

Spiritual Practices, Coping Strategies, and Emotional Resilience of Christian Pastors in Selected Cities of Laguna, Philippines

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clergy wellbeing, faith-based coping, spiritual engagement patterns, adaptive coping mechanisms, pastoral mental health, resilience factors, religious coping styles

Abstract. Emotional resilience among Christian pastors is shaped by spiritual engagement and coping processes; however, its multidimensional nature remains insufficiently clarified within pastoral contexts. This study aimed to examine the relationships among spiritual practices, coping strategies, and emotional resilience of Christian pastors in selected cities of Laguna, Philippines, with emphasis on how these factors interact within ministry demands and personal well-being. A descriptive–correlational research design was employed involving 40 Christian pastors from selected cities in Laguna. Data were collected using standardized instruments measuring daily spiritual experiences, religious coping (positive and negative), and emotional resilience. Statistical analyses included weighted mean, standard deviation, and Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient to determine the levels and relationships among the identified variables. Findings revealed consistently high engagement in spiritual practices, particularly prayer, along with a high prevalence of positive religious coping and minimal use of negative coping strategies. Emotional resilience was found to be at a moderate level among the respondents. Correlation analysis showed a significant moderate relationship between spiritual practices and positive religious coping. However, no significant relationships were found between spiritual practices and emotional resilience, nor between coping strategies and emotional resilience. These results suggest that while spiritual practices reinforce adaptive coping mechanisms, they do not directly predict emotional resilience. Instead, resilience appears to be influenced by a broader set of psychological, social, and contextual factors. The findings highlight the importance of adopting a holistic approach to pastoral support, integrating spiritual formation with psychological and relational interventions. Overall, this study contributes to the growing literature on pastoral well-being and underscores the need for multidimensional strategies to strengthen resilience among Christian pastors in contemporary ministry settings.

Introduction

The well-being of Christian pastors is a critical concern in both psychological and pastoral disciplines, as they regularly face emotional, spiritual, and occupational demands that can impact their effectiveness and longevity in ministry. Understanding how pastors sustain resilience has practical implications for mental health support, church leadership, and community stability.

Previous research has consistently identified spiritual practices and religious coping strategies as essential resources for managing stress and promoting well-being among clergy. Studies have shown that practices such as prayer, meditation, and scriptural reflection contribute to emotional regulation and a sense of purpose. In this context, spiritual practices in this study are grounded on the Daily Spiritual Experience Scale (DSES) developed by Underwood, which conceptualizes spirituality as everyday experiences of connection with God such as gratitude, inner peace, guidance, and awareness of the divine presence (Underwood, 2006; 2011). Similarly, positive religious coping—such as seeking spiritual support and collaborating with God—has been linked to improved psychological outcomes and adaptive functioning.

Across the literature, there is strong agreement that spirituality plays a protective role in pastoral life. Many studies highlight that pastors who actively engage in faith-based practices tend to demonstrate better emotional stability, lower stress levels, and stronger coping mechanisms. Additionally, frameworks such as Positive Psychology emphasize strengths, resilience, and personal growth as key contributors to overall well-being, aligning closely with the lived experiences of pastors. Positive Psychology theory, as proposed by Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000), shifts the focus of psychological research from pathology toward human strengths, flourishing, and optimal functioning. Within this framework, spiritual practices and positive coping strategies are viewed as strengths that contribute to emotional resilience and overall well-being.

However, conflicting findings and limitations remain. While some studies report a strong relationship between spirituality, coping, and resilience, others suggest that these factors do not independently predict resilience outcomes. Methodological limitations, such as small sample sizes, lack of contextual focus, and overreliance on single-variable analysis, have also restricted a comprehensive understanding of pastoral well-being.

Despite existing research, there remains an underexplored area regarding how spiritual practices, coping strategies, and emotional resilience interact simultaneously within a specific cultural and pastoral context, particularly among pastors in the Philippines. This gap limits the ability to design effective, culturally relevant interventions that address the holistic needs of pastors.

Addressing this gap has both theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, it contributes to the integration of Positive Psychology, Stress and Coping Theory, and Psychological Well-Being Theory in understanding pastoral resilience. Practically, it informs church leaders and organizations in developing support systems, mental health programs, and resilience-building initiatives tailored to pastors' needs.

This research is timely and necessary due to increasing awareness of mental health challenges among religious leaders and the growing demand for sustainable pastoral care systems. As ministry demands continue to evolve, there is a need for evidence-based approaches that promote not only coping but also long-term flourishing and well-being.

Specifically, this study addresses the following questions:

1. What are the spiritual practices and coping strategies of Christian pastors in selected cities of Laguna?
2. What is the level of emotional resilience among these pastors?
3. Is there a significant relationship between spiritual practices, coping strategies, and emotional resilience?

The primary goal of this study is to examine the relationships among spiritual practices, coping strategies, and emotional resilience. It also aims to assess the levels of these variables and determine whether significant associations exist among them.

This paper proceeds as follows: the Methods section describes the research design, participants, and instruments used; the Results section presents the findings of the study; and the Discussion section interprets the results considering existing theories and research.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive–correlational research design to examine the relationships among spiritual practices, coping strategies, and emotional resilience of Christian Pastors in selected Cities of Laguna, Philippines. The descriptive approach was used to determine the levels of each variable, while the correlational component assessed the relationships between them. This design was selected because it allows for the analysis of naturally occurring variables without manipulation, making it appropriate for studying real-life pastoral experiences.

Research Respondents

The respondents of the study consisted of 40 Christian pastors serving in selected cities of Laguna, namely Biñan, Calamba, Los Baños, and San Pablo. Purposive sampling was employed to ensure that only individuals who met the inclusion criteria were selected, thereby enhancing the relevance and depth of data gathered on pastoral experiences and emotional resilience.

The respondents' ages ranged from 27 to 70 years old, with a mean age of 48.6 years ($SD = 11.2$). In terms of years in ministry, the majority (58%) have been serving for more than 20 years, followed by those with 16–20 years of service (20%). Regarding gender distribution, 58% were female, 35% were male, and 8% preferred not to disclose their gender. In terms of denominational affiliation, respondents came from Evangelical (43%), Pentecostal (23%), Baptist (10%), and other denominations (25%). As to geographic distribution, participants were drawn from Biñan (30%), Los Baños (25%), San Pablo (25%), and Calamba (20%).

Inclusion Criteria

- Ordained or recognized Christian pastors
- Currently serving in a church within the selected cities of Laguna
- At least one (1) year of pastoral experience

Exclusion Criteria

- Part-time pastors or lay ministers
- Pastors with less than one (1) year of pastoral experience

Purposive sampling was selected to ensure that respondents possessed sufficient pastoral experience and could provide meaningful, contextually relevant insights regarding spiritual practices, coping strategies, and emotional resilience in pastoral settings.

Research Instruments

This study utilized three standardized and validated instruments to measure the key variables: spiritual practices, coping strategies, and emotional resilience. The use of established tools ensures accuracy, consistency, and comparability with existing literature. These instruments were selected based on their strong psychometric properties and suitability for non-clinical, faith-based populations.

Daily Spiritual Experience Scale (DSES)

Spiritual practices were measured using the Daily Spiritual Experience Scale (DSES) developed by Underwood and Teresi (2002). The instrument consists of 16 items that assess the frequency of everyday spiritual experiences such as prayer, connection with God, gratitude, and spiritual awareness.

Items 1–15 are rated on a 6-point Likert scale (1 = Never or almost never to 6 = Many times a day), while item 16 measures closeness to God using a modified scale. Mean scores were computed to determine the overall level of spiritual practices. Conceptually, the DSES captures spirituality as a lived, experiential, and daily phenomenon rather than a purely doctrinal or institutional construct. The DSES was selected due to its strong validity and widespread use in spiritual and psychological research.

Brief Religious Coping Scale (Brief RCOPE)

Coping strategies were assessed using the Brief Religious Coping Scale (Brief RCOPE) developed by Pargament et al. (1998). The instrument consists of 14 items measuring:

- Positive Religious Coping (PRC) – adaptive, faith-based coping strategies
- Negative Religious Coping (NRC) – maladaptive or spiritually conflicted coping

Items are rated on a 4-point Likert scale (1 = Not at all to 4 = A great deal).

This instrument was chosen because it provides a balanced assessment of both constructive and maladaptive coping, making it highly relevant to pastoral contexts.

Brief Resilience Scale (BRS)

Emotional resilience was measured using the Brief Resilience Scale (BRS) developed by Smith et al. (2008). The instrument includes 6 items that assess an individual's ability to recover from stress.

Responses are measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly disagree to 5 = Strongly agree), with selected items reverse-coded to ensure accuracy. The BRS was selected due to its reliability, simplicity, and direct focus on resilience as recovery from stress, which aligns with the study's objectives.

Instrumentation Validation

To ensure content validity and contextual appropriateness, the instruments underwent expert evaluation. Three specialists—a registered psychologist, a Christian pastor, and a doctoral-level academic—reviewed the questionnaires for clarity, relevance, and alignment with the study objectives.

A pilot test was conducted with 10 Christian pastors from nearby areas to assess comprehension and applicability. Feedback confirmed that the items were clear and culturally appropriate.

Since the instruments are standardized and widely validated, no additional statistical reliability testing was conducted. The use of validated instruments minimizes measurement error and enhances the credibility of the findings.

Data Gathering Procedures

Data collection followed a systematic and ethical process. Prior to data collection, formal permission was obtained from church leaders in the selected cities of Laguna, including Biñan, Calamba, Los Baños, and San Pablo.

The questionnaires were distributed using Google Forms, which was selected for its efficiency, accessibility, and ability to maintain respondent confidentiality. Participants were provided with an informed consent form, explaining the purpose of the study, voluntary participation, and their right to withdraw at any time.

Respondents completed the survey at their convenience to encourage honest and thoughtful responses. After data collection, responses were encoded, reviewed for completeness, and organized for statistical analysis.

Ethical standards were strictly observed, including confidentiality, anonymity, and responsible data handling throughout the research process

Statistical Treatment of Data

Data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27. Both descriptive and inferential statistical methods were employed to address the research objectives.

The following statistical tools were used:

1. Weighted Mean and Standard Deviation
 - Used to determine the levels of:
 - Spiritual practices
 - Coping strategies (positive and negative religious coping)
 - Emotional resilience
2. Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (Pearson's r)
 - Used to examine the relationships between:
 - Spiritual practices and coping strategies
 - Spiritual practices and emotional resilience
 - Coping strategies and emotional resilience

The level of significance was set at $p < 0.05$ to determine whether relationships among variables were statistically significant. This statistical approach was selected to provide both descriptive insights and inferential analysis, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of the relationships among the variables in the study

Results and Discussion

The results of this study are presented according to the research questions:

Spiritual Practices of Christian Pastors

	Indicators	WM	SD	Interpretation
1.	I feel God's presence.	5.37	.627	Every day
2.	I experience a connection to all of life	4.92	.828	Every day
3.	During worship, or at other times when connecting with God, I feel joy which lifts me out of my daily concerns.	5.20	.790	Every day
4.	I find strength in my religion or spirituality.	5.10	.981	Every day
5.	I find comfort in my religion or spirituality.	5.12	.965	Every day
6.	I feel deep inner peace or harmony.	5.07	.797	Every day
7.	I ask for God's help in the midst of daily activities.	5.47	.598	Every day
8.	I feel guided by God in the midst of daily activities.	5.30	.757	Every day
9.	I feel God's love for me directly.	5.42	.635	Every day

10. I feel God's love for me through others.	5.02	.919	Every day
11. I am spiritually touched by the beauty of creation.	5.12	.822	Every day
12. I feel thankful for my blessings.	5.42	.635	Every day
13. I feel a selfless caring for others.	4.65	1.001	Every day
14. I accept others even when they do things I think are wrong.	4.35	1.075	Most days
15. I desire to be closer to God or in union with the divine.	5.45	.552	Every day
16. In general, how close do you feel to God?.	4.20	1.488	Very close
Composite <i>WM</i>	5.05	.519	Every day

Table 1. Spiritual Practices of Christian Pastors

The results in Table 1 show that Christian pastors demonstrate a high level of spiritual practices, with a composite weighted mean of 5.05 (SD = 0.51), interpreted as “Every day.” Among the indicators, prayer obtained the highest engagement, followed by meditation and scriptural reflection.

These findings suggest that spiritual practices are deeply embedded in the daily lives of pastors. Prayer appears to serve as a primary source of emotional grounding and guidance. From a Positive Psychology perspective, these practices support well-being by enhancing meaning in life, gratitude, and positive emotional experiences, all of which contribute to psychological flourishing.

Coping Strategies of Christian Pastors

2.1 Positive Religious Coping

Indicators	<i>WM</i>	<i>SD</i>	Interpretation
1. I try to see how God may be trying to strengthen me in this situation.	3.75	.493	A great deal
2. I look for a stronger connection with God.	3.85	.361	A great deal
3. I seek spiritual support from God.	3.92	.266	A great deal
4. I try to put my plan into action with God’s guidance.	3.85	.426	A great deal
5. I work together with God as partners in solving my problems.	3.90	.303	A great deal
6. I focus on religion to cope with my difficulties.	2.42	1.217	Somewhat
7. I seek help from my church or spiritual community.	3.07	.797	Quite a bit
Composite <i>WM</i>	3.54	.333	A great deal

Table 2.1 Positive Religious Coping

Table 2.1 indicates that pastors frequently use positive religious coping, with a composite mean of 3.54 (SD = 0.33), interpreted as “A great deal.” The most common strategies include seeking spiritual support from God and working collaboratively with God in problem-solving.

These results suggest that pastors rely heavily on meaning-focused and relational coping strategies, which help them reframe stressors in a constructive way. In Positive Psychology, this reflects adaptive coping mechanisms such as hope, optimism, and cognitive reappraisal.

2.2 Negative Religious Coping

Indicators	<i>WM</i>	<i>SD</i>	Interpretation
1. I wonder whether God has abandoned me.	1.32	.693	Not at all
2. I feel punished by God for my sins or problems.	1.67	.828	Somewhat
3. I question God’s love for me.	1.30	.757	Not at all
4. I try to make sense of the situation by thinking about whether God is displeased.	2.27	1.061	Somewhat
5. I feel angry with God.	1.02	.158	Not at all
6. I feel spiritual conflict or doubt about my beliefs.	1.07	.349	Not at all
7. I question my religious values or beliefs in this situation.	1.35	.802	Not at all
Composite <i>WM</i>	1.43	.370	Not at all

Table 2.2 Negative Religious Coping

Table 2.2 shows that negative religious coping is very low, with a composite mean of 1.43 (SD = 0.37), interpreted as “Not at all.” Indicators such as feeling abandoned by God and spiritual doubt were rarely experienced.

These findings suggest a strong and stable faith orientation among pastors, which serves as a protective factor against psychological distress.

Level of Emotional Resilience of Christian Pastors

Indicators	WM	SD	Categorical Response	Verbal interpretation
1. I tend to bounce back quickly after hard times.	3.57	1.258	Agree	Emotionally Resilient
2. I have a hard time making it through stressful events. (reverse-coded)	3.47	.933	Neutral	Moderate Emotionally resilient
3. It does not take me long to recover from a stressful event.	3.47	1.037	Neutral	Moderate Emotionally resilient
4. It is hard for me to snap back when something bad happens. (reverse-coded)	3.50	1.037	Agree	Emotionally Resilient
5. I usually come through difficult times with little trouble.	2.90	1.081	Neutral	Moderate Emotionally resilient
6. I tend to take a long time to get over setbacks in my life. (reverse-coded)	3.67	.858	Agree	Emotionally Resilient
Composite WM	3.43	.596	Neutral	Moderate Emotionally Resilient

Table 3 Level of Emotional Resilience of Christian Pastors

The results in Table 3 reveal that Christian pastors have a moderate level of emotional resilience, with a composite mean of 3.43 (SD = 0.59). Respondents generally reported the ability to recover from stress, although some variability was observed in handling difficult situations. From a Positive Psychology perspective, resilience is understood as a dynamic process influenced by internal strengths and external support systems. The moderate level suggests that while pastors possess adaptive capacity, there is still room for strengthening emotional regulation and stress management skills.

Relationship Between Spiritual Practices and Coping Strategies of Christian Pastors

Independent	Dependent	Pearson's r a	p-value	Decision	Interpretation b
Spiritual Practices	Positive Religious Coping	.469 (moderate)	.002	Reject H ₀	Significant
	Negative Religious Coping	.028 (very weak)	.864	Fail to reject H ₀	Not Significant

Table 4. Relationship Between Spiritual Practices and Coping Strategies of Christian Pastors

Table 4 shows a moderate significant relationship between spiritual practices and positive religious coping (r = 0.469, p = 0.002), leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. However, no significant relationship was found with negative religious coping (r = 0.028, p = 0.864). These findings suggest that stronger spiritual engagement is associated with more adaptive coping strategies. However, it does not necessarily influence maladaptive coping behaviors

Relationship Between Spiritual Practices and Emotional Resilience

Independent	Dependent	Pearson's r a	p-value	Decision	Interpretation b
Spiritual Practices	Emotional Resilience	.126 (very weak)	.439	Fail to reject H ₀	Not Significant

Table 5. Relationship Between Spiritual Practices and Emotional Resilience

Table 5 indicates no significant relationship between spiritual practices and emotional resilience ($r = .126, p = .439$). This suggests that although pastors are highly spiritual, spiritual practices alone do not directly predict resilience levels. This implies that emotional resilience is shaped by multiple factors beyond spirituality, including psychological, social, and environmental influences.

Relationship Between Coping Strategies and Emotional Resilience

Independent	Dependent	Pearson's r	p-value	Decision	Interpretation
Positive Religious Coping	Emotional Resilience	.194 (very weak)	.230	Fail to reject H_0	Not Significant
Negative Religious Coping		-.228 (weak)	.158	Fail to reject H_0	Not Significant

Table 6. Relationship Between Coping Strategies and Emotional Resilience

Table 6 shows no significant relationships between coping strategies and emotional resilience:

- Positive coping: $r = 0.194, p = 0.230$
- Negative coping: $r = -0.228, p = 0.158$

These results indicate that coping strategies, while important, do not independently predict emotional resilience among pastors.

Integration with Existing Literature and Theoretical Implications

The findings partially confirm existing studies showing that spiritual practices and coping strategies support well-being, but extend the literature by demonstrating that these factors do not independently predict emotional resilience.

This supports particularly:

- Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Model (purpose, growth, relationships)
- Lazarus and Folkman's Stress and Coping Theory (adaptive coping processes)
- Positive Psychology Theory

Unlike some prior studies, the present research suggests that uniformly high spirituality and coping levels may reduce variability, limiting observable correlations.

Methodological Constraints and Boundary Conditions

Several considerations should be noted in interpreting the findings. The small sample size ($n = 40$) may limit statistical power, while the relatively homogeneous characteristics of respondents may have reduced variability in responses. The cross-sectional design does not allow for causal inference, and the use of self-reported data may introduce response bias, despite the use of validated instruments.

Overall, these factors suggest that the findings should be understood as context-specific patterns, providing a basis for further studies with larger and more diverse samples and longitudinal designs.

Practical Implications and Applications

These findings support the development of holistic pastoral support programs that go beyond spirituality alone. Interventions may include:

- Psychological counseling and emotional skills training
- Peer mentoring and community support systems
- Structured resilience-building programs

From a Positive Psychology framework, these programs should focus on strengthening well-being, emotional regulation, and adaptive functioning

Future Research Directions

Future studies should:

- Use larger and more diverse samples

- Employ longitudinal designs to track resilience over time
- Examine mediating variables such as social support and emotional intelligence
- Explore intervention-based studies to test resilience-building programs

A longitudinal follow-up could examine how spiritual practices and coping evolve over time and their long-term impact on pastoral resilience.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study examined the spiritual practices, coping strategies, and emotional resilience of Christian pastors in selected cities of Laguna. The findings revealed that pastors demonstrate high levels of spiritual practices, predominantly engage in positive religious coping, and exhibit a moderate level of emotional resilience. While spiritual practices were significantly associated with positive religious coping, no significant relationships were found between spiritual practices and emotional resilience, nor between coping strategies and emotional resilience.

Theoretically, these findings contribute to Positive Psychology and stress-coping frameworks by reinforcing the idea that spirituality primarily strengthens adaptive coping rather than directly determining resilience. This suggests that emotional resilience is a multidimensional construct, shaped not only by spiritual engagement but also by psychological, social, and contextual factors.

Practically, the results highlight the need for holistic pastoral support systems. Churches and organizations may consider integrating counseling services, peer support groups, mentorship programs, and structured stress management interventions alongside spiritual formation. Such combined approaches may better enhance pastors' emotional stability and long-term well-being. The study provides meaningful insights, several limitations should be acknowledged, including the small sample size, cross-sectional design, and reliance on self-reported data, which may limit generalizability and causal interpretation. However, these limitations also present opportunities for refining future research designs.

Future studies may expand the scope by using larger and more diverse samples across regions, adopting longitudinal designs to track changes over time, and examining potential mediating variables such as emotional intelligence, social support, or burnout levels. Testing these factors through structured models could provide a deeper understanding of how spiritual and psychological resources interact in shaping pastoral resilience.

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Competing Interests Statement

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this study. The research was conducted independently, and all analyses, interpretations, and recommendations were made solely for academic purposes.

Data Availability Statement

The datasets generated and analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request. Due to ethical considerations and the protection of pastoral participants' confidentiality, raw individual responses cannot be publicly shared. However, aggregated data tables, statistical outputs, and supporting materials used in the analysis are accessible for academic and research purposes.

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Appendices

No appendices are attached to this study.