Ltd.
- Stroebe, W. (2011). Social psychology and health <https://booksgoogle.co.ke./books?isbn0335240526>.
- Sundt, J., Dammer, H., & Cullen, F. (2002). The role of the prison chaplain in rehabilitation. *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation*, 39, 59-86.
- Trinitapoli, J. (2005). Congregational –based services for the elderly: An extermination of patterns and correlates. *Research on aging*, 27 pp. 241-264
- Viggiani, D. V. (2006). Surviving prison: Exploring prison social life as a determinant of health, *International Journal of Prisoner Health* 2 (2):71-89 <https://doi:101000/17449200600935653>
- Wekesa, E., (2012). The role of prisons administration of custodial rehabilitation of inmates in Kenya: A case study of Thika main prison, Kiambu county (Masters thesis) Kenya, Kenyatta University.
- Willis, K. A. and Zaitzow, H. B. (2015). Doing life: A glimpse into the long-term incarceration experience, *Laws* 4,559-578.