

# Influence Of Spiritual Control On The Performance Of Pentecostal Churches In Nairobi County, Kenya

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**Abstract-** The issues of manipulation, control, and ‘forced giving’ in the Church context have raised a lot of concern and especially at a time when the moral authority of the Church has been questioned. Indeed, in the wake of the evangelical explosion, con preachers and fake miracle workers have infiltrated and polluted the good news of the gospel. This study aimed at investigating whether spiritual control did exist in the Pentecostal Church setting, and if so, then the effect it has on the performance of Pentecostal churches in Nairobi County, Kenya. The research used a mixed methods design, embracing a concurrent triangulation strategy, and assuming a pragmatic philosophical approach. The target population was the 12891 congregants in the Pentecostal congregations in Embakasi East Sub-County, Nairobi County. The sample size was 388 congregants and 32 church leaders. Data were collected using questionnaires and interview guides. It was analysed using inferential statistics (regression) and descriptive statistics (Mean and Standard Deviation) with the help of SPSS version 28.0.1.1. Data were presented using Tables, Graphs, and Charts. From the hypothesis testing, the results depicted a P value of 0.0110 ( $P < 0.05$ ), and hence the null hypothesis that there is no statistically significant influence of spiritual control on the performance of Pentecostal churches in Nairobi was therefore rejected and the alternative hypothesis that there was a statistically significant influence of spiritual control on the performance of Pentecostal Churches in Nairobi, Kenya was accepted. The study recommends that church leaders should stick to the mandate of their calling i.e. to shepherd God’s children and forego the race to enrich themselves and expand church infrastructure using unorthodox means. It also recommends that leaders in Christian churches should consider enrolling for training especially those who have not attended theological colleges since leadership training moderates’ manipulation in leadership.

**Index Terms-** Spiritual Control, Manipulative Leadership, Church Performance

## I. INTRODUCTION

The concept of manipulation is as old as humanity; it is indeed impossible to separate it from all human interactions as it permeates all of them. Consequently, history is replete with all

kinds of manipulation and manipulative leaders. Referring to such leaders, Erickson et al. (2015) posit that history is replete with examples of destructive leaders from all walks of life and spheres of influence. Just like power, manipulation does not operate in a vacuum but is prevalent in all domains of life (Bailey, 2019). Describing the menace, Thoroughgood (2018) posits that manipulating subjects in order to influence them is understated but the cruellest form of influencing social behaviour... manipulation is common factor in human interactions (p.69). Its imprints are therefore evident in the political, social, economic, cultural, and religious realms. As such, terms like political manipulation, social manipulation, economic manipulation, and cultural manipulation, just to mention but a few, are common discourses in scholarly works. Such manipulation has also permeated the religious spheres where the church leadership, although for a long time seen as an advocate against the menace, has equally embraced it albeit in disguise.

The underlying concern therefore is whether the proclamations of some church leaders is based on the truth, or merely on the high-sounding armchair rhetoric of their presentations. This concern is in line with the observation by Smith, (2019) that, when one approaches the subject of Christian leadership, the assumption is that a clergy leader would, by virtue of one’s faith assent, practice standards that reflect Christian values and behaviour, which will have constructive influence on followers and the progress of the church. Consequently, the ideal state of the church should be one devoid of manipulation of any nature. However, manipulation, control, exploitation, and ‘forced giving’ in the church is very prevalent, and this has raised many concerns, especially at a time when the moral authority of the church is being questioned. The media is full of stories of the many so-called “men of God” who have exploited their congregants in the name of conferring blessings on them.

Many congregants have experienced extreme control and manipulation from their leaders, a practice that is akin to witchcraft in the church. In fact, Nagle and Owasanoye, (2015) observes that the tools of witchcraft are emotional manipulation, control, isolation, soul ties, fear, confusion, loss of personal identity, sickness, and divination. However, the concept of witchcraft, and especially when mentioned within the Church context, is controversial. Paul Crouch once exclaimed,

“WITCHCRAFT IN THE CHURCH? Horrors! Impossible! How could it be, you ask?” (Godwin, 2015, pvii). At the mention of such a title, many people would be forgiven to react in the same way. However, true to Crouches’ conclusion, the practice is very much alive in such organizations. In his words, he laments, yes—but true! Some of those weird and far-out disturbances in our churches and in our private lives are really Satan’s covert and almost imperceptible tactics that render many churches and lives powerless, ultimately destroying them.

According to Ellis (2016), witchcraft can be seen as an organized crime unit in the Kingdom of Darkness. It is all about the control of others, imposing one’s will upon someone else, usually for a negative result. It brings bondage to the victim; it is the practice of trying to control others for personal gain. It works through these major components, namely, intimidation (I will scare you into doing what I want), manipulation (I will trick you into doing what I want or giving what I need), domination (I will force you to do what I want), emotional blackmail (I will make you feel bad into doing what I want).

Despite the existence of such disgusting practices in the church, an attempt to directly address the issue has been futile. One reason could be the high esteem people hold such institutions and presumably because of the perception that all religious organizations are sacred. Referring to this perception of the sacred institution, and the existence of conflict, Anderson (2017) asserts that the existence of conflict is viewed as non-existent, downplayed, or barely acknowledged, as to do so disagrees with the most fundamental ideals of the church. In supporting the sentiments, Davis (2019) notes that in his observations of and participation in conversations around abuse of power and control in churches, some evangelical Christians may object to addressing these issues within evangelicalism, claiming that either all things should be forgiven under grace or that admitting such issues exist is divisive to the body of Christ.

An attempt therefore to highlight any negative manifestation whether by the believers or non-believers is seen as an attack to the sacred. In further emphasis on this argument, Elazar-DeMota (2021) states that in matters of faith, such probing and defiant questions are not tolerated. One must take it or leave it. Any criticism is tantamount to heresy, which is ‘a sin of sins’. This stroke is the chief antinode with which matters of faith are fortified. They are not open to healthy debates; neither are they amenable to diversity, which characterizes the universe. Similarly, referring to such concerns as propaganda, Huckin (2016) posits that in general, propaganda, in the most neutral sense, means to disseminate or promote particular ideas. To identify a message as propaganda is to suggest something negative and dishonest.

Another reason why such attacks are not welcome could be the relative absence of legal framework within which to base the concerns or even guidelines from intra-church governing organizations to regulate church affairs. As Clifford and Hilborn (2018) note, spiritual abuse is a serious problematic term partly because of its own inherent ambiguity, and because attempts by some to embed it within a statutory safeguard and secular law would be impractical, potentially discriminatory towards religious communities, and damaging to inter-faith relations.

Further, the issue may not overly be linked to the Christian community, but generally ascribed to a phenomenon of sects or cults predominantly from without the Church (Starr, 2017).

Another reason could be the fact that many shy away from highlighting matters that pertain to the clergy and church leadership for fear of being labelled as rebels within the system. Still, the spiritually abused victims may not necessarily be aware of what is happening to them and may as such blame themselves for spiritual growth, being not able to separate their sacred beliefs from deviant abusive experiences (Yusoff et al., 2018).

Nevertheless, an attempt to expose and condemn that, which seems to deviate from God’s word in the church should be made. Enroth (2016) states that when we fail to pass judgment on any religious phenomenon for fear that such judgments might violate the norm of tolerance so prevalent in our culture, we abdicate our responsibility to the body of Christ, to sound a warning where a warning is justified. Some boats need to be rocked; even Christian boats. The church’s responsibility is to condemn that which is not in line with God’s word, both from within and without the church itself. It should also serve as a model to the world for emulation and a point of reference in matters of morality.

Referring to the power of the Church, Jomo Kenyatta, the first president of Kenya while addressing a gathering of East Africa Catholic bishops once commented that “the Church is the conscience of society” and today’s society needs a conscience. Do not be afraid to speak; if we go wrong and you keep quiet, one day you may have to answer for our mistakes (Ekena, 2017). As such, it is the prerogative of the Church to demonstrate a culture of moral decency in all her operations and disseminate the same to the outside world.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### Spiritual Control and Church Performance

#### Spiritual Control

Just like the other indicators of manipulative church leadership, spiritual control is associated with and derived from mainly spiritually abusive tendencies. Some religious leaders have been using control either in their soteriological pursuits or deliberately for their egocentric expeditions in the Ministry. Referring to the situation in Nigeria, Taiwo et al. (2017) assert that some preachers have resulted to mind control, indoctrination, intimidation and brainwashing as mechanisms towards what they termed as prostitution of the gospel and anointing of God. The reason behind such acts, as the scholars note, is the quest for materialism and a get-rich syndrome tormenting many such false preachers.

There are different forms of mind control especially the ones that pertain to techniques employed by church leaders to ensure control over their members (Cowan, 2015). Hassan (2015) defines mind control as a system of influences that disrupts an individual’s identity and replaces it with a new identity. To Ryan et al. (2015) mind control is a step-by-step process designed to break a person’s independence and individuality and to substitute it with the characteristics of a pawn. Geldenhuys, (2018) on the other hand look at mind control as a concerted effort to change a person’s way of looking at the world, which will change their behaviour. Yet Hunt (2015) sees control as invading aspects of life better left to the individual. Referring to control in a spiritual context, Nelson (2015) defines the concept as overriding the feelings and opinions of another, without regard to what will result in the other person’s state of living, emotions or spiritual well-being. In this study, spiritual control will refer to the use of any language, threats, fear

or otherwise to maintain the status quo of a congregation or even positioning them to a desired state for purposes of manipulation. There are various reasons as to why a leader would exercise spiritual control over his or her congregants. There are those who do it knowingly motivated by their selfish desires while others have no idea that they are controlling their flocks. To the former, the reason is to capture the victim's mind to benefit eventually from such control. In the words of Cowan (2015), the aim of mind control is to suppress an individual's own personality (ambitions, opinions, critical thinking, and ability to make decisions) and to replace it with an identity acceptable to the religious leader. In such a state as Cowan depicts, the leader can easily manipulate their followers easily for their own gain. They manage to do that by imposing every expression of control over the victims so that they eventually bow to their authority.

Garrett (2017) illustrates this by observing that the bedrock of the control of an abusive church and its pastor over the lives of members is the control of all aspects of communication: how they speak, what they hear, what they read, and from whom (or from what sources) they receive information. Indeed, as the scholar postulates, this is a well-calculated move by the leaders, which first ensures that the leaders win the trust of their followers through the knowledge of their dreams, esteemed plans, or desires. They consequently use this knowledge to manipulate and control their naive followers by feeding them with promises of how they or their churches would actualize their dreams and goals. Underpinning this is the use of communication, which, according to Garrett, must be controlled and altered for control and manipulation to take place. Similarly, Hunt (2015) depicts the same by noting that at the core of spiritual abuse is excessive control of others. Spiritual abuse is acting "spiritual" to benefit oneself by using self-centred efforts to control others. Spiritual control has also been associated with the practice of witchcraft and occultism. Referring to the situation in Nigeria, Osinaike (2017) notes that some elements of witchcraft existed in some church services. He asserts:

One of the clear examples of pulpit witchcraft is making the word of God say what it is not intended to say so that we can get some material benefit from the congregation. This happens so much that many preachers deliberately look for scriptures that could be used to wrest money from people (p.9)

To Vayne, (2016), witchcraft itself is nothing more than the practice of occultism. It is an attempt to manipulate forces to accomplish personal ends, and people all over the world today are attempting it. As such, when people, whether priests or otherwise, seek to control, dominate, manipulate, or intimidate, they are practicing witchcraft. This conforms to the assertion by Prince (2020) that one purpose common to all forms of witchcraft is control. Whenever any religious activity seeks to control other people, the influence of witchcraft is probably at work. To Prince, when Church leaders practice control, dominion, and manipulation, they are indeed operating under the demon of witchcraft, which manifests in seeking control over either some members of their staff or the entire flock. Others on the other hand have blended African religious beliefs and Christian beliefs/practices especially in healing ministries in what Igwe (2016) terms as witch-demonology. As such, a juxtaposition of some Christian healing ministries and the African traditional healing practices (especially those involving witches and

traditional healers) connotes a thin line, where principles used are the same and confusing to a believer.

To others, spiritual control is a practice among the cults and its aim is to dominate followers. According to Waters (2016), a cult is a closed system whose followers have been unethically and deceptively recruited using manipulative techniques of thought reform or mind control. This agrees with the definition by Knapp (2021) that spiritual abuse occurs on a continuum from rarely abusive to extreme legalism, mind control, shame, guilt, fear, coercion, ex-communication and death. These practices are contrary to the word of God, which ascribes the *modus operandi* in Christian organizations. In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul observes, "... we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God" (2 Corinthians 4:2. NIV).

Various methods are used in the process of spiritual control. They vary from one leader to another and depend mainly on their ultimate agenda. According to Prince (2020), the three ways in which the desire to control is manifested are through manipulation, domination and intimidation. As such, the goal of manipulation, domination and intimidation is to control. On the same note, the three can be expressions of control within a leader rather than being ways per se. According to Prince, the goal is domination. People who recognize that they are weaker than those they seek to control tend to manipulate; those who feel stronger tend to intimidate. But the end purpose is the same: to dominate, that is, to control others and get them to do what they want.

One common method of control as Enroth (2016) alludes to is by the use of guilt, fear and intimidation. The victims are made to feel guilty when they do or not do certain things as approved by the abusive leaders. Such invocations do not only make the victim feel guilty but also inculcate some form of fear in them, which makes them prone to control. Indeed, Enroth looks at fear as the most effective control mechanism that an abusive leader can use. This is demonstrated by fear of not measuring up, fear of losing out with God if one leaves the group, and a fear of spiritual failure. Consequently, Enroth paints an environment where the leaders consciously foster an unhealthy form of dependency, spiritually and interpersonally, by focusing on themes of submission, loyalty, and obedience to those in authority (p.53). One victim of spiritual control as interviewed by Enroth decried such an environment as frightening and more often the victims clutch together helplessly. In his words an incredible environment of fear is created where the hens huddle together within the walls to protect themselves from ravenous wolves, while allowing weasels to guard their chicken coop (p.55).

Another way in which spiritual control is expressed is through strict and secretive surveillance of members. The abusive leaders establish monitoring systems to watch on what members are saying, where they go, whom they associate with and sometimes what they think about certain issues. Such ploys are made to ensure conformity and control among some or all members of a congregation. A clique of usually submissive and loyal members is used in the surveillance and report what they observe to the abusive leaders. In some extremes especially in cults, spiritual control is exercised through restrictions of visitations to some places or individuals associated with the members. To Enroth (2016), control also can be exercised by

regulating contacts with family members and friends from the past. Members who go home to visit friends and relatives are encouraged to keep the visits brief because, you may lose the vision (p.56). Some kind of control aims at suppressing the victim's ability to reason out by themselves but instead depend on the leader's perceptions and judgements on certain things. The worst that can happen to somebody is to be restrained from their family members given that they emanate from such families prior to joining their spiritual groups. Even in the worst scenario where one is from an abusive family or religiously subversive entity it is not safe to recommend restraint from family members. Further, the Bible, which forms the basis for Christian trainings, admonishes that we love everyone including our enemies and encourages fellowship with one another. It invites to consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another-and all the more as you see the Day approaching (Hebrews 10: 24-25, NIV).

Still around restrictive control is the issue of marriage or partnership of members with others. Some abusive churches or leaders restrain their members from marrying from outside their groups and only approve internal engagements. Referring to an abusive case in the now-defunct Southern California Fundamentalist Group, Enroth (2016) observes that members had to covenant to date Christians and only those from their assembly. They also had to agree to get prior endorsement from those in authority before any marriage engagement or plans. Part of the creed read, I will keep these dates 'clean' and refrain from any kissing until six months of dating the same person. I promise God I will not go steady without the approval of those in authority .... (p.56). Such a practice is not only domineering but also at variance with doctrinal teachings. Candidates for marriage are indeed encouraged to refrain from any sexual immorality including kissing before they marry. As such, giving a timeline of six months is not only a control gimmick but also a false dogma.

The most used method of inculcating fear and control in most abusive churches takes place on the pulpit and by using God's word. Abusive preachers thus use the scriptures deceptively to intimidate, control or manipulate their members. According to Enroth (2016), a noticeable system of control in the church is the use of instruction or preaching from the pulpit. To Abrahams et al. (2019), scriptural texts may be used/misused to demand obedience and reinforce the perpetrator's entitlement to headship. Enroth gives an example of such misuse of the pulpit when he asserts that according to a former member of the shepherding movement, so-called because its members had "shepherds" who required full submission and taught the need for "spiritual authority," these "leaders had the true story of what was going on. Pastors exercised control and manipulation through their sermons. Certain themes came through regularly: covenant, authority, obedience, submission, serving, honouring. Whichever form spiritual control takes, the underlying goal is to get people to do something, which they would have not done in their sober and normal states. This is wrong and more so when practised in the church.

#### Effects of Spiritual Control on Church Performance

Just like any other form of spiritual abuse, spiritual control has its devastating effects on church performance. According to Graham (2020), toxic leaders who control their followers have

their interest and motivation; consequently, such leaders create unhealthy and negative atmospheres. They desire to control every situation by attempting to assert their personal authority to get the outcome they desire. They have no ethics or morality concerning the principles of the church. Such environments are bottlenecks to church performance and followers can only but engage in 'wait and see' kind of attitude as the goals of the church are overlooked. Where there is control, the full potential of subordinates or followers is not realized, and such institutions operate under minimal capacity. As Cowan (2015) observes the aim of mind control is to suppress an individual's own personality (ambitions, opinions, critical thinking, and ability to make decisions) and to replace it with an identity acceptable to the religious leader. Individuals who assume this new identity as Cowan alludes, do not think critically, are hesitant, lack self-drive and are reliant on the leader. Such controlled individuals are not proactive and largely do what they are instructed to do by their leaders just for conformity and routine purposes. Eventually strategic imperatives of such institutions where there is control are overlooked as leaders concentrate on fulfilment of their own selfish desires.

One of the methods of control in an institution is the inculcation of fear among the followers. Garrette (2017) posits that although fear is antithetical to Christian faith abusive churches are often seedbeds of a fear-based faith. They nurture an environment of stress and fear as a mechanism of control. Where there is fear, little can be accomplished for fear is like a siphon that drains up somebody's energy, making them impotent. The Bible is very clear when it comes to fear. It is the opposite of love and God has not bestowed upon us fear for He wants us to be productive. As the Bible states, God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind (2 Timothy 1:7, NIV). A church with members who are full of fear cannot make progress. Such members cannot go out for outreaches, evangelistic crusades or boldly proclaim the word of God everywhere because of fear. Indeed, the Bible declares from the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been subjected to violence, and violent people have been raiding it (Mathew 11:12, NIV). It is only the courageous and the bold not the fearful who advance God's kingdom. As such, where there is control and members are fearful church performance is greatly jeopardized.

The best environment for any organization to perform including the church is one where individuals are motivated and nurtured for sustainability. Such an environment is secure, and individuals are free to express their concerns. Controlling environments on the other hand are retrogressive and demoralizing. To Lichty (2016), pastors who employ control myths play to base fears and exacerbate the need for safety and security. In such cases, future leaders are not nurtured and there is little progress if any that takes place hence low performance.

On the flip side, spiritual control may also have some positive effects on church performance. Where control is meant to channel people in the same direction or in the achievement of a certain goal, church performance is enhanced. Indeed, control may help eliminate or reduce division and make followers whether willingly or unwillingly work together (Wilt et al., 2016). This apparently helps in the attainment of some milestones in the church such as infrastructural developments. The leaders may use control to tame some people who would otherwise backbite and unwittingly derail the church from its goals.

### III. RESEARCH METHODS

This study assumed a pragmatic philosophical approach and a mixed methods design, embracing a concurrent triangulation strategy. Qualitative and quantitative data were collected concurrently, analysis done separately, and results merged during interpretation. The target population was the 12891 congregants in the Pentecostal congregations in Embakasi East Sub-County, Nairobi County. The sample size was 388 congregants and 32 church leaders. Data were collected using questionnaires and interview guides. It was analysed using inferential statistics (regression) and descriptive statistics (Mean and Standard Deviation) with the help of SPSS version 28.0.1.1. Data were presented using Tables, Graphs and Charts.

Quantitative data was gathered from the close-ended section of the questionnaire while qualitative data was gathered from the interview guide and the open-ended sections of the questionnaires. Stratified, simple random and purposive sampling to identify the respondents. Stratified sampling was used to group the churches into broad denominational entities, that is P.E.F.A, P.A.G, DCI, and other categories. The ‘others’ category were congregations that were upcoming and mostly single independent congregations without branches, founded by individual Ministers. Most of them were not under any umbrella body, and decisions were made either by the founder minister or elders appointed by the minister. Proportionate sampling was then used to determine the number of respondents from each of the churches as a fraction of the target

population. Simple random sampling was then employed to identify the congregants in their churches. Simple random sampling provides equal opportunity and an unbiased representation of the population (Kothari, 2014). Purposive sampling technique was then introduced to identify the leaders in the churches. Purposive sampling is suitable for selecting individuals or groups who have knowledge or experience with a phenomenon of interest (Clark, 2019).

The actual sample size of the congregants was then determined using Yamane (1967) formula:

$$n = \frac{N}{[1 + N(e)^2]}$$

Where

- n = The sample size
- N = Total population
- e = Error tolerance

Substituting the formula:

$$n = \frac{12891}{[1 + 12891(0.05)^2]} = 388 \text{ congregants}$$

The sample size of the leaders on the other hand was determined using the argument by Mugenda and Mugenda (2019) that in a finite population, a sample of 10-30% is adequate for analysis. The sample size was therefore as shown on Table 3.6

**Table 3.1: Sample size**

Denomination	Congregants		Leaders	
	Population	Sample size	Population	Sample size (30%)
P.E.F.A	3254	98	26	8
P.A.G	3723	112	27	8
D.C.I.	3115	94	33	10
Others	2799	84	21	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>12891</b>	<b>388</b>	<b>107</b>	<b>32</b>

Analysis of data was done in order to answer the research questions of this study. Descriptive statistical analysis and inferential statistical techniques were used for analysis. Data collected was sorted, classified and coded then tabulated for ease of analysis. The data was summarized and categorized according to common themes. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences computer software (SPSS) was then employed to generate the output in form of frequency tables, means and standard deviations for ease of analysis.

Regression analysis was also done to establish the relationship between the dependent and independent variables using the following analytical model.

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + e$$

Where:  $\alpha$  = constant

Y = church performance

$B_1$  = betas for spiritual control

$X_1$  = Spiritual control

$\epsilon$  = Error term with a significance level of 5%

Ethical considerations were observed which included voluntary participation and informed consent from the respondents. These principles were followed to guarantee that all human subjects choose to participate of their own free will and that they had been fully informed regarding the procedures of the research project and any potential risks.

### IV. RESULTS

Out of the 388 questionnaires issued to respondents, 332 were returned giving a response rate of 86% which was an excellent response (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2019).

**Table 1: Questionnaire Return Rate**

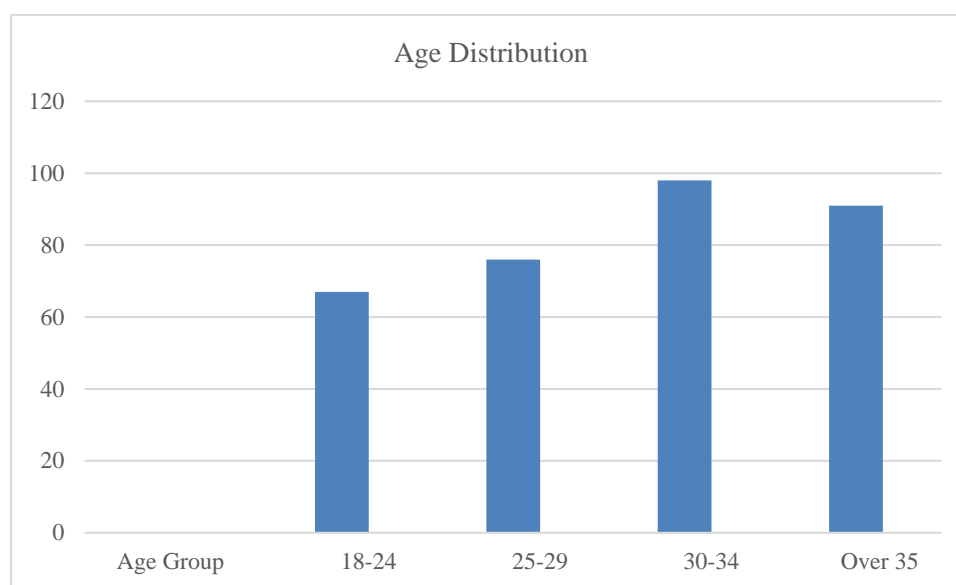
Return rate	F	%
Complete questionnaires	332	86
Incomplete questionnaires	56	14
Total	388	100

The age distribution of respondents indicated that 21% were aged between 18-24 years, 23% between 25-29 years, 29% between 30-34 years, and 27% were over 35 years. This showed that all the respondents were adults aged 18 years and above and

therefore old enough to fully appreciate the influence of Spiritual control on the performance of Pentecostal churches.

**Table 2. Age of Congregants**

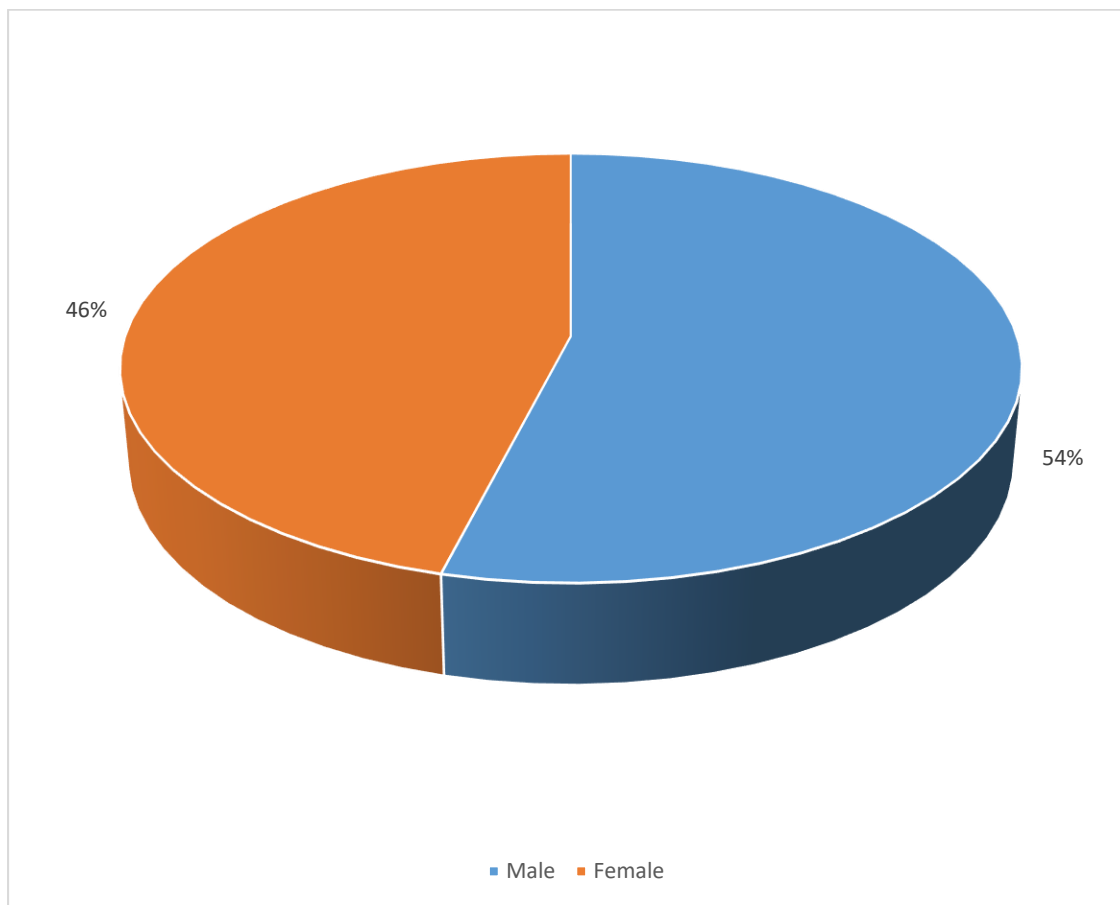
Age in years	Frequency (F)	Percentage (%)
18-24	67	20
25-29	76	23
30-34	98	30
Over 35	91	27
Total	332	100



**Figure 1.0. Age of Congregants**

The gender distribution indicated that 182 respondents representing 54% were female while 150 representing 46% were

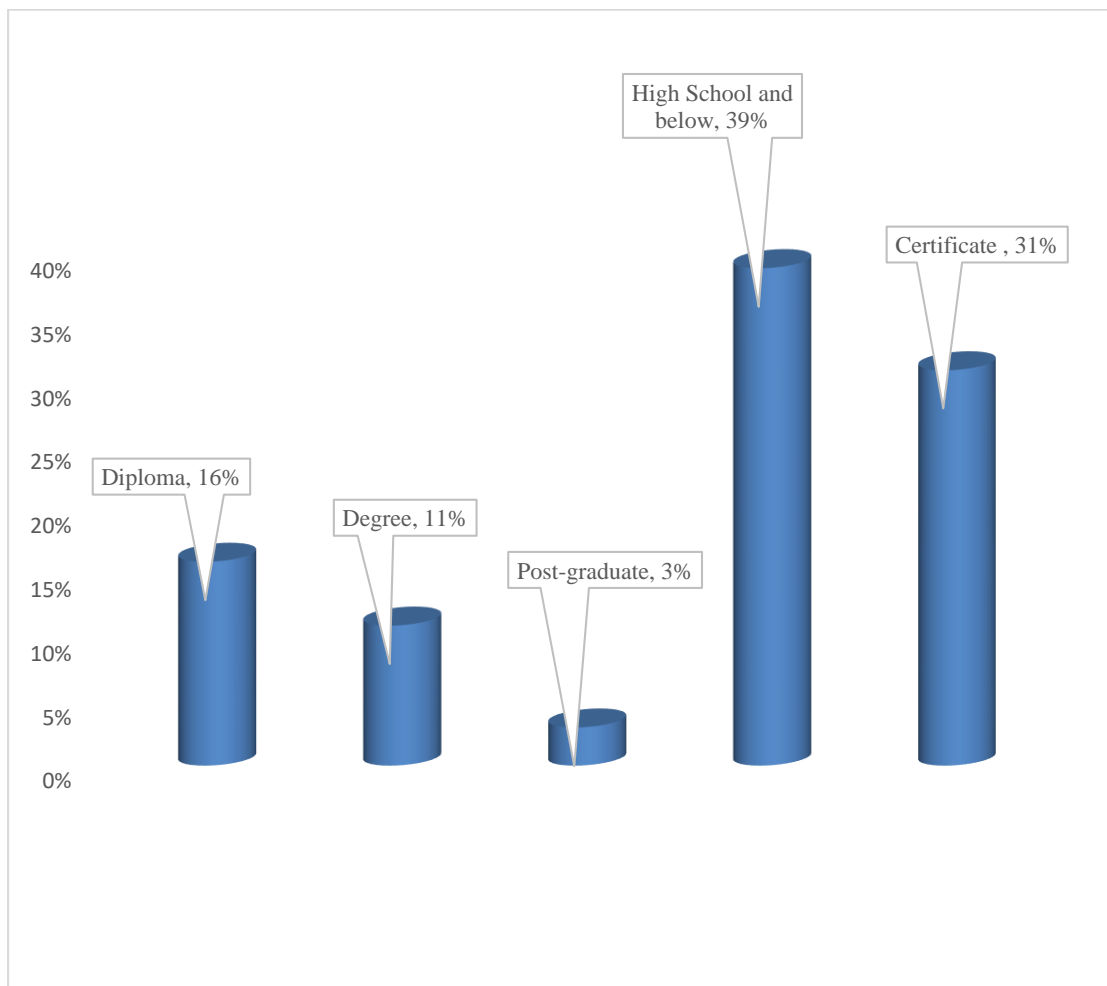
male. This showed gender disparity among the congregants in Nairobi County.



**Figure 1.1. Gender Distribution.**

The highest level of education of the congregants was established as follows. Thirty-nine percent (39%) (n=129) of the congregants had high school and below level of education, 31% (n=103) had certificate qualifications, 16% (n=53) had diploma,

11% (n=37) had a degree, while only 3% (n=10) had post-graduate qualifications. This implied that the congregants had at least some formal learning and were therefore suitable respondents to the study. This is illustrated in figure 1.2. below.

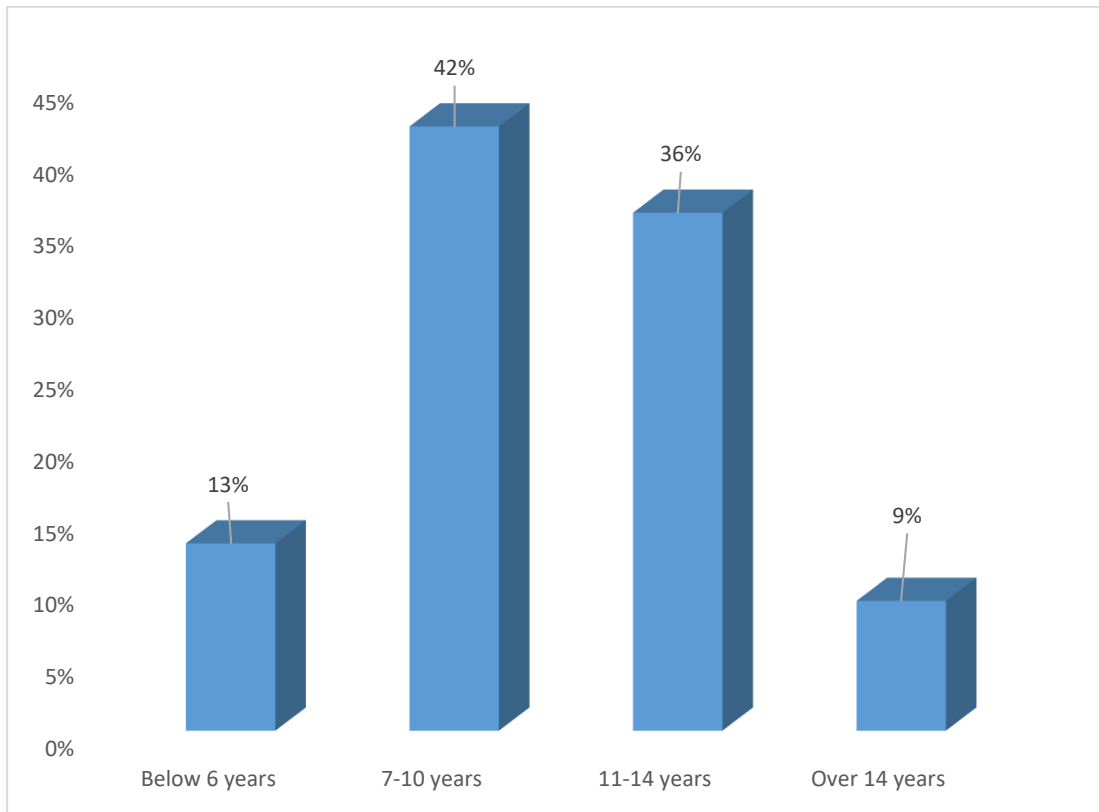


**Figure 1.2: Highest level of education of the congregants**

The period the congregants had been members of their churches showed that 42% (n=139) of the congregants had been members of their churches for 7-10 years, 36% (n=120) for 11-14 years, 13% (n=43) had been members for under six years while

9% (n=30) had been members for over 14 years. This implied that all the congregants had been members of their churches long enough to understand the issues of manipulative leadership and church performance and as such were suitable respondents for the study. This is reflected in Figure 1.3 below.

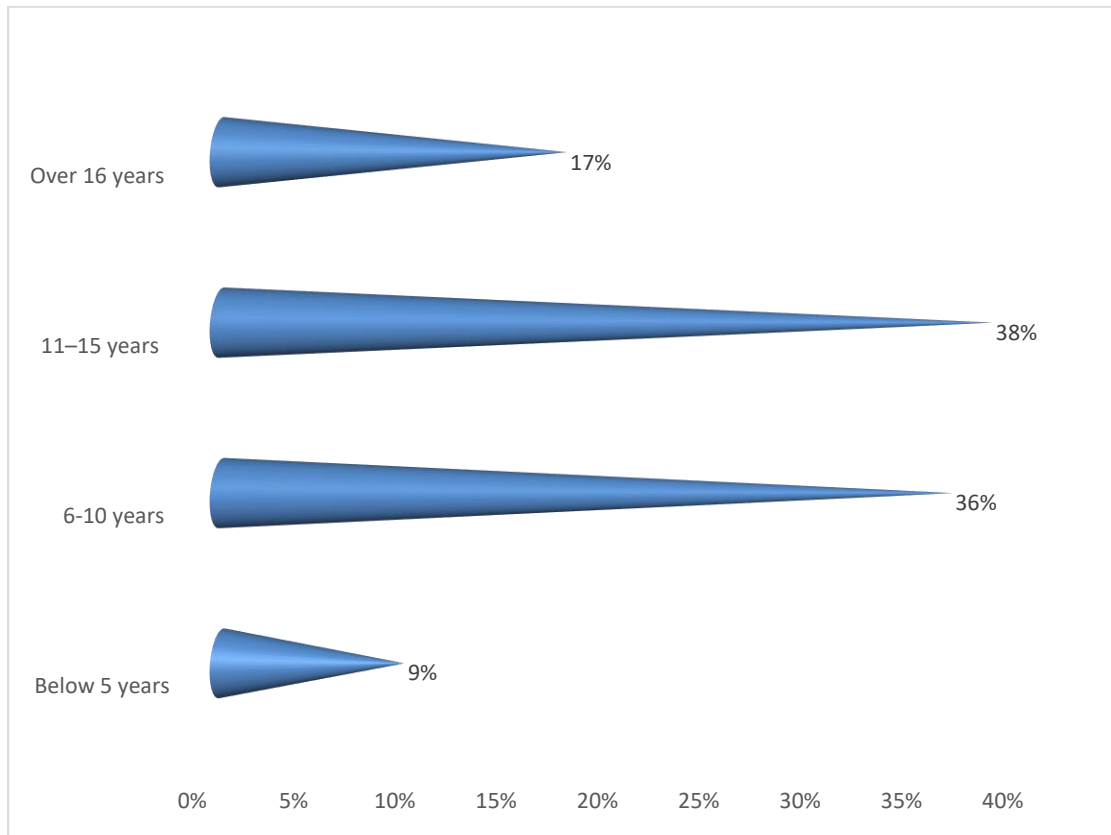




**Figure 1.3: Period the congregants had been members of their churches.**

Further, the period the congregants had been born again was established as follows. Thirty-eight percent (38%), (n=126) of the congregants had been born again for 11-15 years, 36% (n=120) for 6-10 years, 17% (n=56) had been born again for over 16 years

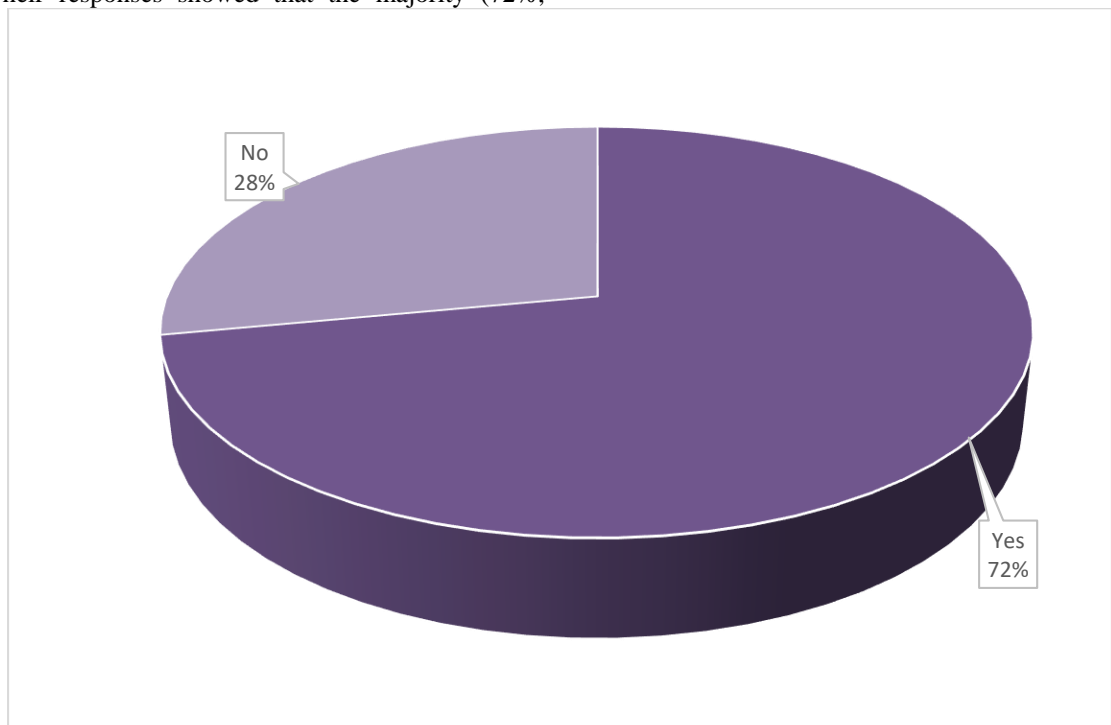
while 9% (n=30) had been born again for less than 5 years. This implied that all the congregants had been born again long enough to understand the issues of manipulative leadership and church performance and as such were suitable respondents for the study. This is shown in Figure 1.4 below.



**Figure 1.4: Period the congregants had been born again.**

Regarding the influence of Spiritual control on the performance of Pentecostal churches in Nairobi County, the following findings were established. Congregants were asked whether they understood spiritual control from a biblical perspective. Their responses showed that the majority (72%,

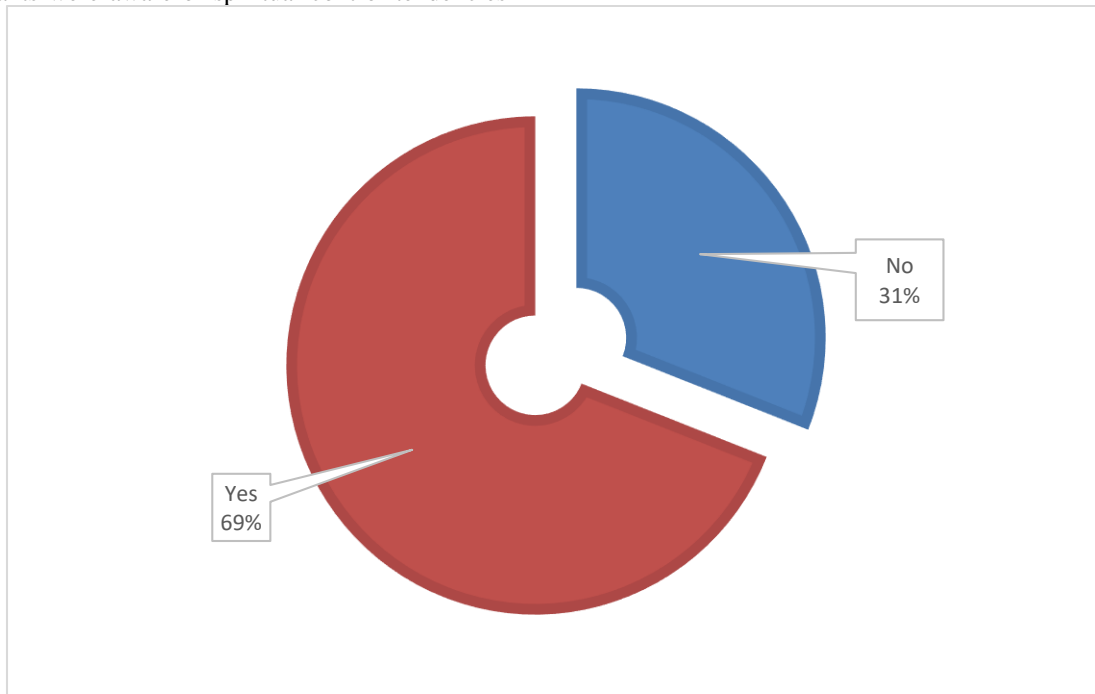
n=239) of the congregants were aware of spiritual control from a biblical perspective while 31% (n=93) were not aware. This implied that most of the congregants were aware of the presence of spiritual control from a biblical perspective as depicted in Figure 1.5 below.



**Figure 1.5: Opinion on whether congregants understood spiritual control from a biblical perspective.**

The congregants who had answered they were aware of spiritual control from a biblical perspective were also required to indicate whether they were aware of spiritual control tendencies in their churches. The findings were that the majority (69%, n=229) of the congregants were aware of spiritual control tendencies in

their churches while 31% (n=103) reported that they were not aware of any such tendencies. Their responses were as shown in Figure 1.6.



**Figure 4.1: Congregants' opinion on their awareness of spiritual control tendencies**

This implied that a majority of the congregants had observed some evidence of spiritual control tendencies in their churches. Further, those who indicated that they were aware of spiritual control tendencies were tasked to explain the various forms in which spiritual control was practiced in their churches. They reported that it took the form of threats and confrontations where their pastors threaten to deny them pastoral services if they fail to support their church. They also reported that at times the threats were meant to force them to support the pastors' personal projects. Congregants were also tasked to evaluate their degree of agreement with the following statements regarding the presence of

spiritual control in their churches. Their reactions were rated on a 5-point Likert scale where: where 1= Strongly Disagree 2 = Somehow Disagree 3 = Neutral 4 = Somehow Agree 5 = Strongly Agree. The mean and standard deviations were generated using SPSS. A mean range of 1-2.4 meant Disagree, 2.5 – 3.4 meant Neutral and 3.5 - 5 meant Agree. A standard deviation of 0.0000 meant unanimous agreement on a certain statement while figures above 0.0000 showed varying degrees of agreement within the same statement. The output from SPSS was as shown on Table 1.2

**Table 1.2 : Congregants' opinions on the presence of spiritual control**

Statement	Mean	Std. Dev
Some church leaders manipulate the emotions of the congregants in order to control them into doing some things	4.2217	.8630
Some leaders make their followers feel guilty when they do or do not do certain things as approved by them.	4.3464	.5440
Some leaders consciously foster an unhealthy form of dependency, spiritually and interpersonally, by focusing on themes of submission, loyalty and obedience to those in authority.	3.9213	.6373
Some leaders use the scriptures deceptively in order to intimidate, control or manipulate their members	4.1218	.7868

Some leaders ensure control through strict and secretive surveillance of members; they establish monitoring systems to watch on what members are saying, where they go, whom they associate with and sometimes what they think about certain issues. 3.6031 .8123

The congregants reported that some leaders made their followers feel guilty when they did or did not do certain things as approved by them (Mean 4.3464, SD .5440). This implied that the congregants were cognizant of the presence of their leader's use of guilt to force the congregants to comply with the leader's demands. This was perhaps due to the fact the leaders desired exponential numeric growth in their churches by getting particular things done in church, whereas they understood that if the congregants were left on their own, it would take the church longer to get those things done, or perhaps they would not be done altogether. They thus resulted in issuing threats to the congregants. These views are agreeable to those of Enroth (2016) who alludes that one common method of spiritual control is by the use of guilt, fear and intimidation where the victims are made to feel guilty when they do or not do certain things as approved by the abusive leaders. Such invocations do not only make the victim feel guilty but also inculcate some form of fear in them, which makes them prone to control. Indeed, fear is the most effective control mechanism that an abusive leader can use. This is demonstrated by the fear of not measuring up, the fear of losing out on God if one leaves the group and a fear of spiritual failure.

The congregants also reported that some church leaders manipulated the emotions of the congregants in order to control them into doing some things (Mean 4.2217, SD .8630). This implied that the congregants were aware of emotional manipulation by their leaders into participating in some church activities. This perhaps happens as a result of desperate efforts by the leaders to ensure the physical growth of the church (increase in numbers), and in the process, they forget about the spiritual growth of their congregation. These findings resonate with the assertions by Cowan (2015) who asserts that the aim of mind control is to suppress an individual's own personality (ambitions, opinions, critical thinking, and ability to make decisions) and to replace it with an identity acceptable to the religious leader. In such a state, the leader can easily manipulate their followers easily for their own gain. They manage to do that by imposing every expression of control over the victims so that they eventually bow to the leader's authority.

The findings however contrast those of Lichty (2016) who opines that the best environment for any organization to perform including the church is one where individuals are motivated and nurtured for sustainability. Such an environment is secure, and individuals are free to express their concerns. Controlling environments on the other hand are retrogressive and demoralizing. To pastors who employ control myths play to base fears and exacerbate the need for safety and security. In such cases, future leaders are not nurtured and there is little progress, if any, that takes place hence low performance.

The faithful also reported that some leaders used the scriptures deceptively in order to intimidate, control or manipulate

their members (Mean 4.1218, SD .7868). This implied that the congregants were alert that their leaders were twisting the scriptures in order to manipulate them into control. Perhaps this happens when the church leaders (in this case pastors), want to be like their peers who seem to be doing much better financially, and they are not ready to walk with God into righteous prosperity, the one which God provides. Instead they want to fully dominate their members into total submission so that when they eventually introduce personal and selfish agenda to the congregants, no one will question but will all oblige. The easiest route to attaining such an end is to use the scriptures (albeit in a twisted way) since the congregants are believers in the word of God and they have an unquestionable trust in their pastor as required in those churches. Manipulation thus becomes easy.

These findings concur with those of Osinaike (2017) who compares spiritual control with witchcraft. He observes spiritual control has been associated with the practice of witchcraft and occultism. Referring to the situation in Nigeria, he notes that some elements of witchcraft existed in some church services. He asserts that one of the clear examples of pulpit witchcraft is making the word of God say what it is not intended to say so that we can get some material benefit from the congregation. This happens so much that many preachers deliberately look for scriptures that could be used to wrest money from people. Again, Vayne (2016) asserts that witchcraft itself is nothing more than the practice of occultism. It is an attempt to manipulate forces to accomplish personal ends, and people all over the world today are attempting it. As such, when people, whether priests or otherwise, seek to control, dominate, manipulate, or intimidate, they are practicing witchcraft.

Similarly, Prince (2020) notes that one purpose common to all forms of witchcraft is control. Whenever any religious activity seeks to control other people, the influence of witchcraft is probably at work. He argues that when church leaders practice control, dominion, and manipulation, they are indeed operating under the demon of witchcraft, which manifests in seeking control over either some members of their staff or the entire flock.

The congregants also reported that some leaders consciously fostered an unhealthy form of dependency, spiritually and interpersonally, by focusing on themes of submission, loyalty and obedience to those in authority (Mean 3.9213, SD .6373). This implied that that the congregants realized that their leaders employed all means to ensure loyalty and interpersonal dependency on them. Perhaps this was out of the fear that if the leaders allowed objective thinking (as opposed to submission) in the churches, then there would be no loyalty among the congregants; this may eventually slow down their quest for numeric growth, as well as increase in physical structures in the churches. Most of these leaders want to 'build/expand and attract'

i.e. if they build modern structures, then they will be able to attract more followers.

These findings echo those of Abrahams et al. (2019), who avers that scriptural texts may be used/misused to demand obedience and reinforce the perpetrator’s entitlement to headship. Similarly, Enroth (2016) gives an example of such misuse of the pulpit when he asserts that according to a former member of the shepherding movement, so-called because its members had "shepherds" who required full submission and taught the need for "spiritual authority," these "leaders had the true story of what was going on. Pastors exercised control and manipulation through their sermons. Certain themes came through regularly: covenant, authority, obedience, submission, serving, honouring. Enroth observes that whichever form spiritual control takes, the underlying goal is to get people to do something, which they would have not done in their sober and normal states. This is wrong and more so when practised in the church.

The faithful also indicated that some leaders ensured control through strict and secretive surveillance of members; they had established monitoring systems to watch on what members were saying, where they went, whom they associated with and sometimes what they thought about certain issues (Mean 3.6031, SD .8123). This implied that these leaders were insecure in their mission and therefore put in place measures to ensure that they were updated on every move of their followers lest the followers spoke ill of them in their circles outside the church. Perhaps the

leaders knew what they were doing was wrong, hence the insecurity. Perhaps in the race to ensure growth and expansion of their churches, the leaders forget that they ought to be vessels of the good news and therefore should teach the truth. They instead focus on the wrong priorities which in turn puts them on a collision course with their followers, hence the need for surveillance. The truth sets free.

The findings are in sync with those of Garrett (2017) who posits that the bedrock of the control of an abusive church and its pastor over the lives of members is the control of all aspects of communication: how they speak, what they hear, what they read, and from whom (or from what sources) they receive information. Indeed, this is a well-calculated move by the leaders, which first ensures that the leaders win the trust of their followers through the knowledge of their dreams, esteemed plans, or desires. They consequently use this knowledge to manipulate and control their naive followers by feeding them with promises of how they or their churches would actualize their dreams and goals. Similarly, Hunt (2015) depicts the same by noting that at the core of spiritual abuse is excessive control of others. Spiritual abuse is acting “spiritual” to benefit oneself by using self-centred efforts to control others.

The congregants were also tasked to indicate the effect of spiritual control on the church performance in terms of numeric and spiritual growth, and infrastructural development. Their responses were as shown on Table 1.3:

**Table 1.3 : Opinion on the effect of spiritual control on the church performance**

	Increased	Neutral	Decreased
Infrastructure development	36%	49%	15%
Numeric growth	46%	37%	17%
Spiritual growth	14%	77%	9%

The congregants reported that spiritual control by their leaders had a positive effect on infrastructure and numeric growth (41% and 36% respectively, others reported that they didn’t know whether spiritual control had any effect (49%, and 37% respectively) while the rest (15% and 17% respectively) reported that spiritual had a negative effect on the two areas. This implied that the congregants had varied opinions on the effect of spiritual control on church performance under the given parameters.

Interestingly, the congregants’ opinion on the effect of spiritual control on their spiritual growth was that the majority (77%) reported that they didn’t know whether spiritual control had an effect on their spiritual growth. This implied that the respondents were perhaps unable to tell whether they had been impacted spiritually through being controlled. The opinion depended perhaps on the individual’s experience in their churches. This may have been so because unlike infrastructure and membership, which were physically quantifiable, spiritual growth is a qualitative and a deeply personal experience with Christ, and as such it could only be self-reported.

For those who reported a negative effect on church performance, their views were in agreement with those of Lichty (2016) who posits the best environment for any organization to perform including the church is one where individuals are motivated and nurtured for sustainability. Such an environment is secure, and individuals are free to express their concerns. Controlling environments on the other hand are retrogressive and demoralizing. Pastors who employ control myths play to base fears and exacerbate the need for safety and security. In such cases, future leaders are not nurtured and there is little progress if any that takes place hence low performance.

For those who reported positive effect of spiritual control on performance, the views were related to those of Wilt et al.,(2016) who avers that indeed, control may help eliminate or reduce division and make followers whether willingly or unwillingly to work together. This apparently helps in the attainment of some milestones in the church such as infrastructural developments. The leaders may use control to tame some people who would otherwise backbite and unwittingly derail the church from its goals.

The congregants were also tasked to indicate the effect of spiritual control on the church performance in terms of numeric and spiritual growth, and infrastructural development and their responses were as shown in Table 1.6.

**Table 1.6: Congregants’ responses on the effect of spiritual control on church performance**

	Increased	Neutral	Decreased
Infrastructure development	53%	33%	14%
Numeric growth	56%	26%	18%
Spiritual growth	14%	17%	69%

The findings showed that 69% of the congregants indicated that there was decreased spiritual growth, 56% indicated that there was increased numeric growth, and 53% indicated there was increased infrastructure development as a result of spiritual control. This implied that the congregants felt that they were not growing spiritually, despite the growth in both numbers and infrastructure. Perhaps there the church leaders only emphasized monetary contributions to support church projects and forgot their main calling i.e., to win souls for Christ. In an environment where the aim is manipulation, in all likelihood, leaders do not even want the believers to read the scriptures by themselves. They want to make them dependent on the word that they give when they meet as a church. This ensures that these followers will never be liberated although the word of God (The Truth) is supposed to bring them freedom.

The findings concur with those of Lichty (2016) who posits that controlling environments are retrogressive and demoralizing; pastors who employ control myths play to base fears and exacerbate the need for safety and security. In such cases, future leaders are not nurtured and there is little progress.

Inferential statistics

To assess the relationship between the study variables, a regression analysis was conducted, and the results were as follows:  
 Model Summary

Coefficient of determination (R square) explains the percentage of variation in the dependent variable that is influenced by the independent variables. The independent variable studied (spiritual control), explained 69.8% of variance in church performance as represented by the R square. Thus, other factors that were not part of this study contributed 30.2% of variance in the dependent variable.

**Table 4.2 :Model summary**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.835	0.698	0.683	1.5237

- a. Predictor: (Constant), spiritual control.
  - b. Dependent Variable: church performance
- Source: Research Data (2023)

Analysis of Variance

Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) consists of calculations that provide information about levels of variability within a regression model and forms the basis for tests of significance.

**Table 4.3 : ANOVA (Analysis of Variance)**

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	215.223	4	107.612	45.188	.0000
	Residual	92.876	59	2.381		
	Total	308.099	63			

- a. Predictor: (Constant), spiritual control.
  - b. Dependent Variable: church performance
- Source: Research Data (2023)

From the study findings in Table 4.21, the significance value is 0.000 which is less than 0.05, thus the model was statistically significant in predicting how spiritual control

influenced the performance of Pentecostal churches. The F statistic in this study was significant (as it was = 45.188, against the set value of 2.76) and this showed that the overall model was fit.

**Table 4.4: Coefficient of correlation**

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	
		B		Beta			
1	(Constant)	6.182	.826		7.484	0.0000	Decision
	Spiritual control	0.242	.278	0.146	2.669	0.0110	Reject Null

Source: Research Data (2023)

Therefore, substituting the regression model  $Y_i = \alpha + \beta_1 X_1 + \epsilon$ , it becomes:  $Y = 6.182 + 0.242X_1 + \epsilon$ . According to the equation, taking the factor (spiritual control) constant at zero, performance of Pentecostal churches would be 6.182.

**Hypothesis Testing Results**

The study also sought to test the following hypothesis.  $H_01$ : There was no statistically significant influence of spiritual control on the performance of Pentecostal Churches in Nairobi, Kenya. The results were as shown on Table 4.21. The results depicted a P value of 0.0110 ( $P < 0.05$ ), therefore the null hypothesis that there was no statistically significant influence of spiritual control on the performance of Pentecostal Churches in Nairobi was rejected and the alternative hypothesis that there was a statistically significant influence of spiritual control on the performance of Pentecostal Churches in Nairobi, Kenya, accepted. This finding implied that spiritual control was not only real in these churches but was also being used as a tool to grow the numbers of the congregation. Perhaps the church leaders were not confident enough about their skills in growing the number of congregants using the word of God. In any case unless for purposes of manipulation, there is no other reason why a man of God should be worried about numbers in the church. If indeed they are called to win many souls for Christ, they should allow themselves to be mere vessels to be used by God rather than acting God.

This finding concurs with that of Cowan (2015), who posits that there are various reasons as to why a leader would exercise spiritual control over his or her congregants; there are those who do it knowingly motivated by their selfish desires, while others have no idea that they are controlling their flocks. To the former, the reason is to capture the victim's mind to benefit eventually from such control. The aim of mind control is to suppress an individual's own personality (ambitions, opinions, critical thinking, and ability to make decisions) and to replace it with an identity acceptable to the religious leader. In such a state, the leader can easily manipulate their followers easily for their own gain. They manage to do that by imposing every expression of control over the victims so that they eventually bow to their authority.

**V. CONCLUSIONS**

The study made the conclusion that Spiritual control had both a positive and negative effect on church performance. The church leaders were consequently using spiritual control to increase their membership and expanding their church infrastructure. Through this many have found faith in Jesus Christ and found places of worship. Contrarily, some were offended by spiritual control effects and left their churches either joining others or backsliding altogether.

**VI. RECOMMENDATIONS**

The study recommends that since manipulative leadership in the form of spiritual control was discovered to be prevalent in the Pentecostal churches in Nairobi County, church leaders should stick to the mandate of their calling i.e., to shepherd God's children and forego the race to enrich themselves and expand church infrastructure using unorthodox means. Similarly, the leaders in the various churches should consider enrolling for training especially those who have not attended theological colleges since leadership training moderates manipulation in leadership. In addition, the Pentecostal churches should embark on the creation of a basic curriculum for training church leaders before their churches are eventually registered and allowed to operate. On the same note, the government ought to be more vigilant in intelligence gathering on churches whose practices border cults and they should reign on those leaders who abuse their followers.

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