

Perceived Family Factors Influencing Transition Rates of Seminarians from Minor to Major Seminary Schools in Kisumu Ecclesiastical Province, Kenya

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Abstract- Low transition rate of seminarians from Minor Seminary schools to Major Seminary schools for priestly formation has translated to an inadequacy of priests for serving the church and the society. This poses a challenge to the Catholic Church that depends entirely on ordained priests from the Major Seminaries to carry out its evangelical functions. Studies in secular institutions have shown that family-related factors had major influence on learners' transition rates. However, little research has been done to examine the influence of such family-related factors on transition of seminarians in seminary schools. This study thus sought to investigate the influence of family factors on transition rates of seminarians from Minor to Major Seminaries in Kisumu Ecclesiastical Province, Kenya. It targeted all the five rectors and 1075 former seminarians of the period 2014-2018 in all the five Minor Seminaries in the Ecclesiastical Province of Kisumu. The study was guided by Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory of development. The study employed aexplanatory mixed methods design. stratified simple random sampling were used to sample rectors and former seminarians respectively. Questionnaires, document analysis guide and observation schedule were used to collect data, which was then analyzed by frequencies, means and percentages. The finding were that; Transition rate of seminarians was significantly affected by family culture and traditions, and family decisions and preferences. The study recommended that the government should financially support genuine seminarians who may not afford the fees; the Catholic Church should have clear formation programmes and goals in the Minor Seminaries, and provide priests to teach, form and accompany the students in and out of the seminary; the rectors should perform thorough orientation interviews during selection of seminary entrants, and work towards having good role models in the seminary. Families should be encouraged to have good family (sacramental) catechesis. This would help meet the need for enough well-trained and dedicated priests in the Catholic Church, that may translate to the betterment of entire society.

Index Terms- Family Factors; Transition Rates; Seminarians Minor ;Major, Seminary Schools

I. INTRODUCTION

A “Minor Seminary” is an educational institution established for the specific purpose of providing young men with a secondary school education, but which is specially tailored towards priesthood. In Kenya, the term formerly referred, under the 7-4-2-3 curriculum, to the six years training, embracing four years of ordinary level plus the two years of advanced level, with the “Major Seminary” providing the final 8 years of seminarian’s education. Under the 8-4-4 curriculum, the term “Minor Seminary” is used to refer to only the four years of high school, thus dividing the seminary along the more usual high school-college- post- graduate lines. Furthermore, the term Seminary designates a special type of school dedicated to the spiritual, moral, intellectual, human and pastoral formation of those who would wish to serve as priests. Knight (2020) explains that the term seminary is derived from the Latin word “semen” which means “seed”, also from another Latin word “seminarium” which was commonly used to describe a place where young seedlings were prepared for eventual transplantation.

The first official use of this word to describe institutions for clerical training dates back to the Council of Trent, which did not invent the term as such but accepted it from some of the writings of the period, by men such as Cardinal Reginald Pole, St. John Fisher, and St. Ignatius of Loyola (Oakley, 2017). Since the reformation times, religious vocation was considered to be a mysterious irresistible voice felt within one’s soul. This voice, this feeling was mostly delicate and faint. Therefore, it had to be protected, nurtured and strengthened. It was like a little seed sprouting, in need of delicate care and protection. The only safe place for it was the “Seminarium,” a Latin word for seedbed, to guard it from marauders. Seminaries were charged with the formation of men for the priesthood. The character of seminary education was largely unchanged until the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965).

A Minor Seminary therefore, is a type of a private secondary school, where young boys who have sensed a spiritual vocation upon their lives are given academic training as prescribed by the national curriculum, but alongside spiritual and ministerial formation. The Decree on Priestly Training of the Second Vatican Council, which was promulgated by Pope Paul VI on 28 October 1965, emphasized that Minor Seminaries needed to be established

to develop the seeds of vocations, and the students be prepared for special religious formation. Here the goal was to deepen their spiritual awareness, nurture moral sensibility and character, and help them to develop a personal spiritual and devotional life (Graham, 2002).

According to Chiroma (2015), this spiritual formation is basically a mentoring process that entails discipleship, spiritual direction, imitation and '*Parakeleo*' (Greek word meaning 'coming/ walking alongside'). According to the post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation, by John Paul II of 1992, Minor Seminaries in particular are referred to as places where ordinary secondary education previous to the study of philosophy and theology is imparted. The Church looks after these seeds of vocation sown in the hearts of children, by means of the institution of Minor Seminary, providing a careful though preliminary discernment and accompaniment.

In Western Kenya, Minor Seminaries are traced back in 1937 when the Mill Hill Missionaries, the missionaries who evangelized the Western part of Kenya, came to Kenya in 1895, established a Minor Seminary at Mukumu, that is St. Peter's seminary, in the then Diocese of Kisumu, but currently in the Diocese of Kakamega, in Kakamega County. The second oldest Minor Seminary in the Ecclesiastical Province of Kisumu is Mother of Apostles seminary, that was established in 1956 in Uasin Gishu County. St. John's Minor Seminary in Rakwaro, is the third oldest Minor Seminary in the Kisumu Ecclesiastical Province, established in 1956 at Rakwaro in Homabay County by the Mill Hill missionaries as well. This is followed by St. Gabriel's Minor Seminary established in 1980 by the Archdiocese of Kisumu at Daraja Mbili area in Kisumu County. The youngest Minor Seminary in the Kisumu Ecclesiastical Province is Pope Benedict XVI Minor Seminary, in Masongo, Kisii, established in 2011 by the Catholic Diocese of Kisii.

In Kenya, Minor Seminaries have been and still are centers for producing academically, morally and spiritually integrated human resource thus making a big contribution to the human resource development of the Catholic Church and the country. Minor Seminaries for that matter are identified with a good and firm spiritual, moral and academic formation which is generally referred to as "integral education." The effectiveness of this education and formation has therefore been a subject of great concern since it is believed that its good foundation can bring about a positive and profound change in society. It is this foundation that enables seminarians to transit from the Minor Seminaries to the Major Seminaries in order to continue with their formation to priesthood.

Transition has been defined in a general sense as a passage from one state, stage, subject or place to another (Merriam-Webster, 1999). This means that transition involves change and movement from one situation to another. The flow of seminarians from one level of formation to another known as 'transition' is an integral part of the seminary formation towards priesthood. This is thought to be a good indicator of balanced or unbalanced development of education between two levels.

However, in reference to education, different researchers have defined transition differently depending on context. Niesel and Griebel (2005) in discussing transition competence and resiliency in educational institutions defined transitions as "phases of life changes connected with developmental demands that are

determined by social, economic and cultural variables in existence in the context in which they are being carried out". On the other hand, Peter and Waita (2018) in their study on transition rates from primary to secondary schools, viewed it in terms of the number of learners who exited primary school and were admitted into secondary school. But Ondieki and Mweru (2020) defined transition rate as "the probability that a learner in a particular class will be in the next class in the succeeding year". Here, Ondieki and Mweru implied that transition is a function of probability, thus recognizing that there are factors which can influence the chances of an individual's transitioning to the next level.

World over, governments work towards achieving higher transition rates in their education systems. According to Barro and Lee (2013), developing countries are making remarkable strides toward universal access to basic education. In Kenya for instance, the government has established several legal initiatives and mobilized resources over the years to address the challenge of access to and transition in education. Such initiatives include free primary education (FPE), which has however been faced with implementation challenges (Simiyu, 2019). Similarly, free day secondary education (FDSE) was another good initiative, which has had challenges too (James, Simiyu, & Riechi, 2016). Most recent of these initiatives is the 100% transition policy aimed at having all children that exit primary schools to automatically join secondary schools irrespective of availability of school fees, or even the marks they scored in Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) examinations (Republic of Kenya, 2015). According to M'mbijiwe, Jagero, Mburugu and Barchok (2018), these government initiatives as championed by the government of Kenya have caused transition rate to rise. However, other researchers have reported lower transition rates due to different factors.

Studies have been done to investigate these factors responsible for low transition rates. Jemutai (2018) found that availability and quality of school facilities had influence on pupils' transition from preschool to primary school. Preschools that had facilities of good quality prepared the children for transition to primary schools better than those that did not have. Ondieki and Mweru (2020) on the other hand found that teacher factors, curriculum factors and infrastructural factors affected children's transitioning from preschool into primary school. M'mbijiwe, et al, (2018) investigated the relationship between curriculum content management and transition of public primary school learners with disabilities to secondary school. Findings of the study revealed that curriculum content management had significant impact on transition to secondary school for public primary school learners with disabilities.

Odhiambo, Shinali and Pere (2016) investigated the influence of socio-cultural factors on transition of learners from Primary to Secondary schools in Central Division of Narok County, Kenya. The study found that socio-cultural factors that hindered learner transition to secondary schools (though to varied degrees) included: forced or early marriages, initiations, parental level of education, parental perception on education and religion. This was in agreement with Mwikya and Cheloti (2019), who also found that cultural factors are a predictor variable in determining transition rates of pupils from primary school to secondary schools.

Tabwara and Maina (2019) who conducted a study on parental factors influencing transition rates from primary to secondary schools found that parental literacy level, parental income level and socioeconomic background influence transition. Levies charged by the school, and the number of meals taken by students were found to influence transition rate but to a very low extent. majority of the families lived below the poverty line and spent most of their income on basic needs such as food and clothing and therefore, affording to meet the cost of education has become a challenge. Peter and Waita (2018) also found that family determinants of socioeconomic nature had influence on transition rates of learners. And according to Njuguna and Muchanje (2019), the socioeconomic factors not only influence transition rate, but also affect the retention rate of learners in institutions.

It is thus clear that influence of economic, social and cultural factors on transition rates, factors which are all experienced at the level of the family, cannot be overlooked irrespective of the level of learning in question. In the context of seminary schools, it means that family factors have influences on how one may respond to a spiritual calling to God's service, and if the calling will be pursued to the end. These factors include (but are not limited to) family economic status, family culture and traditions, family lifestyle of modernity and secularism, parental/ family preferences as well as family perceptions on education and religion.

Most of the studies done have been conducted in public institutions of learning. Very little research has been done on transition rates in private institutions, and particularly Seminaries which are having very low transition rates. After sitting for their Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE), the students from Minor Seminaries are expected to transition to Major Seminaries where they are to be further prepared for priestly work. In the recent past however, the number of those proceeding to the Major Seminaries has been declining. According to CMRI (2018), there are many boys who show promising signs of a priestly vocation during their early teenage years, only to lose interest as they approach their final years of high school. The inadequacy of priests needed to serve the Church and society is as a result of the low rates of Minor-to-Major Seminary transition.

It has been reported that a large proportion of Minor seminarian graduates fail to proceed to Major Seminary level all over the world. This has been attributed to a number of reasons for instance (Kariuki, 2017) argues that seminary-based factors such as school rules, attitudes, the curriculum, formators and management practices does affect students transition rates. In addition, family factors such as parent's education level, parent's occupation, family size, birth order, gender, occupational aspirations, parental involvement or seminarian's own attitudes towards Major Seminary formation also have an effect on transition rates (Kimuli, 2013).

The low transition rates from Minor Seminary to the Major Seminary is not only a problem of Kenya and specifically Kisumu Ecclesiastical Province but a global problem in the Catholic Church. A case in point, according to Vatican statistics (2018), the number of candidates for the priesthood, both diocesan seminarians and members of religious orders showed a continued slight decline worldwide, decreasing from 116,160 at the end of 2016 to 115,328 at the end of 2017. Therefore, globally, the number of Minor Seminary students proceeding to the Major

Seminaries keeps on declining. In Spain, Patsy (2014), asserted that there has been a huge drop in the number of priestly vocations. More specifically numbers joining Major Seminaries are becoming low each year that pass by, overall, the total is definitely down.

In Philippines, according to Reynaldo (2016), he acknowledged that Minor Seminaries take in many youths who may not be sure about going on to priesthood therefore this greatly affects the transition from the Minor Seminary to the Major Seminary. In Uganda, Mukasa (2017), asserted that there was a huge drop in the number of seminarians from the Minor who joined the Major Seminary. Many dropped out after Form Six for various reasons, numbering among them; change of mind about becoming a priest, some excel in their national exams and opt to go to secular universities to do marketable courses, and other reasons ranging from family to personal goals.

In Kenya, specifically Kisumu Ecclesiastical Province, primary and secondary data in the Minor Seminary schools and some Major Seminaries in Kenya provide statistics on the transition rates from Minor to Major Seminary schools. According to The Seed Magazine (September 5, 2016), St. John's Seminary Rakwaro: The Cradle of Priestly Formation for Homa Bay Diocese, a teacher in the said Minor Seminary, Mukobe points out that not all who join the Minor Seminary schools go on to become priests. In his view, only about 5 percent of a particular class proceeds to the Major Seminary. This points to a very low transition rate. This gives room for a comprehensive study to be carried out in all the other Minor Seminaries in Western Kenya.

There are a variety of interior and exterior factors during the discernment process that lead to the low transition of Minor seminarians to the Major Seminary. According to Mukobe (2016), attributes the low transition rates to the fact that formation to the priesthood is very rigorous and yet many young people today love shortcuts. Thus, Major Seminary tires them very fast. Therefore because of young people who are attracted by easy life, secular facilities and materialism opt not to continue to the Major Seminary.

Oketch (2017) asserts that there are various reasons as to why seminarians quit the journey to priesthood, which sometimes for a number of boys, begin at tender ages. In his assertion he comes up with several key factors that affect the rate of dropping out of this journey from either Minor Seminary or even Major Seminaries. In the first place, there is always a personal reason and conviction that informs one's decision to either proceed to Major Seminary or not. These reasons may be based on one's own desire for a different lifestyle or peer influences. Basing on the observations made by the seminary superiors, there are those Minor seminarians who are never recommended to proceed to Major Seminary. The recommendation may also be drawn from their home parishes where their priests play an important role in their being seminarians. Secondly, the rate of transition to the Major Seminary may be affected by one's social-cultural demands especially streaming from his family. Considering one's position in the family may affect their decision to join the Major Seminary, and this may be hindered if he is looked upon as the potential breadwinner.

More so, Ratzinger (2008), identified smaller family size as the cause of the low transition to the Major Seminaries and Catholic priests' shortage. He opined that required celibacy was

not the cause of the problem, which he believes has its roots in shrinking family size and changing family priorities. "If today the average number of children is 1.5", he reasoned, "The question of possible priests takes on a very different role from what it was in ages when families were considerably larger." The main obstacle, he argued, was parents "who have very different expectations for their children". Therefore, in preparing for successful transitions, staff in the Minor Seminaries have important roles to play in supporting the transitions of all seminarians to the Major Seminary. Minor Seminaries are responsible for preparing students academically and socially for Major Seminary and sharing information with the students and families. The values, ethical orientation or culture within a Minor Seminary is fundamental to how well it welcomes and supports seminarians. The crisis is now mathematically certain as regards the low transition, but despite these figures that indicate the existence of low transition from the Minor Seminaries to the Major Seminaries by the seminarians from Kisumu Ecclesiastical Province, there is limited studies showing how family factors affect transition rates from Minor to Major Seminary in Kisumu Ecclesiastical Province. Hence occasioning the current study. Furthermore, the interactions of Minor Seminary students with their family social, cultural and economic contexts have a great say and sway on their decisions to transition to Major Seminaries for priesthood, or otherwise. Thus, both the Minor and Major Seminary schools in Kenya were established as "seedbeds" or nurseries to nurture vocations to the

Catholic Priesthood. Nonetheless, even for those who do not make it to priesthood, the habits formed during their time in the seminary are of great benefit to their future (CMRI, 2018).

Minor Seminaries therefore, differ from the ordinary schools in the area of formation, given that they offer not only intellectual formation, but also spiritual, human and physical formation (Chiroma, 2015). In Minor Seminary schools, students have a well-ordered life that involves Mass and prayer (spiritual formation), academics (intellectual formation), character (human formation) and recreation and sports (physical formation).

As already mentioned in the Seed Magazine (2016), not all who join the Minor Seminary schools go on to become priests. Only about 5 percent of seminarians in St. John's Seminary Rakwaro, in Homa Bay Diocese of the Archdiocese of Kisumu proceed to the Major Seminary. This is a very low transition rate, and thus a clear pointer to the necessity of research to fill this gap. This is why the current study was done in the Kisumu Ecclesiastical Province, and include all the five Minor Seminaries for purposes of comparison and verification.

Generally, there exists a relationship between the Catholic Church, Minor Seminaries, Major Seminaries and the society. These intertwined institutions influence each other, hence working together as a system. Any factor affecting one of its parts results to the entire system getting affected in a way as illustrated by the researcher in Figure 1 below

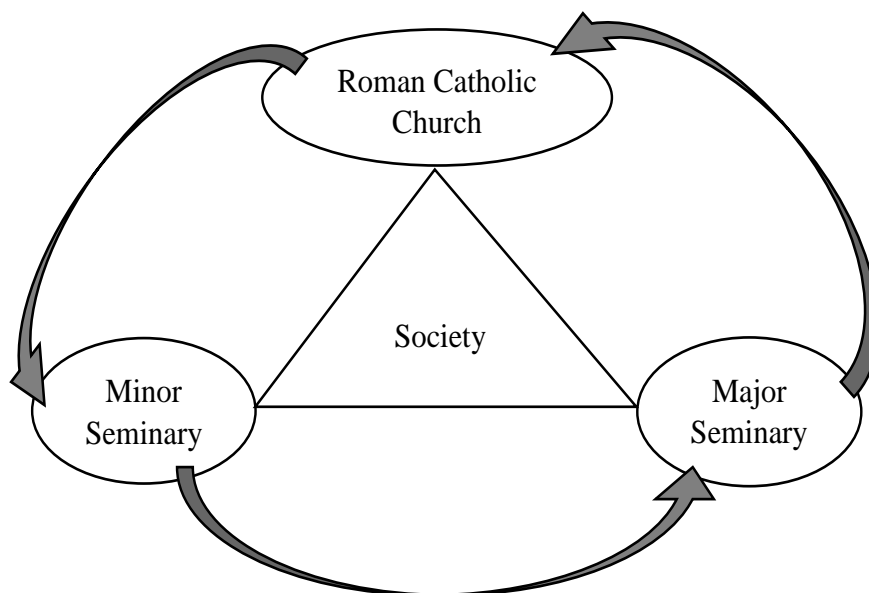


Figure 1. Relationship between Seminaries, Catholic Church and Society
(Researcher)

The society provides individuals for formation by the Church, which founds the Minor Seminaries. Those who graduate from the Minor Seminary transit to the Major Seminary after which they join the Church and the society to serve as priests. These priests promote morals needed to make the society upright, so that it can continue providing the Church with morally upright young men to join the Minor Seminary. This explicates why the concern of training of priests is global. In South Africa, Naidoo

(2013) voiced this concern, arguing that there were numerous persistent issues that were negatively impacting on the training of ministers.

Furthermore, Minor Seminary schools in Kenya were established as tributaries to supply the Major Seminary schools with candidates for priesthood after their K.C.S.E. examinations. When Minor Seminary schools fail deliver in this function, the Major Seminary schools get a shortage of candidates for priestly

formation. It implies that the Church in Kenya and the entire society may face an acute shortage of priests. This poses a great danger to the future existence of the Church, which depends entirely on ordained priests from the Major Seminaries to carry out its evangelical functions. If this trend continues, there is likelihood of there being very few priests in future, and this may have negative effects to the Church, the government and the society as a whole.

Family factors influencing seminarians range from family economic status, culture and traditions, family lifestyle, family perceptions on education and religion and family/ parental preferences. These factors may however, play out differently in developed nations of the world than they do in developing nations, to determine how children are raised and what they ultimately become. As Roksa and Kinsley (2019) argued, the family has a pivotal role it plays in determining the success of students. This means, what students become in school and in life may be a direct function of family factors. According to Olszewski-Kubilius (2018), even talent development hinges upon the role played by one's family or otherwise.

In Ukraine, Burlaka, Graham-Bermann and Delva (2017) investigated family factors, and how they affected the lives of children, either positively or negatively. The study aimed at estimating the level of the family factors, and explored relationships between these factors and how the children grew up. This included use of violence, use of alcohol, parents' level of education, among other socio-demographics. Parents of children (N = 320) ages 9–16 answered questions in questionnaires. Parents who reported high level of education, higher family income, less use of alcohol, balanced family functioning and lower use of violence were more likely to raise their children positively. Furthermore, alcohol use, violence, parent education and family income were significantly and indirectly related with parenting scores.

In South Africa, Parker (2018) investigated the role strain among South African seminarians in the Anglican Church. The study was adopted a phenomenological approach. Interviews were used to obtain data from respondents. The study explored how values of religious involvement were perceived among non-traditional distance learners in South Africa, who were pursuing theological distance education. Four basic types of churches emerged: "the Equipping Church", the "Empowering Church", the "Engaging Church", and the "Endangering Church". However, in examining religious coping strategies among the seminarians, it was found that seminarians experienced a deep sense of loneliness in their calling. As a result, they had to often rely almost exclusively on resources outside their local church. Furthermore, they often juggled the roles of student and church minister, while also serving the needs of their families and communities which were dependent on them. This revealed that apart from their spiritual calling, needs of their families still required their attention. Family financial and material needs may thus play a role in the life of an individual pursuing a spiritual calling

Family financial constraints in one's background not only affect learners in seminary schools but also in the secular institutions. Education in many developing economies is encumbered with economic challenges which hinder maximal transitions. In Kenya, the government has responded to this challenge by introducing free primary education (FPE) and

subsidized free day secondary education (SFDSE). James, Simiyu and Riechi (2016) investigated the relationship between the SFDSE and retention in secondary schools in Kenya. They focused on determining retention rates of students in secondary schools before and after the introduction of SFDSE by the government since the year 2008 and the adequacy of SFDSE funds in enhancing retention of learners in secondary schools in Bungoma County. The study targeted 3,993 stakeholders in the education sector including the Educational Officers, Principals, BOM chairpersons, P.T.A chairpersons and Parents from each Sub County in Bungoma County in Kenya.

Cross-sectional survey design, and purposive sampling were adopted to obtain a sample size of 340 respondents. Questionnaires and interview schedules were used to collect data from the respondents. The results indicated SFDSE had increased enrollment and transition rates and reduced dropout rates of the learners at secondary level education level. The study recommended that due to the importance of SFDSE which had enhanced retention, the amount allocated per child needed to be increased, and the government needed to remove the extra burdens from the parents by removing extra charges.

Tabwara and Maina (2019) examined parental factors influencing transition rates from primary to secondary schools in Matuga sub-county of Kwale county. Descriptive survey design was employed in the study. The population for the study comprised head teachers and parents of 89 primary schools in Matuga Sub-County Kenya. Questionnaires were used for data collection. Stratified, purposive and convenient sampling methods were used to obtain the sample size for the study. The sample size for the study was 178 respondents. The study established that parental literacy level, parental income level and family background influenced transition. Levies charged by the school and number of meals taken by students were found to influence transition rate but to a very low extent. Majority of the families lived below the poverty line and spend most of their income on basic needs such as food and clothing and therefore, affording to meet the cost of education has become a challenge. The study concluded that parental level of income, parental literacy level and family background influenced low transition rate in Matuga sub-county. It recommended that the national government in collaboration with the county government of Kwale needed to come up with programs aimed at reducing poverty levels within the sub-county so to promote a smooth transition from primary to secondary.

II. METHODOLOGY

Exploratory mixed-methods design was used ;

Target Population were all rectors and former seminarians from the Minor Seminaries in the Ecclesiastical Province of Kisumu, Kenya as well as Vocations Directors in Dioceses that host the targeted five Minor Seminary schools.

Stratified simple random sampling was used.

Data collection instruments were: Questionnaires, document analysi guide and interview schedules were used to collect data.

Validity

To determine validity, experts in the area of Seminary were consulted.

Reliability:

Results

Table1: Family Factors Affecting Minor Seminarians

		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly agree	Mean	SD
Low family socioeconomic status.	f 49 % 29.2	24 14.3	10 6.0	53 31.5	32 19.0	2.97	1.549	
Family culture and traditions opposed to priesthood.	f 28 % 16.7	47 28.0	13 7.7	53 31.5	27 16.1	3.02	1.384	
Family attraction to modernity and secularism.	f 11 % 6.5	29 17.3	7 4.2	48 28.6	73 43.5	3.85	1.321	
Negative family perceptions on education & religion.	f 32 % 19.0	50 29.8	15 8.9	55 32.7	16 9.5	2.84	1.324	
Family preferences for other careers.	f 6 % 3.6	10 6.0	8 4.8	90 53.6	54 32.1	4.05	0.965	

The findings revealed that seminarians are most affected by family preferences for other careers than priesthood (\bar{X} =4.05, SD=0.95). This was followed by families that have attraction to modernity and secularism (\bar{X} =3.85, SD=1.321); family culture and traditions opposed to priesthood (\bar{X} =3.02, SD=1.384); low family socioeconomic status (\bar{X} =2.97, SD=1.549); and negative family perceptions on education and religion (\bar{X} =2.84, DS=1.324). Therefore, to varying degrees, family factors influencing seminarians range from family economic status, culture and traditions, family lifestyle, family perceptions on education and religion and family/ parental preferences. These factors may however, play out differently in developed nations of the world than they do in developing nations, to determine how children are raised and what they ultimately become.

Though family socioeconomic status was not rated highest among family factors affecting seminarians, family financial and material needs have been found to play a role in the life of an individual pursuing a spiritual calling (Parker, 2018). According to Burlaka, *et al.*, (2017), parents who have a high level of education and higher family income are more likely to raise their children positively. Similarly, Roksa and Kinsley (2019) argued that the family has a pivotal role in determining what a young person becomes and achieves. This means, what students become in school and in life may be a direct function of family factors.

According to Olszewski-Kubilius (2018), even talent development hinges upon the role played by one’s family or otherwise.

III. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Based on the results the researcher concluded that that seminarian is most affected by family preferences for other careers than priesthood. varying degrees, family factors influencing seminarians range from family economic status, culture and traditions, family lifestyle, family perceptions on education and religion and family/ parental preferences. These factors may however, play out differently in developed nations of the world than they do in developing nations, to determine how children are raised and what they ultimately become.

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