

## ABSTRACT

Despite various interventions that promote the importance of women in leadership, enactment of legislation to ensure inclusion of women in leadership, gender parity, and gender equity, it is still assumed that men have better leadership skills. Male chauvinism coupled with Gusii Traditional understanding of the Status of women in society continues to subordinate women to male authority, and more so in the Catholic Church. While women are increasingly participating in the leadership of Small Christian Communities, henceforth SCCs, many have yet to fully acknowledge the exceptional leadership skills and the capabilities that women bring to leadership. This study assessed the leadership skills of women in SCCs within the Diocese of Kisii. The study was guided by three objectives: to explore the leadership skills of women in the SCCs of the Catholic Diocese of Kisii; to analyse challenges women face in their leadership of the SCCs in the Catholic Diocese of Kisii; and to assess the contribution of women in leadership of the SCCs in the Catholic Diocese of Kisii. The study utilized Burn's Transformation Leadership theory. The study involved mixed methods employing both qualitative and quantitative data. A descriptive survey design was employed for collecting information through interviews, focus group discussions and questionnaires from a sample size of 391. Descriptive analysis was used to analyse quantitative data, while thematic analysis was utilized for qualitative data. The findings obtained demonstrate that women in the Catholic Diocese of Kisii present several leadership skills related to transformational leadership qualities namely: effective communication, visionary, creativity, good planners, emotionally intelligent, team players, sense of responsibility, trustworthiness and high motivation. Nonetheless, women face multiple challenges in the leadership of SCCs categorized as spiritual, economic, social, political, and emotional. There are also challenges related to poor spiritual formation, financial constraints, illiteracy, sickness, gossip, inferiority complex, divorce and separation, widowhood, single motherhood, and cultural norms opposed to Church doctrines. Despite these challenges, women are making significant contributions in preaching the gospel, being role models, counsellors, participating in liturgical activities, and in strategic planning. The study recommends that the Catholic Diocese of Kisii has to address the conventional patriarchal system that is prevalent in the church and offer women a chance to impact the society positively through the Small Christian Communities. Women can play roles comparable to the biblical apostles, deaconesses, martyrs, prophets, benefactors and teachers in the modern church. Further research need to be undertaken to establish what fuels the low regard for women that evidently permeates the Catholic Diocese of Kisii as well as Gender disparity in church leadership in Catholic Dioceses in Kenya.