

Impact of COVID-19 on Christian Wellness: A Study among Adventists in Kajiado County

Janet Nyaboke Odhiambo

Adventist University of Africa, Kenya

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Abstract

Background: Pandemics disorganize society, and COVID-19 was no exception. COVID-19 significantly impacted the religious practices and lifestyles of millions of believers worldwide. Following COVID-19 guidelines from the World Health Organization, social gatherings, including church attendance, were discouraged, affecting members' spiritual well-being and church life. This study aimed to determine how COVID-19 impacted Christian wellness from the perspective of church members.

Methods: This study used a descriptive survey design to collect data on how COVID-19 affected the Christian wellness of Seventh-day Adventists in Kajiado County through a questionnaire. Statistical analysis was performed to determine the extent of these changes and identify the key factors contributing to wellness outcomes.

Results: The findings indicated that spirituality, stewardship, and fellowship practices declined significantly during virtual worship compared to face-to-face worship.

Conclusion: These results provide insights that may enhance support mechanisms toward mitigating the unique challenges religious communities face during global health crises.

Keywords: Mental health, well-being, online worship, Christian wellness

Introduction

The unstoppable COVID-19 pandemic emerged suddenly bearing a catastrophic impact worldwide. It precipitated unprecedented global challenges, disrupting nearly every aspect of daily life (Kola et al., 2021). Mukhtar (2020) say that most countries were devastated as the disease profoundly disrupted the world economy, social life, and psychological well-being of individuals. This proved to be a huge challenge globally, and the World Health Organization recommended

some strategies to curb the spread of the disease.

Some of the recommendations included imposing travel restrictions, closing businesses, sports centers, schools, institutions of learning, community centers, and religious gatherings (R. L. Parisi et al., 2020). Strategically, physical distancing, referred to as 'social distancing,' became central in all personal relations, and these impacted the performance of religious functions negatively. Studies show that church attendance is one of the foundations

of spiritual life, which is associated with worship, fellowship, discipleship, ministry, and mission (Bryson et al., 2020).

For Christians, the cancellation of in-person church services, sacraments, and communal worship was particularly challenging, as many denominations consider these practices central to spiritual life. Some responded by transitioning to virtual services or holding socially distanced outdoor worship to maintain spiritual connection (Dowson, 2020). In a similar vein, Musyafaah et al. (2021) noted that Muslim communities modified their Ramadan and Eid celebrations by transitioning from large gatherings for prayers in mosques to virtual sermons. Likewise, Jewish communities held online Seders and Shabbat services (Vanhamel et al., 2021). Hindu temples introduced live streaming of festivals and religious rituals to allow devotees to participate from home (Sueca et al., 2021). However, the adaptation to virtual worship varied widely across denominations and sects, with more traditional or rural congregations struggling with technological barriers. In contrast, Buddhist monks in some regions embraced online meditation sessions and teachings, while many indigenous spiritual practices faced challenges due to the communal and land-based nature of their rituals (Li & Cao, 2022). The pandemic spurred creative responses, but it also raised concerns about the loss of communal and embodied religious experiences, highlighting the importance of physical gatherings in many faith traditions. The shift to digital worship

presented both an opportunity for global reach and inclusivity, but also a challenge for maintaining the same depth of spiritual connection, particularly in communities where in-person rituals are considered irreplaceable.

The ensuing health crisis, coupled with stringent public health measures such as lockdowns and social distancing, profoundly affected the physical, mental, and spiritual well-being of the people (Saha & Dutta, 2020). Consequently, religious communities, particularly those reliant on regular communal worship and social interactions, faced unique struggles during this period. Seventh-day Adventists, like many other religious groups, integrate physical, mental, and spiritual dimensions into their understanding of wellness. Their beliefs and practices, which include dietary regulations, Sabbath observance, and stewardship, as well as communal worship (fellowship), play a crucial role in their daily lives (McBride et al., 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted these practices, potentially leading to significant changes in their wellness. Rwafa-Ponela et al. (2022) hypothesized that restrictions on gatherings limited access to communal worship and spiritual support, while health concerns and economic instability added layers of stress and anxiety.

This study focused on the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) community in Kajiado County (Kenya), exploring how the pandemic impacted their holistic wellness. Kajiado County, which is predominantly rural with pockets of urbanization, presents a unique context

for this study. The SDA community in this region is tightly knit, and the interplay between traditional lifestyles and modern challenges is particularly pronounced. Understanding the impact of COVID-19 on this community's wellness requires a nuanced approach that considers their specific socio-cultural and religious contexts. Wellness has eight dimensions: social, emotional, financial, spiritual, environmental, physical, intellectual, and occupational (Hooker et al., 2020). This study focuses on four aspects (spiritual – spirituality; financial – stewardship; and social and emotional fellowship). Christian wellness encompasses prayer, engagement with scriptures, and active participation in church activities. It also includes applying biblical principles regarding individual finances and relationships and optimizing overall well-being in the body, mind, and spirit. It is assumed that engaging in such practices results in Christian wellness and the opposite is also true. This study aimed to quantitatively assess the changes in participants' practices in terms of their spirituality, stewardship, and fellowship. By examining these dimensions, this study seeks to identify the key factors that influence wellness outcomes and provide insights into how religious communities can better support their members during crises. The findings are expected to contribute to broader discussions on public health, religious practices, and community resilience in the face of global health emergencies.

Statement of the Problem

The COVID-19 pandemic created a landscape of uncertainties. For instance, it disrupted religious practices, leading to the cancellation of worship services, pilgrimages, ceremonies, and religious festivals (Dein et al., 2020). Consequently, churches experienced a decline in spirituality, finances and fellowship (Eagle et al., 2022; Osei-Tutu et al., 2021). Although online communities emerged and many transitioned to virtual worship, the overall impact of the pandemic on the Christian well-being of church members remains underexplored.

Purpose of the Study

Therefore, this study sought to determine the impact of COVID-19 restrictions on members' spirituality, stewardship, fellowship, and, consequently, Christian wellness among SDAs in the Kajiado North region. The study concerned itself with the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on members' practices, beliefs, processes, relationships or trends. The following research questions were addressed:

1. What is the demographic profile of the respondents?
2. What is the extent of the respondents' practices regarding a) spirituality, b) stewardship, c) fellowship?
3. Is there a significant difference in the level of spirituality in terms of a) gender, b) age, and c) education?
4. Is there a significant difference in stewardship practices when considering the following

demographic variables: a) gender, b) age, and c) education?

5. Do fellowship practices differ significantly when the demographic variables of gender, age, and educational level are considered?

Model for Christian Wellness

Figure 1 depicts Christian Wellness as the central and core concept, with three interconnected components: Stewardship, Spirituality, and Fellowship. Christian Wellness is at the center, symbolizing a holistic approach to well-being that integrates physical, emotional, and spiritual health through faith in Jesus Christ. The Stewardship component focuses on the Christian duty to responsibly manage God’s gifts—time, talents, resources, and the environment. It emphasizes the idea of living in a way that honors God’s creation and blessings. Spirituality is another component that illustrates the personal and communal practices of faith, such as prayer, worship, Bible study, and reliance on God for inner peace and strength. It represents an individual’s relationship with God and their growth in faith, culminating in spiritual health. The Fellowship component is also linked to Christian Wellness, emphasizing the importance of relationships within the Christian community. It highlights mutual support, accountability, shared worship, and encouragement as the key aspects of Christian life and well-being. These components are not isolated but interact to create a balanced Christian wellness model.

Figure 1
Model for Christian Wellness



Literature Review

The COVID-19 pandemic developed very rapidly on a global scale. It significantly impacted social life, including religious practices. Religious practices, which are, by their very nature, communal, also changed under the influence of the pandemic. Consequently, societal functions and economic life were extremely affected.

The outbreak of COVID-19 had similarities and differences with the previous acute respiratory syndrome (SARS; 2002–2003) and MERS respiratory syndrome (2012–present). Most of the secondary SARS and MERS transmissions took place in hospital settings. In contrast, in the case of COVID-19, significant transmission occurred between close contacts (Wu & McGoogan 2020), making it more challenging to handle.

Impact of COVID-19 on Spirituality

The COVID-19 pandemic profoundly affected spiritual practices and the overall spiritual well-being of individuals worldwide. For religious communities, particularly those that relied heavily on communal worship and spiritual gatherings, the disruption was significant. For instance, the pandemic had an impact on the social manifestations of religiosity and, therefore, took a toll on the spiritual health and Christian wellness of believers who have deeply rooted religious convictions and are strongly attached to Church tradition (Papazoglou et al., 2021). Research shows that spirituality provides critical support needed by people struggling with the impact of COVID-19; lack of support results in mental health problems (Del Castillo, 2023). Moreover, spirituality has been found to correlate with resilience during disasters (Roberto et al., 2020). The following are the various ways in which the pandemic has impacted spirituality, focusing on changes in religious practices, the role of technology, and the implications for spiritual well-being.

Disruption of Communal Worship and Religious Practices. One of the immediate impacts of COVID-19 on spirituality was the disruption of communal worship and religious practices. The lockdowns and social distancing measures led to the closure of places of worship, limiting access to communal prayers, rituals, and sacraments (Dowson, 2020). Notwithstanding, for many adherents, these gatherings are central to their spiritual lives, providing a sense of

community, support, and connection to the divine. The inability to participate in these practices caused a sense of spiritual dislocation and loss.

Adaptation to Virtual Worship. In response to the restrictions on physical gatherings, many religious communities adapted by moving their services and activities online. Virtual worship services, prayer meetings, and religious study groups became a commonplace. While these adaptations have allowed for the continuity of religious practices, they also presented some challenges. For example, the lack of physical presence and direct interaction diminished the sense of community and spiritual connection (Dowson, 2020). Additionally, access to technology and digital literacy varies among congregants, potentially excluding some individuals from fully participating.

Personal Spiritual Practices. With the disruption of communal worship, individuals have had to rely on personal spiritual practices. According to Coppola et al. (2021), this shift led to increased focus on individual prayers, meditation, and the study of religious texts. Moreover, for some, this has been an opportunity for spiritual growth and deepening personal faith. However, for others, the lack of communal reinforcement and support has made it difficult to maintain spiritual discipline and motivation.

Mental Health and Spirituality. The pandemic has also highlighted the intricate link between mental health and spirituality. S. B. Parisi et al. (2020) reveals that the stress, anxiety, and uncertainty brought about by COVID-19

have affected individuals' overall well-being, including their spiritual health. Spirituality has served as a crucial coping mechanism, providing comfort, hope, and a sense of meaning amidst the crisis (Bryson et al., 2020). Conversely, the disruption of spiritual practices and community support has exacerbated feelings of isolation and despair for some individuals.

Impact of COVID-19 on Stewardship

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted many facets of life, including economic systems, social structures, and religious practices. Stewardship, a core principle in many religious communities, particularly among Seventh-day Adventists, was negatively affected during the pandemic. For instance, church members were unable to carry out their responsibilities entrusted to them (time, talents, and abilities) by the creator, as indicated by Eagle et al. (2022). In general, the pandemic significantly impacted congregational finance. Practicing stewardship is an indicator of Christian wellness as it reflects the lifestyle of believers. This is an indicator of the spiritual maturity of Christians. Saha and Dutta (2020) suggested that stewardship encompasses the responsible management of resources, including time, talent, and finances, in accordance with spiritual beliefs and values. The pandemic influenced stewardship practices, highlighting changes in financial giving, volunteerism, and resource management within the church.

Financial Stewardship. Economically, the pandemic resulted in job losses and reduced income, consequently leading to a decline in the financial contributions of church members to the church. McBride et al. (2021) sadly recorded that many congregants faced financial hardships, which affected their ability to give tithes and offerings. This strained the financial resources of the churches, impacting their ability to maintain operations and support community services. Another challenge was the inability to adapt to digital giving. With restrictions on physical gatherings, churches adopted digital platforms for financial giving. Online giving, mobile money transfers, and bank deposits became essential tools for maintaining financial stewardship. Pillay (2020) hypothesized that, while this has facilitated continued giving for some, it has also highlighted the digital divide, with some members lacking access to or familiarity with these technologies.

Volunteerism and Community Service. Social distancing measures and concerns about health and safety led to a reduction in volunteer activities (Gupta et al., 2020). For example, many community service programs, such as feeding the homeless, visiting the sick, and organizing community events, were scaled back or suspended. Subsequently, the church's role in community engagement and support was significantly affected. On the other hand, some congregations developed innovative approaches to continue serving their communities despite the challenges. Gupta et al. (2020) continues to say that initiatives such as virtual mentoring,

online support groups, and contactless delivery of food and supplies emerged. These efforts demonstrated resilience and commitment to stewardship, albeit in new forms.

Time and Talent Management.

The pandemic altered how individuals allocate their time, with more people working from home and experiencing changes in daily routines (Pillay, 2020). Furthermore, this shift created both opportunities and challenges for personal stewardship. While some individuals found more time for spiritual practices and church involvement, others struggled with increased responsibilities and stress (Singarimbun, 2021). It became evident that there is a need for digital solutions and virtual engagement because technical skills and innovation are important. The same researcher continues to say that congregants who have expertise in technology, media, and communications played crucial roles in maintaining church operations and outreach during the pandemic, unlike those who didn't have expertise.

Impact of COVID-19 on Church Fellowship

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly disrupted traditional church fellowship, which is central to the social and spiritual life of many religious communities. According to Itzhaki and Cnaan (2019), church fellowship includes communal worship, social interactions, and mutual support among congregants, fostering a sense of belonging and spiritual growth. The pandemic impacted church

fellowship in various ways, including, but not limited to, communal worship, social interactions, and the overall sense of community within the church.

Disruption of Communal Worship.

The enforcement of social distancing measures and restrictions on public gatherings led to the suspension of in-person church services. This disruption has been one of the most noticeable impacts on church fellowships, as regular communal worship is a cornerstone of spiritual life for many Adventists. A study conducted in Ghana that investigated how a ban on religious gatherings during the COVID-19 impacted Christian wellness revealed that there was a negative impact on Christian wellness manifested through spiritual slacking, loss of fellowship, disruption of normal routines, pandemic anxiety, and financial stress (Osei-Tutu et al., 2021).

Although some churches responded to the restrictions by transitioning to virtual worship services, business was not as usual. Online services allowed congregations to continue worshipping together, however, the physical presence and communal atmosphere that in-person services provide was lacking (Hendricksen, 2021). This shift affected the depth of spiritual experience and connection for many congregants. Studies have shown that even though congregations adapted to the changing circumstances creating interconnected network of temporary sacred spaces, virtual church services blurred the line between sacred and secular space (Bryson et al., 2020; Pillay, 2020).

Social Interactions and Community Support. The pandemic led to the cancellation or postponement of various church social activities, such as potlucks, youth group meetings, and Bible study groups (Osei-Tutu et al., 2021). These activities play a crucial role in building relationships and fostering a sense of community in the church. Their absence has been keenly felt, particularly by those who rely on these interactions for social support. In response to the limitations on physical gatherings, churches increased use of digital communication tools (Singaram, 2021). While these tools have helped bridge the gap, they cannot fully replicate the warmth and immediacy of face-to-face worship interactions.

Sense of Community and Belonging. The lack of regular contact and shared experiences made it more difficult for congregants to maintain a sense of unity and collective identity. In fact, some of them felt that they didn't belong to the Christian community anymore. For example, Campbell (2020) highlights that certain groups within the church, such as the elderly and those without access to technology, faced greater challenges in maintaining fellowship. This led to feelings of not belonging, isolation, and missing out on both spiritual and social support during a time of heightened need. However, despite these challenges, Osei-Tutu et al. (2021) noted that many churches showed remarkable resilience and creativity in fostering fellowship. Initiatives such as drive-in services, small home-based worship groups, and outdoor gatherings (where permitted) emerged as

alternative ways to maintain community connections.

Spiritual and Emotional Well-being. The absence of regular fellowship contributed to feelings of loneliness and anxiety among many congregants (Johnston et al., 2022). The same scholars highlight that the church community often serves as a vital source of emotional and spiritual support, and its disruption can exacerbate the emotional strain caused by a pandemic. In response to these challenges, many church leaders intensified their pastoral care efforts using other strategies. For example, phone calls, home visits (where safe and permitted), and one-on-one virtual meetings to provide support and maintain a sense of connection (Itzhaki & Cnaan, 2019).

While research has explored the economic, social, and physical impacts (Mukhtar, 2020; S. B. Parisi et al., 2020) of COVID-19, Christian wellness which partly integrates spirituality, fellowship, and stewardship remain underexplored in relation to the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Although some scholars have attested that communal worship, including church attendance, plays a significant role in Christian wellness (Bryson et al., 2020; McBride et al., 2021), there is still limited research that focuses on spiritual resilience, examining how Christians maintain their spiritual health in the absence of communal worship and religious support systems. More so, little is known about how the closure of churches and religious gatherings affected the members' fellowships. There is a gap in understanding whether virtual

worship services and online religious communities effectively fostered personal relationships and fellowship compared to in-person gatherings. In addition, the role of Christian fellowship in providing psychological support and how its absence during lockdowns impacted mental health, particularly for those experiencing anxiety, depression, or grief, has not been adequately addressed either. Not much is in the literature on how churches and Christian organizations' stewardship patterns were impacted during the COVID-19 pandemic, hence the need for this current study. These gaps highlight the need to examine the intersection between Christian wellness and the unprecedented disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Methodology

Research Design

This study utilized a descriptive survey design to gather quantitative data on the impact of COVID-19 on the Christian wellness of Seventh-day Adventists in Kajiado County. This facilitated data collection on individuals' perceptions, attitudes, and practices in a structured and quantifiable manner. Nardi (2018) suggested that this type of design measures things as they are without interventions, providing insights into how people maintain their wellness. The survey can also reveal patterns and trends in how Christians engage with stewardship, spirituality, and fellowship, particularly in light of disruptions like COVID-19. Furthermore, the design identifies relationships between these

components and overall well-being, offering a clearer understanding of how each aspect contributes to Christian wellness (Bloomfield & Fisher, 2019). This approach not only allows for the generalization of findings but also provides practical, actionable data for religious leaders and communities to improve pastoral care and support systems. Ultimately, a descriptive survey offers a valuable snapshot of Christian wellness, making it an ideal method for exploring this multifaceted topic.

The target population comprised adult members of the SDA community in Kajiado County aged 20 years and above. Stratified random sampling ensured that different subgroups within the Adventist church in Kajiado County were adequately represented. The strata were defined based on geographical region (urban and rural) and age group (youth, adults, and seniors). The rationale behind selecting these strata was to capture diversity in spiritual practices, fellowship engagement, and stewardship values across churches. This method ensures that each subgroup is proportionally represented in the sample, minimizing bias and improving the accuracy of the findings. Moreover, it enhanced the study's ability to identify meaningful patterns and differences in Christian wellness in the Adventist Church. Sixty-six respondents participated in the study due to difficulties in accessibility and the unwillingness of participants during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Data Collection Instrument

A questionnaire which had two parts was developed. Part one measured respondents' demographic profile (age, gender, and education level). Part two, which was a 4-point scale, measured Christian practices on spirituality (religious practices, faith, church attendance, and spiritual support during the pandemic), stewardship (giving tithes and offerings), and fellowship (communal worship versus virtual worship) among church members. The questionnaire development followed a structured approach to ensure that the questions were both relevant and aligned with the study's objectives. The questions were formulated based on Martin Seligman 'PERMA' model which steps through five elements essential to human well-being and flourishing (Kun et al., 2017). These are positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and achievement. The elements can be reflected in the core aspects of Christian wellness namely, stewardship, spirituality, and fellowship. Each question was designed to probe the specific dimensions of these components, such as respondents' engagement in spiritual practices, participation in communal worship, and perspectives on responsible stewardship.

The development process involved consultations with subject-matter experts—such as religious scholars, psychologists, and public health professionals—ensuring that the questions were clear and suitable for a varied audience while also validating the content. Before actual data collection,

the instrument was pre-tested to ensure clarity, relevance, and to spot any ambiguities, allowing for revisions to confirm that the final questionnaire was reliable and valid. Cronbach's alpha was used to assess the internal consistency of the questionnaire, with a threshold of 0.78 for acceptable reliability.

Data Collection and Analysis

The questionnaire was administered in person, adhering to the COVID-19 safety protocols. Prior to data gathering, participants were provided with detailed information about the study, and consent was obtained before participation. Data were collected over a period of three weeks.

Descriptive statistics, such as frequencies, means, and standard deviations, were calculated for demographic variables and wellness indicators. Inferential Statistics, particularly an independent samples t-test, were conducted to compare wellness outcomes across the different demographic groups. This statistical test was useful because of the small sample size and was appropriate for comparing the two groups. Additionally, a one-way ANOVA was employed to assess the variations in the effect of COVID-19 on Christian wellness among various age groups and educational backgrounds. ANOVA was selected as it enables the researcher to compare multiple groups at once while upholding statistical integrity.

Participants' anonymity was ensured, and data were stored safely. The necessary permissions were secured prior

to the initiation of the study. Additionally, participants who encountered emotional disturbances or distress during the survey were debriefed by the researcher.

Results and Discussions

Demographic Profile of Respondents

A total of 66 respondents participated in the study, evenly divided between men and women, ensuring equal gender

representation. Most respondents were young adults aged 20-40 years (56%), while 44% were older adults. Most of the respondents had a bachelor's degree (46%), followed by a tertiary level (33%) and high school (21%). Table 1 shows the respondents' demographic profiles.

Table 1

Respondent's Demographic Profile

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	33	50
Female	33	50
Age Group		
20 – 30	22	33
31 – 40	15	23
41 – 50	17	26
51 and above	12	18
Education Level		
High School	14	21
Bachelor's	30	46
Tertiary	22	33

Descriptive statistics were used to answer research question two regarding the extent of respondents' spirituality, stewardship, and fellowship practices. Table 2 highlights the participants' spiritual practices.

Table 2
Respondent's Spirituality Practices

Question	Mean	Std Dev
I spent intentional time with God in a church setting compared to online church meeting	3.12	.920
I found myself being reverent during a face-to-face service compared to online service	3.29	.957
I prayed more when I attended face-to-face services compared to online church service	2.76	1.01
I engaged in scripture reading more at Church meetings compared to online meetings	2.80	.964
I participated more while attending face-to-face church service compared to online service	3.27	.833
I found myself distracted while watching church service in online	3.18	.802
Average Mean	3.07	.729

The findings indicated that the level of spirituality was high (as indicated by a mean of 3.07/4) when participants attended church services face-to-face compared to online services. Specifically, respondents indicated that they were more likely to spend intentional time with God in a church setting than in a virtual setting. They revealed that while attending services virtually, they were distracted by other things and that they were less likely to be reverent during worship, as in the case of traditional face-to-face worship. This implies that on average, participants engaged more in spiritual practices during face-to-face sessions compared to the on-line sessions. Moreover, the sense of belonging and support derived from communal worship, which is considered a critical component of spiritual health, was lacking. These findings are similar to those of Dowson (2020), who found that religious practices were seriously impacted during the COVID-19

pandemic. Therefore, the COVID-19 pandemic experience necessitates a re-evaluation of how spiritual communities can foster connections and support in the absence of physical gatherings. This period also underscored the importance of integrating technology into spiritual practices, ensuring inclusivity, and addressing the diverse needs of the congregants.

In terms of stewardship, the findings indicated that generally, stewardship practices were poor, as evidenced by a mean of 2.4/4 when participants attended church services virtually as compared to face-to-face attendance as shown in Table 3.

Table 3
Respondent's Stewardship Practices

	Mean	Std. Dev
I gave tithes and offerings regularly while attending online church services	2.98	1.10
I spent valuable time engaging in spiritual activities when we were attending online church services	2.73	1.03
I faithfully invested my time serving others when we had online church services	2.44	1.13
I had church responsibilities (deacon/deaconess, elder, etc) while worshipping through online service	2.12	1.22
I spent reasonable time (about 4 hours) engaged in church activities while worshipping online	2.41	1.05
I spent time visiting those in need (jail, Hospital, children's homes) as part of church activities during the COVID-19 period	1.76	1.04
Average Mean	2.41	0.75

Specifically, practices such as visiting the needy and vulnerable were neglected. It was challenging to spend time in spiritual activities, invest time in serving others, and carry out church responsibilities during the pandemic. However, stewardship in terms of tithes and offerings were moderately practiced (Mean 2.98/4) maybe because these services could be availed online through mobile apps. This implies that financial stewardship can be salvaged, unlike other forms of stewardship. The findings of this study are similar to those of previous studies. For example, Hendricksen (2021) suggested that integrating digital tools

for giving, communication, and service delivery proved beneficial during the pandemic. However, other researchers have revealed that some churches were adversely impacted financially and had to derive strategies to ensure the continuity of services (Eagle et al., 2022). Churches need to invest in technology and provide training to ensure inclusivity and accessibility for all members in this rapidly changing world. The results of the fellowship are presented in Table 4.

Table 4
Respondent's Fellowship Practices

	Mean	Std. Dev
The fellowship I enjoyed in a face-to-face church service was disrupted when I attended church online	3.27	0.78
The online services deprived me meaningful personal relations with other church members	3.21	0.78
The online church services interfered with the way I connected with close friends	3.02	0.81
I felt lonely and stressed because contact with other church members was limited during online worship services	2.59	0.94
I missed out on mutual relationships with the people at church during online services	3.06	0.63
I participated in social church activities during the face-to-face worship services	3.11	0.81
	3.04	0.54

The findings indicated that fellowship practices were good during face-to-face services as indicated by a mean of 3.04, implying that practices were poor during virtual services. In particular, participants lamented that they missed out on the mutual relationships that they enjoyed during face-to-face services. Consequently, they experienced loneliness and stress. In other words, the fellowship they enjoyed during face-to-face worship was disrupted, and they were unable to foster meaningful personal relationships, which interfered with their connectedness and support. It was noted that the experience of the pandemic was likely to result in lasting changes to church fellowships. Studies have shown that fellowships in times of unsettled times, especially during crises,

are negatively affected (Johnston et al., 2022), which was also the case in this study. This also implies that embracing hybrid models that combine in-person and virtual elements may become more common, offering greater flexibility and inclusivity to congregants, as Coppola et al. (2021) suggest.

Research question three sought to determine whether there was a significant difference in the level of spirituality, considering gender, age, and level of education. A t-test was performed to investigate the participants' practices. Table 5 highlights participants' practices in terms of gender.

Table 5
Differences in Independent Variables Considering Gender

Variables	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Spirituality	1.015						
Equal variances assumed		.318	.000	64	1.000	.00000	.18076
variances not assumed			.000	62.019	1.000	.00000	.18076
Stewardship							
Equal variances assumed	.339	.562	-.957	64	.342	-.17677	.18476
Equal variances not assumed			-.957	63.131	.342	-.17677	.18476
Fellowship							
Equal variances assumed	.387	.536	-.189	64	.851	-.02525	.13396
Equal variances not assumed			-.189	61.139	.851	-.02525	.13396

The results indicated no significant difference in the level of spirituality when gender and age were considered. This means that both male and female spirituality was negatively impacted while they were virtually worshipping. It also implies that irrespective of the respondents' age, the impact was the same. All age groups experienced low spiritual well-being/growth during virtual worship compared with face-to-face worship.

However, the means of age group 20-30 and 31-40 were slightly higher at (3.1) indicating that these groups might have experienced the impact more severely than the older age groups (2.8). The findings of this study agree with those of Kola et al. (2021), who indicated

that people, irrespective of their age or gender, were affected spiritually during the pandemic. Similarly, other scholars agree that spiritual growth is adversely affected globally (McBride et al., 2021).

There was a significant difference in the education levels. The findings indicated a significant difference between the groups (Table 6). High school and bachelor's groups recorded high means. This implies that on average, participants engaged more in spiritual practices when they attended face-to-face worship as compared to when they attended virtual worship. According to Mukhtar (2020), face-to-face worship is associated with high levels of spirituality and, consequently, better mental health outcomes.

Table 6
Level of Spirituality Considering Educational Level

Multiple Comparisons				
Dependent Variable - Spirituality				
Edu. level	Edu. Level	Mean Difference	Std. Error	Sig.
1	3	.03889	.22853	.865
	3	.48485*	.24139	.049
2	1	-.03889	.22853	.865
	3	.44596*	.19819	.028
3	1	-.48485*	.24139	.049
	2	-.44596*	.19819	.028

*. The mean difference was significant at the level of 0.05.

In terms of stewardship, the findings indicated that only age had a significant difference, unlike gender and educational level. A significant difference was seen between the ages 20-30 and 31-40 groups and above 51 years, as indicated in Table 7. The older group had a higher mean at (2.9) indicating that this group practiced better stewardship practices like tithes and offerings, meaning the group recorded a lesser impact compared to other groups even during online worship services. The results of this study agree with other researchers who revealed that older people practiced better stewardship compared to younger age group during the pandemic (Campbell, 2020; Singarimbun, 2021).

The lack of gender difference implies that both male and female stewardship practices were negatively impacted while they were virtually worshipping. Unfortunately, this observation also held true for educational attainment, with all individuals experiencing similar impacts regardless of their education level. Previous research has demonstrated that the COVID-19 pandemic negatively affected people's stewardship irrespective of their gender or educational background (Eagle et al., 2022; Pillay, 2020).

Table 7

Level of Stewardship Considering Age Groups

Multiple Comparisons				
Dependent Variable: Stewardship				
Age Range	Age Range	Mean Difference	Std. Error	Sig.
1	2	-.03636	.24093	.881
	3	-.28342	.23235	.227
	4	-.70581*	.25822	.008
2	1	.03636	.24093	.881
	3	-.24706	.25489	.336
	4	-.66944*	.27867	.019
3	1	.28342	.23235	.227
	2	.24706	.25489	.336
	4	-.42239	.27129	.125
4	1	.70581*	.25822	.008
	2	.66944*	.27867	.019
	3	.42239	.27129	.125

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Research question five sought to determine if fellowship practices differed significantly when demographic characteristics were considered. The findings indicate that fellowship practices were similarly affected and did not differ significantly when gender, age, and education level were considered. This

meant that fellowship practices were negatively impacted while attending church online compared to face-to-face worship, irrespective of the participants' gender, age, or education. Furthermore, the study suggested that regardless of gender, age, or educational level, Christian fellowship and interpersonal

relationships are universally significant and are more effectively cultivated in face-to-face environments compared to online settings, corroborating findings from previous research (Campbell, 2020; Dowson, 2020; Singarimbun, 2021).

Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings indicate a decline in spirituality, stewardship, and fellowship practices among participants engaged in virtual worship. This decline was observed across all age groups and genders. Furthermore, younger generations reported more adverse Christian wellness outcomes compared to older generations when participating in virtual worship. It was observed that faith, manifested through fellowship, stewardship, and spirituality, provides a framework that assists individuals and communities in navigating the uncertainties of global crises; however, these fundamental values were notably absent during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The absence of fellowship practices deprived members of the emotional and social support derived from face-to-face worship, as well as hope and encouragement. Spiritual strength, responsibilities, and resilience that were cultivated during face-to-face worship diminished. Furthermore, spirituality declined significantly, yet it was needed during the pandemic period because this is what is supposed to help the congregation cope with their fears and uncertainties about the pandemic and find purpose in life. Scholars have hypothesized that spirituality, stewardship, and fellowship

are significant indicators of Christian wellness (Eagle et al., 2022; Osei-Tutu et al., 2021).

The COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly impacted Christian wellness, challenging traditional practices and necessitating adaptation. While the shift to virtual worship increased reliance on personal spiritual practices that provided continuity, they also highlighted the limitations and challenges faced by religious communities. It is essential to find innovative ways to maintain and enhance spiritual well-being and foster resilience and connection in the face of ongoing challenges. The experiences and adaptations during this period inform future practices, ensuring that spiritual communities remain vibrant and supportive, even in times of crisis.

It is recommended that the Church structure programs foster good spiritual, stewardship, and fellowship practices to nurture and develop Christian wellness during periods of crisis. This may include fostering a church community to support members during crises, implementing wellness initiatives, and utilizing technology to augment worship experiences regardless of the mode of worship. Just as eating a healthy diet, exercising, and building strong relationships are significant predictors of physical health, church members need Christian wellness programs geared towards spiritual, stewardship, and fellowship mentorship practices to foster Christian health. In addition, church administration needs to venture into studies to investigate the impact of

spirituality, stewardship, and fellowship on church growth.

Another recommendation is that a larger sample size would be advantageous for enhancing generalizability, as it could encompass a more diverse population sample, thereby providing a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of COVID-19 among Christians. Furthermore, while the present study employed a quantitative approach, future research could explore qualitative methodologies to elucidate individuals' experiences and perceptions, thus offering a more holistic perspective. The researcher also acknowledges that the findings of the current study represent a snapshot of the COVID-19 pandemic and may not be generalizable to other contexts.

Furthermore, caution should be exercised when generalizing these findings to other religious denominations and faith communities, as this study focused specifically on the Seventh-day Adventist church in Kajiado County. Additional research investigating similar impacts across diverse denominations, cultural contexts, and geographical locations is suggested.

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