

The Impact of Negative Life Events (NLEs) on Spirituality: A Qualitative Study on the Perspectives of Nigerian Catholic Women Religious in the United States

¹Angela U. Ekwonye* & ²Ngozi G. Nwosisi

¹Department of Public Health, St. Catherine University, St. Paul, Minnesota, USA

²Department of Population Health and Disease Prevention, University of California, Irvine, CA, USA



Abstract

Context: Most research work on stress and spirituality has pointed to the importance of spirituality in coping with stressful, adverse, and even life-threatening circumstances, especially among individuals of immigrant backgrounds. Limited studies exist about how negative life events (NLEs) influence spirituality, particularly that of the Nigerian Catholic sisters living in the United States.

Methods: In 2018, interviews were conducted in New York with Nigerian Catholic Sisters to explore how NLEs influence their spirituality. Twenty sisters who have lived in the United States for 2-25 years were interviewed. A coding scheme was developed using the grounded theory. Key themes were identified and examined by participants' year of profession, length of stay in the USA, employment type, and educational level.

Results: Content analysis of twenty transcripts generated four significant themes. The themes followed a specific pattern of dealing with a difficult life situation, beginning with 1) the basic instant internal reactions to the stressor such as crying, feeling shocked, and alone. 2) Movement from self-absorption toward an expanded view of life through reframing the NLE using spiritual approaches. 3) Outcomes of the process which include, a deeper relationship with God, a positive outlook on life, and a strong sense of meaning in life.

Conclusion: While the impact of spirituality on stress is known, we discovered that the state of one's mental health as affected by an NLE also influences one's spirituality. **Mental Health Policy Implication:** This research highlights the need for spirituality to be integrated into clinical practice to improve the mental and emotional health of individuals.



Biography:

Dr. Angela Ekwonye is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Public Health at St. Catherine University, St. Paul, Minnesota, USA, and a member of the congregation of the Daughters of Mary, Mother of Mercy. She has over 19 years' teaching experience at different educational levels. Her research explores the role of spirituality in the mental and physical health of different population groups. Dr. Ekwonye engages adolescents, college students, older adults, and groups of Nigerian Catholic immigrant sisters in her research to understand the role of spirituality in their overall wellbeing. She recently developed a tool for measuring college women's spirituality. She has published research works in the area of spirituality and mental health. This presentation is a follow up of her previously published work on the effect of a spiritual retreat on perceived stress of Nigerian Catholic immigrant sisters in the USA.

Speaker Publications:

1. "Antibody Lineages with Vaccine-Induced Antigen-Binding Hotspots Develop Broad HIV Neutralization"; *Cell* 2019 Jul 25;178(3):567-584.e19. doi:10.1016/j.cell.2019.06.030.
2. "S-nitrosylation of NADPH oxidase regulates cell death in plant immunity"; *Nature* 2011 Oct 13;478(7368):264-8. doi:10.1038/nature10427.

[**8th International Conference on Mental Health and Human Resilience**](#); March 09-10, 2020 Rome, Italy

Abstract Citation:

Angela U. Ekwonye, The Impact of Negative Life Events (NLEs) on Spirituality: A Qualitative Study on the Perspectives of Nigerian Catholic Women Religious in the United States, Mental Health 2020, 8th International Conference on Mental Health and Human Resilience; March 09-10, 2020 Rome, Italy (<https://childpsychology.insightconferences.com/abstract/2020/effect-of-ready-made-meals-on-family-eating-styles-abnormal-eating-behaviours-and-cognitive-chewing-in-adolescents>)