



## **Societal Expectations Of Exemplary Behavior As Role Models And Its Influences On The Identity Formation On Some Selected Clergy Children In The Mezam Division Of The North West Region Of Cameroon**

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### **Abstract**

#### **Purpose**

The purpose of this research was to examine the societal expectations of exemplary behaviour as role models and its influence on identity formation on some selected clergy's children of the Mezam Division of the North West Region of Cameroon. The study aimed at examining the influence of societal expectations of exemplary behaviour as role models on identity formation of clergy's children.

#### **Materials and Methods**

The convergent mixed-methods design was used in conducting this study. To collect quantitative data, the cross-sectional survey design with the aid of a questionnaire made up of closed ended items was used. Qualitative data was collected through the phenomenological approach with the aid of an interview guide made up of open-ended questions. A sample of 60 purposefully selected clergy's children were recruited for this study.

#### **Findings**

Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical tools; frequency counts, graphs, percentages and the Pearson test and regression analysis was used to test hypotheses. Thematic analysis with the aid of themes and quotations was used for qualitative data. The association between identity formation (IF) and the pressure of being a role model (PRM) is strong and negative ( $r = -0.608$ ,  $p < 0.00001$ ). This means that as the pressure on clergy's children to always be perfect role models increases, their capacity for developing a stable and clear personal identity diminishes.

#### **Keywords:**

*Societal expectations, identity formation, exemplary role models, clergy's children.*



## Introduction

Jankowski et al ( 2020) state that societal expectations, refer to the explicit and implicit behavioral and moral standards imposed by religious communities, extended family systems, and peers on children of clergy, due to their association with pastoral leadership. Jorge & Maropa (2016) assert that people who hold high-profile status live under much scrutiny as they are always in the public eye. A study done by McRobbie (2021) also states that when one thinks of high-profile individuals, images of royalty, politicians, celebrities, athletes, successful entrepreneurs, socialites, religious leaders, and acclaimed intellectuals often come to mind. In the context of this study, clergy's children, otherwise pastors' children are expected to live a life that is different from other children. Smith (2023), states that some of these expectations may include holiness, moral uprightness, high achieving, talented, exemplary to their peers and active members of the church, any deviation from the perceived expectations is frowned upon and deemed a disappointment even failure.

Adams et al (2023), ascertain that when they cannot live up to such expectations, it can lead to internalized pressure among clergy's children to conform to roles that may not reflect their personal developmental stage, interests, or struggles. For example, clergy's children are often expected to demonstrate a higher standard of behavior than their peers, leaving little room for vulnerability or failure. When they fail to meet these expectations, they may experience psychological strain, self-doubt, and fear of disappointing their families or church members, which may ultimately affect how they perceive and construct their identities (Wright, 2023).

Erikson (1968) postulated that identity formation is the process through which individuals develop a coherent sense of self around personal values, beliefs, and social roles. According to Erikson, adolescents, particularly, go through a critical period of exploration and commitment in developing their identities. When societal expectations clash with personal values or experiences, it can lead to identity confusion a state Erikson termed "identity crisis". Marcia (1993) further emphasized that unresolved societal pressures can result in identity foreclosure, where individuals prematurely adopt externally imposed roles without personal exploration.

In pastoral families, children often find their sense of self overshadowed by the need to live up to the spiritual image of their parents (Benjamin et al, 2021). Fowler (1981) states that constant exposure to moral scrutiny and the expectation to embody religious values may prevent authentic self-expression and delay identity consolidation. Furthermore, Fowler (1981) explained that this is especially evident in the areas of autonomy, social belonging, and emotional expression. The result is often a fragile sense of identity heavily shaped by the demands of others rather than by internal convictions. This study seeks to examine the influence of societal expectations of exemplary behavior on identity formation by clergy's children.

## Background

Historically, the expectations and norms that are set by society play the biggest role in shaping a person's character and affect their behavior, choices, and opinions about self-worth and their sense of belonging (Amna, 2024). Durkheim (1982) claimed that society is held together by a shared system of norms and values that individuals come to internalize from early childhood. He maintained that these norms function as the invisible glue that binds members of a community, ensuring a collective consciousness that guides behavior. Durkheim's perspective, rooted in his earlier work from the late 19th century, establishes that societal expectations are not arbitrary; rather, they emerge from centuries of cultural evolution and are embedded in the rituals, institutions, and everyday practices of a community. Furthermore, Durkheim's insights remind us that these expectations provide structure and meaning, ultimately facilitating social order and cohesion (Durkheim, 1982).

Weber (2001) offered a complementary view by exploring how religious beliefs and ethics significantly contribute to the formation of societal expectations. He specifically highlighted the concept of the "Protestant ethic," which posited that the spirit of capitalism and the emergent norms concerning hard work, discipline, and rationality were intrinsically linked to Protestant religious values. Weber's analysis illustrates that societal expectations are deeply intertwined with historical and religious contexts, meaning that the moral codes governing behavior are, in part, a legacy of past ideological developments. This work laid the groundwork for understanding how historical narratives and religious ideologies serve to influence the expectations imposed on social groups, setting a precedent for future explorations into how these expectations are inherited and transformed over time (Weber, 2001).

Mead (1934) further expanded on these ideas by examining the development of the self through social interactions. He contended that identity and the sense of self are constructed through the process of internalizing societal expectations via face-to-face interactions. According to Mead, the "I" and the "me" are born in these interactions, with the "me" representing the internalized attitudes of the generalized other the collective norms and values of society. Through this process, individuals learn to modify their behavior to align with what is expected of them, thus perpetuating the cycle of societal expectation. Mead's work underscores that not only do societal expectations shape external behavior, but they also fundamentally influence the internal process of identity formation (Mead, 1934).

Goffman (1959) introduced the dramaturgical perspective, emphasizing that everyday social interactions are akin to performances where individuals manage their presentation of self. He argued that people, much like actors on a stage, perform roles that are prescribed by societal expectations. This performance is not merely incidental; rather, it is a strategic effort to align with the unspoken norms and values held by one's community. Goffman's analysis highlights that the pressure to conform to societal expectations is ever-present in daily life, dictating how one should behave, speak, and even dress in different social contexts. By viewing social life as a series of staged performances, Goffman provided a vivid

illustration of how deeply ingrained societal expectations operate to regulate individual behavior and maintain social order (Goffman, 1959).

Berger and Luckmann (1966) took these discussions a step further by conceiving of societal expectations as a product of the social construction of reality. They posited that reality itself is formed through social processes in which language, communication, and everyday interactions play critical roles. According to Berger and Luckmann (1966), the norms and expectations of society are constructed, maintained, and evolved through continuous social negotiations. Their work suggests that while societal expectations may appear fixed, they are, in fact, subject to change as collective understandings are renegotiated in light of new information and shifting cultural landscapes. This perspective is crucial in understanding that societal expectations are dynamic and contextually bound, a concept that influences contemporary views on identity formation (Berger & Luckmann, 1966).

As the study of societal expectations evolved, scholars have increasingly recognized that these expectations are not static but are continually reshaped by historical forces and leadership dynamics. Acemoglu and Jackson (2011) demonstrated that historical events and prominent leadership could actively influence the emergence and transformation of social norms. In their analysis, they provided evidence that societal expectations are subject to recalibration in response to key historical shifts and the actions of influential figures. They argued that prominent leaders could, through visible and symbolic actions, signal a transformation in societal expectations, thereby altering the collective mindset and behavior of large social groups. This dynamic perspective is especially relevant in settings where historical legacies and charismatic authority intersect, illuminating the adaptive nature of societal expectations over time (Acemoglu & Jackson, 2011).

Adding to this contemporary discourse, Drewelies, Huxhold, and Gerstorf (2019) explored the role of historical change in shaping individual development, particularly as it relates to evolving societal expectations. They proposed that as historical conditions shift be it through technological advancement, economic change, or cultural transformation so too do the expectations that society imposes on its members. Their framework, which examines how contextual changes influence personal development, underscores the fact that societal expectations are both reflections of historical realities and catalysts for future behaviors. In doing so, their work bridges the gap between historical analysis and contemporary developmental theory, offering insights into how dynamic societal conditions continue to influence identity formation in the present day (Drewelies, Huxhold, & Gerstorf, 2019).

Jointly, the historical background of societal expectations is characterized by a rich dialogue among foundational theorists and contemporary scholars. Durkheim (1982) laid the groundwork by emphasizing the role of shared norms in fostering social order, while Weber (2001) illuminated the powerful influence of religious ideologies on shaping modern expectations. Mead (1934) and Goffman (1959) then brought attention to the micro-level processes in which these societal expectations are internalized and enacted in everyday life. Berger and Luckmann (1966) expanded the discussion by framing societal expectations as part of a continually reconstructed social reality, and Acemoglu and Jackson (2011)

provided empirical evidence of how leadership and historical events drive shifts in these norms. Finally, Drewelies, Huxhold, and Gerstorf (2019) affirmed that the transformations of societal expectations are integral components of both historical change and individual development.

This rich historical background provides a foundational context for understanding how societal expectations may influence the identity formation of specific groups, such as pastors' children in Mezam. By recognizing the historical depth and evolution of these expectations, researchers can better appreciate the multifaceted ways in which they influence personal development and social integration, particularly in environments steeped in tradition and moral precision.

Conceptually, Durkheim (1982) stated that societal expectations are the set of collective norms, values, and rules that guide individual behavior and maintain social order. According to him, these expectations emerge from long-established cultural traditions that continuously shape how individuals perceive their role in society. Weber (2001) extended this understanding by illustrating that religious ideologies such as those embedded within the Protestant ethic serve as a prominent source for many of these expectations. He showed that the virtues of diligence, frugality, and discipline are not innate traits but are promoted by broader societal mandates influenced by historical religious developments. Berger and Luckmann (1966) further maintained that societal expectations are socially constructed and continuously reproduced through everyday interactions, making them dynamic rather than static. Society often views clergy's children as role models and expects them to embody spiritual maturity, uprightness and leadership qualities beyond their developmental stage. (Smith and Denton, 2005)

Identity formation, particularly in adolescence and early adulthood, is a complex psychological process through which individuals develop a coherent sense of self by integrating personal experiences with social roles and expectations (Erikson, 1968; Kroger, 2017). For clergy's children, identity development occurs within the dual context of family and church, where they must navigate personal identity alongside a pre-assigned religious identity. These children often internalize societal and parental expectations, which may either reinforce or conflict with their personal aspirations, leading to tension or confusion in identity development (Hardy et al., 2010)

In summary societal expectations, significantly influence the identity formation of clergy's children by placing them under continuous moral scrutiny and religious pressure. While these expectations may offer structure and guidance, they can also contribute to internal conflict and identity challenges, particularly when personal experiences do not align with imposed ideals.

According to Lockwood and Kunda (2000), role models are individuals who embody exemplary conduct and achievements to such a degree that they serve both as aspirational figures and as benchmarks for personal success. They contended that these role models are influential only when individuals see them as relevant to their own lives. Morgenroth, Ryan,

and Peters (2015) expanded this explanation by proposing a motivational theory of role modeling. According to their work, role models influence the goals and aspirations of observers by acting as behavioral exemplars, representing attainable ideals, and inspiring motivation. They emphasized that the impact of a role model is contingent upon whether their success appears attainable to the aspirant; if it seems out of reach, the influence may become demoralizing rather than inspirational. In this light, perfect role models are not perfect in an absolute sense but idealized figures against which individuals measure both their progress and potential. Such figures, especially in high-expectation environments, set standards that can both spur and challenge personal development, highlighting the dual-edged nature of idealized exemplars.

Empirical studies show that clergy's children are often subject to the "perfect child syndrome" where they are expected to be models of Christian virtues academically successful, actively involved in church activities (Lee & Iverson-Gilbert, 2003). These expectations, while well intended can lead to a performative identity, where clergy's children act out the roles expected of them rather than developing an authentic sense of self (Lowe, 2012). When their personal struggles or beliefs do not align with the public image imposed upon them, clergy's children may experience identity confusion, guilt, or rebellion as coping responses (Kay & Francis, 1996).

According to Francis and Robbins (2012), clergy's children often struggle with the need to meet high spiritual standards while trying to establish an independent identity, this tension can hinder emotional well-being and result in long term effects on self-perception, self-worth, and career or relationship choices. Therefore societal expectations serve not only as external pressure but also as formative agents in shaping how clergy's children negotiate their personal and spiritual identities.

Theoretically, Carl Rogers, a leading figure in humanistic psychology, proposed the Person-Centered Theory (1959), which emphasizes the importance of self-concept, unconditional positive regard, and congruence between the real self and ideal self for healthy psychological development.

Clergy's children are often viewed by society as moral and spiritual role models. This external labeling can create pressure for them to meet idealized standards that conflict with their personal desires or struggles. Rogers' concept of incongruence a misalignment between one's self-image and actual experiences helps to explain how trying to meet these role-model expectations may lead to internal identity conflict.

Rogers' theory provides a framework for understanding how societal idealization of clergy's children as role models may hinder authentic self-expression and identity development. It explains why some PKs may feel the need to mask their true selves in order to meet societal expectations, which could result in suppressed emotions, self-alienation, or rebellion.

Erik Erikson (1968) developed the Psychosocial Theory of Development, which posits that human development occurs in stages. The fifth stage Identity vs. Role Confusion is



especially critical during adolescence and young adulthood, where individuals seek to explore and consolidate their identity.

Contextually, Cameroon is a culturally and religiously diverse nation in Central Africa, where Christianity plays a dominant role in shaping societal values and behaviors. According to the Pew Research Center (2010), approximately 70% of the population identifies as Christian, with significant denominational representation from Roman Catholicism, Protestantism, and Pentecostalism. Religious institutions in Cameroon do not merely function as centers of worship; they serve as educational, moral, and socio-cultural pillars within communities (Konings, 2009). Over the years, pastoral leadership has gained increasing influence in shaping both public and private life, with pastors often regarded as moral authorities and community gatekeepers.

Within this national framework, the North West Region, and specifically Mezam Division stands out as one of the most religiously vibrant and community-oriented regions. Predominantly inhabited by the Ngemba, Widikum, Meta, and Kom ethnic groups, Mezam is known for its strong communal values and high religious participation (Nkwi, 2015). Churches such as the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon (PCC), the Cameroon Baptist Convention (CBC), and Full Gospel Mission (FGM) are deeply embedded in the social fabric of communities within the Division. These churches not only shape theological perspectives but also reinforce moral norms, youth behavior, and family expectations.

In this context, pastors and their families, particularly their children, are treated as visible extensions of spiritual leadership. While most children in Cameroon grow up under some form of societal expectation, pastors' children in Mezam are subjected to uniquely elevated communal standards. They are expected to exhibit maturity, spiritual leadership, academic excellence, and exemplary behavior. These expectations are both explicit and implicit, often reinforced through sermons, church programmes, peer interactions, and informal community surveillance (Agbiji & Swart, 2015). As one study in Nigeria (a culturally similar context) noted, “the children of clergy are seen as mini-pastors, whether or not they have a calling or interest in ministry” (Adewale, 2019).

Mezam Division's communal orientation further intensifies these pressures. Communalism in this region implies that identity is not solely an individual construct but a reflection of family, clan, and church reputation. As such, the conduct of a pastor's child is frequently interpreted as an indicator of pastoral effectiveness and spiritual discipline within the household. This makes the clergy's children behavior and choices not just personal, but collective concerns. In such a setting, deviation from community expectations is met with public scrutiny, often placing a burden on the clergy's children to conform and suppress aspects of their emerging identity (Nche, 2020).

Despite the visibility of pastoral families and the communal pressures within which they operate, there is a notable gap in empirical research on how these societal expectations influence the identity formation of clergy's children in Cameroon. Most existing literature on clergy's children is based in western contexts, where identity development is studied in

more individualistic settings. These studies rarely account for the socio-cultural and religious nuances that shape identity formation in collectivist African communities.

Therefore, Mezam Division offers a fertile and contextually rich setting for examining how societal expectations, particularly those related to being exemplary role models, shape the evolving identities of clergy's children. This contextual background not only justifies the geographic and cultural focus of this study but also underscores its contribution to closing a critical gap in African-based identity and pastoral family research.

## **Objective**

To investigate how the expectation of exemplary behavior as role models influences the identity formation of clergy's children.

How does the expectation of exemplary behavior as role models affect the identity formation of clergys' children?

## **Research Hypothesis**

Ho: The expectation of exemplary behavior as role models has no significant influence on identity formation of clergy's children.

Ha: The expectation of exemplary behavior as role models has a significant influence on identity formation of clergy's children.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The convergent mixed-methods design was used in conducting this study. To collect quantitative data, the cross-sectional survey design with the aid of a questionnaire made up of closed ended items was used. Qualitative data was collected through the phenomenological approach with the aid of an interview guide made up of open-ended questions. This study was carried out in Mezam Division of the North West Region of Cameroon. Specifically data was collected from some selected clergy's children of this division.

The population of this study consisted of all clergy's children residing within the Mezam Division of the North West Region of Cameroon. This broad population included those who have grown up and continued to live in environments where the societal expectations linked to pastoral families are prevalent. The target population was clergy's children within the Mezam Division who were within the age range of 18years and above. This group was selected because their experiences were most likely to reflect the interplay between societal expectations and identity formation that the study aimed to explore. Purposive sampling was used to ensure that the participants met the inclusion criteria and were willing to provide detailed data either through structured questionnaires or in-depth interviews. This approach helped in ensuring that the data collected were both representative of and specific to the group of interest (Table 1).



**Table 1: The Population of the Study**

Division	Target Population	Accessible Population	Sample size
Mezam	180	70	60
Total	180	70	60

**Source: Tantoh, (2025)**

The sample for this study consisted of clergy's children residing in the Mezam Division of the North West Region of Cameroon. To which a power of 0.80 with an alpha of 0.05, an estimated sample size of approximately 59 participants was anticipated. This number was expected to provide sufficient data to perform reliable descriptive statistics, correlational analyses, and regression analyses while allowing for subgroup examination (like variations by age or denominational affiliation).

Firstly, the Initial Sample Size ( $n_0$ ) was calculated using Cochran's (1977) formula for determining the sample size for an infinite population was used as follows:

$$n = \frac{Z^2 \times p \times (1 - p)}{d^2}$$

(Cochran, 1977)

Where:

Z is the Z-score corresponding to the desired confidence level (for 95% confidence,  $Z=1.96$ ),

p is the estimated proportion of the attribute present in the population ( $p=0.5$ ),

d is the desired margin of error (set at 0.05).

Using these values:

$$n_0 = \frac{(1.96)^2 \times 0.5 \times (1 - 0.5)}{(0.05)^2} = 384.16$$

The second step was to adjust for finite population ( $n$ ). When the total population ( $N$ ) is small (less than 10), the initial sample size must be adjusted using the finite population correction (FPC) formula:

$$n = \frac{n_0}{1 + \frac{n_0 - 1}{N}}$$

Assume that the total number of pastors' children in the accessible population of the Mezam Division is approximately  $N=70$ . Then,

$$n = \frac{384.16}{1 + \frac{(384.16 - 1)}{70}} = 59.34$$

After rounding, the required sample size was  $n = 60$ .

**Table 2: Distribution of Sample Size**

S/N	CP Accessible population	Number of clergy's Kids
1	CC in Santa (Purposive sampling)	8
2	CC in Bamenda I, II and III (Purposive)	22
3	CC in Tubah (Purposive)	17
4	Referrals (snow ball sampling)	13
	<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>

*Source: Tantoh, (2025)*

Given the specificity of the study population, a non-probability (non-random) sampling strategy was used. The study employed a multi-step non-probabilistic sampling approach as follows: Purposive Sampling was used to select participants specifically based on the inclusion criterion that they are children of clergy's children residing in the Mezam Division. This was done by inviting them to fill the questionnaire and links (to the questionnaire) were sent to those who could not be reached directly. This targeted approach ensured that the sample reflected the individuals who have experienced the societal, familial, and religious expectations central to the study. By focusing on those who met these criteria, the research aimed to enhance the relevance and validity of the findings regarding identity formation under high societal expectations.

In addition, snowball sampling was used to reach a wider segment of the accessible population, particularly those who may not be in the Mezam clergy's children WhatsApp forum. Initially, clergy's children identified through the WhatsApp forum were invited to participate. As they filled the researchers pleaded with participants to share the link with other eligible individuals (Clergy's children). This technique helped to expand the sample and ensured that various subgroups within the target population were represented.

The research instruments used were a self-constructed questionnaire and an interview guide. The Chi-square test was used to analyse distributions and variations of demographic data from which variables such as gender, educational level, occupation and age were coded as dummy variables (0 or 1). A test of normality was carried to verify if the residual of the model meets the normality assumption. Items on identity formation were summed and a cut-off point of greater than or equals to 25.5 on 30 was used to distinguish those with a high level of identity formation over those with a low identity formation (total score <25.5/30). The Pearson Correlation coefficient was calculated from the multivariate linear regression and used to examine the relationships between societal expectations of clergy's children (independent variables) and identity formation (dependent variable). Correlation coefficients ( $r$ ) near +1 or -1 indicated a very strong relationship (either positive or negative). SPSS version 27 and MS Excel 2019 were used for these statistical analyses and charts respectively. Statistical significant level was set at  $p\text{-value} < 0.05$ . The quantitative results were presented on tables, and pie charts.

The interview transcripts were analyzed using thematic analysis. This process involved identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

MS Word and Excel were used to code and organize themes for qualitative analysis. The qualitative table listing themes alongside illustrative quotes and frequencies or intensities of the theme were used to present thematically analyzed data.

## FINDINGS

Six structured items were used to measure clergy's children opinion about expectation to demonstrate exemplary behavior as role models and its influence on identity formation and the findings are presented on Table 3 below where: SD/D: Strongly disagree/disagree, SA/A: Strongly agree/agree, N: Neutral.

**Table 3: Respondents opinion on demonstrating Exemplary Behavior as Role Models.**

Items	SD/D	N	SA/A
I feel that people expect me to always behave perfectly because I am a clergy's child.	4 (6.7%)	2 (3.3%)	54 (90.0%)
I often feel like my parent's job depends on how well I behave.	16 (26.7%)	16 (26.7%)	28 (46.7%)
I often try to act spiritually mature in public, even when I am struggling with my faith inside.	14 (23.3%)	16 (26.7%)	30 (46.7%)
I find it hard to be myself because of the high expectations placed on me.	18 (30.0%)	10 (16.7%)	32 (53.3%)
I High expectations sometimes make me feel stressed	14 (23.3%)	6 (10.0%)	40 (66.7%)
Being treated like a role model has changed how I view myself	6 (10.0%)	10 (16.7%)	44 (73.3%)

**Source: Tantoh, (2025)**

Most of clergy's children (90.0%) agreed that people expect them to always behave perfectly because of their status. Only a very small fraction (6.7%) disagreed, while 3.3% remained neutral. When asked if they felt that their parents' job success depended on how well they behaved, the responses were more mixed. About 46.7% agreed or strongly agreed, whereas 26.7% disagreed and another 26.7% remained neutral. Regarding the effort to portray spiritual maturity in public even when personally struggling with faith, 46.7% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with this sentiment. Meanwhile, 26.7% were neutral and 23.3% disagreed or strongly disagreed. More than half (53.3%) of the clergy's children acknowledged that it is hard for them to be themselves because of the high expectations placed on them, with only 30.0% disagreeing. A significant two-thirds (66.7%) of

respondents agreed or strongly agreed that high expectations make them feel stressed. With regards to the statement “Being treated like a role model has changed how I view myself,” 73.3% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed with it. Only 10.0% disagreed. Table 4 below shows the deductive thematic analysis of clergy’s children as role model.

**Table 4: Deductive Thematic Analysis of CC’s Role Model Construct**

Theme	CC1	CC2	CC3	CC4	CC5
<b>Idealized Behavior and Perfection</b>	Expected to be a “saint”, always polite, spiritual, and appropriately dressed; any deviation was magnified because of the symbolic role.	Expected to be perfect, never angry or weak (e.g., couldn’t show sadness over academic failures) because his behavior is held to a higher standard.	Expected to be respectful, holy, and flawless; even minor mistakes (like tiredness during a youth program) become “big things” due to the pastor’s daughter label.	Previously noted (in other sections) that CC4 was expected to be disciplined, spiritually strong, and a role model at all times even when struggling internally.	Expected to be almost perfect, always kind, prayerful, respectful, and mature; deviations (laughing too loudly, choosing non church friends) immediately invite scrutiny.

*Source: Tantoh, (2025)*

The deductive thematic analysis on Table 4 displays the “idealized behavior and perfection” subtheme from the role model construct. All five respondents described feeling compelled to embody an idealized image: CC1 reported being expected to “be a saint,” with any lapse magnified by her role, CC2 noted he could “never get angry or weak,” even in academic failure. CC3 described minor mistakes such as fatigue during ministry work as “big things.” She reported “Even when I yawned during farm work at a youth program, it became a big thing.” CC4 was held to a standard of constant discipline and spiritual strength and CC5 recounted scrutiny for ordinary social behaviors like laughing loudly (Table 4).

### Association between IF and PRM

**Table 5: Correlation coefficient between societal expectation and Identity formation**

Correlations			
		IF	PRM
Pearson Correlation (r)	IF	1.000	
	PRM	<b>-0.608</b>	1.000
p-values	IF	--	
	PRM	<b>0.00001</b>	--

**Source: Tantoh, (2025)**

IF: Identity formation, PRM: Pressure being a role model.

The association between identity formation (IF) and the pressure of being a role model (PRM) is strong and negative ( $r = -0.608$ ,  $p < 0.00001$ ). This means that as the pressure on pastors' children to always be perfect role models increases, their capacity for developing a stable and clear personal identity diminishes.

**Table 6: Revised Thematic Matrix showing Themes Affecting Identity Formation**

Influence Area	Key Themes	Frequency Across CCs (n=5)	Effects on Identity Formation
<b>Societal Expectations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pressure to be morally perfect, emotionally composed, and viewed as a “spiritual symbol” rather than a full human.</li> <li>• Heightened scrutiny means that any deviation or vulnerability is quickly noticed and criticized.</li> </ul>	5/5 (All five respondents)	Consistently leads to emotional suppression, self-doubt, and challenges in authentic self-expression.

**Source: Tantoh, (2025)**

Table 6 demonstrates four core influences on clergy's children identity formation, their proportions across all five participants, and their primary effects. Clergy's children generally contend with three pervasive pressures namely moral “perfection,” mandated church service, and family legacy that fuel self-doubt and suppress authenticity. In

response, most adopt reflective coping (journaling, prayer, mentorship) to reclaim personal values and move toward a self-authored identity (Table 6).

### **Discussions**

The study revealed that 90% of respondents felt intense pressure to always behave perfectly due to their identity as clergy's children. This aligns with what Cameron Lee (1995) described as the "fishbowl effect," where clergy's children live under constant scrutiny, expected to maintain flawless public personas. The negative correlation between identity formation and role model pressure ( $r = -0.608$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) highlights how overwhelming societal demands can distort self-perception and hinder authentic identity development.

This supports Erikson's (1950, 1968) theory that adolescents must resolve the conflict between personal identity and imposed roles. The pressure to represent moral perfection impedes the process of self-discovery, often leading to identity confusion. Carl Rogers (1959) adds that when acceptance is conditional based on compliance with idealized behavior young people may experience incongruence, a gap between the true self and the "ideal" self-imposed by others.

Qualitative data supported this, with all participants expressing the need to project a "spiritual" image, often at the cost of emotional honesty. This aligns with Doe (2021) and Hileman (2008) who describe the emotional suppression and internal conflict that arise when children feel forced to become symbols of religious virtue rather than individuals. Berne's (1961) concept of the Parent ego state is also relevant here, as participants often acted from learned religious scripts instead of from authentic awareness.

In sum, the expectation to be perfect role models contributes to stress, emotional suppression, and ultimately delays the development of a grounded self-concept.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Conclusion**

Findings reveal that the expectation to model ideal Christian behavior exerts a strong influence, contributing significantly to emotional distress, self-monitoring, and identity conflict among clergy's children. This pressure leads many to suppress authentic thoughts and feelings in favor of maintaining an image that aligns with communal ideals, thus delaying or complicating the process of genuine self-discovery.

Overall, the study concludes that identity formation among clergy's children in Mezam Division is significantly shaped by societal and religious expectations particularly in the areas of moral performance and church involvement. These findings call for increased awareness among parents, churches, and mental health practitioners about the psychosocial burden placed on clergy's children, and the need to support them in developing a balanced and authentic sense of self.



## Recommendations

Parents and church leaders should create safe environments where clergy's children are allowed to express themselves honestly without fear of judgment. Emphasizing unconditional love and acceptance over moral perfection can help reduce identity conflict.

Furthermore, instead of projecting idealized standards, parents should prioritize open communication and provide emotional support that acknowledges their children's individual struggles and aspirations.

Also, church members should be educated to understand that clergy's children are individuals with unique journeys, not replicas of their parents. This can be done through workshops or youth programs that celebrate diversity of identity and calling.

In addition, counsellors should offer individual or group counselling sessions specifically designed for pastors' children, helping them explore their identity, manage stress, and navigate conflicting expectations. Support groups for clergy's children will be very necessary.

Moreover, integrate faith-sensitive counselling approaches. Mental health services provided to clergy's children should respect their religious backgrounds while promoting autonomy, emotional intelligence, and self-awareness.

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