

# Reframing the philosophy of pastoral counselling: An interdisciplinary dialogue between theology, existential psychology, and positive psychology

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### Abstract

This study explores the need to reframe the philosophy of pastoral counselling through an interdisciplinary dialogue between theology, existential psychology, and positive psychology. Historically rooted in religious traditions, pastoral counselling has evolved by integrating psychological insights to address the holistic needs of individuals. However, contemporary cultural diversity, ethical complexity, and global social change demand a renewed philosophical foundation that is both theologically grounded and psychologically informed. Using a qualitative design based on an interdisciplinary literature review, this study analyses peer reviewed works published between 2000 and the present that discuss the integration of theology and psychology within counselling contexts. Thematic analysis was employed to synthesize key concepts and identify emerging patterns across disciplines. The findings indicate that existential psychology contributes a focus on meaning making, freedom, and responsibility, which align with theological reflections on suffering and hope, while positive psychology enriches pastoral counselling through its emphasis on virtues such as forgiveness, gratitude, resilience, and character development. The study also highlights the importance of ethical clarity, particularly regarding professional boundaries, value imposition, and client autonomy, as well as the necessity of cultural sensitivity and multicultural adaptation. In conclusion, reframing the philosophy of pastoral counselling through interdisciplinary integration provides a more holistic, ethically responsible, culturally responsive, and spiritually authentic model of care capable of addressing contemporary mental health and spiritual challenges.

## Introduction

The philosophy of pastoral counselling is a multifaceted and interdisciplinary field that draws from religious, psychological, ethical, and cultural dimensions to provide holistic care for individuals (Ağilkaya-Şahin, 2018; Lee, 2025). Historically, pastoral counselling has been a vital resource within religious communities, offering guidance on emotional, relational, physical, and spiritual concerns (Pargament & Rosmarin, 2009). This integration of religious and psychological practices has allowed pastoral counsellors to address the complexities of the human experience by offering both spiritual support and psychological healing

(Dumulescu et al., 2022). The importance of philosophy in pastoral counselling lies in its ability to merge these two domains, forming a robust framework for therapeutic interventions that are both deeply spiritual and psychologically informed (Ağilkaya-Şahin, 2018; Haşegan, 2021). This comprehensive approach is crucial in fostering well-being and addressing mental health concerns within faith communities, making it an essential component of pastoral care.

Recent trends in the philosophy of pastoral counselling have focused on the integration of psychological approaches with religious counselling practices, reflecting a broader shift toward a more holistic, interdisciplinary perspective. The collaboration between pastoral counselling and positive psychology, for example, highlights the shared values of forgiveness, hope, and love, which are fundamental to both fields (Ağilkaya-Şahin, 2024). This collaboration aims to enhance mental health by reinforcing virtues that promote well-being and emotional resilience (Jankowski et al., 2020). Furthermore, the development of theoretical frameworks within pastoral counselling continues to evolve, with greater emphasis on the integration of existential psychology, community, and spiritual practices. This shift recognizes the importance of community-centred approaches in healing, with many pastoral counselling models emphasizing psychosocial development, resilience, and support within faith communities (Cooper-White, 2012). Additionally, the focus on multicultural and contextual adaptation has led to new practices that respect cultural and theological diversity, ensuring pastoral counselling is relevant and effective across different societal settings (LaMothe, 2014).

In reviewing existing research, the philosophy of pastoral counselling has been explored through various lenses, including the integration of religiosity and psychology (Serra, 2024). Studies have shown that pastoral counselling can significantly benefit from the incorporation of psychological theories, such as psychodynamic and cognitive-behavioural approaches, which provide a comprehensive understanding of clients' psychological needs (Welton, 2014). The relationship between clergy and counselee is central to this process, as it fosters a deep sense of trust and communication that is vital for therapeutic success (Pargament & Rosmarin, 2009). Theological reflection and psychotherapeutic theory often coexist within pastoral counselling, allowing counsellors to align their religious values with psychotherapeutic methods (Townsend, 2006). In addition, recent research has underscored the importance of collaboration between positive psychology and pastoral counselling, where both fields share an interest in enhancing virtues like forgiveness and gratitude to promote emotional healing (Ağilkaya-Şahin, 2018b).

Despite the wealth of research in this field, there are notable gaps that warrant further investigation. One significant area that remains underexplored is the integration of multicultural perspectives into pastoral counselling. While some studies have addressed the impact of culture on counselling practices (Townsend, 2011), there is a need for a more systematic integration of cultural differences into a unified theoretical framework (Hotifah, 2019). This would involve a deeper understanding of how cultural preferences and religious practices shape counselling methods and the development of culturally adaptive models that can be applied across diverse contexts. Another gap in the literature concerns the ethical considerations in pastoral counselling. Ethical dilemmas, particularly those related to the imposition of religious values, are a recurring concern in the field (Evans & Nelson, 2021; Steen et al., 2006). However, comprehensive guidelines to address these ethical challenges remain scarce. More research is needed to explore how pastoral counsellors can navigate the boundaries between their religious duties and their professional responsibilities, ensuring that their practices align with ethical standards while respecting the autonomy of their clients (Evans & Nelson, 2021; Giordano, 2025).

Moreover, the role of interdisciplinary approaches in pastoral counselling is another area that calls for further investigation (Giordano, 2025). Research has pointed to the potential benefits of combining insights from missiology, practical theology, and psychological theories

such as narrative therapy and cognitive-behavioural therapy (Smit, 2015). Yet, there is a lack of in-depth exploration into how these interdisciplinary methods can be effectively operationalized within pastoral counselling practices. Additionally, while there is growing interest in the application of pastoral counselling to modern challenges, such as the psychological impacts of globalization and migration, there is limited research on how pastoral counselling can adapt to meet the unique needs of culturally diverse populations (Kim, 2025; Sathler-Rosa, 2014; Solomon, 2014).

The purpose of this review is to explore the evolving philosophy of pastoral counselling by analysing emerging trends, existing research, and the gaps that still need to be addressed. The review aims to provide an in-depth understanding of how philosophy informs the practice of pastoral counselling, highlighting its intersection with psychology, theology, and ethics. It will also examine the contemporary challenges faced by pastoral counsellors, such as navigating cultural diversity, ethical dilemmas, and the integration of interdisciplinary methods. By investigating these trends and gaps, this review seeks to contribute to the development of more effective, culturally sensitive, and ethically grounded pastoral counselling practices.

The research question guiding this study seeks to examine how the philosophy of pastoral counselling can be reframed through an interdisciplinary integration of theology, existential psychology, and positive psychology while simultaneously addressing ethical responsibilities and multicultural challenges in contemporary counselling practice. This question arises from the recognition that pastoral counselling operates at the intersection of spiritual formation and psychological care, requiring a framework that remains theologically grounded yet open to empirically informed psychological insights. In particular, the study investigates how existential psychology contributes a focus on meaning-making, freedom, responsibility, and the human search for purpose; how positive psychology enriches pastoral practice through its emphasis on virtues such as forgiveness, gratitude, resilience, and hope; and how these perspectives can be integrated without compromising the distinctive theological identity of pastoral counselling. Furthermore, the study explores the ethical implications of such integration, including the maintenance of professional boundaries, the avoidance of value imposition, and the protection of client autonomy. It also considers the necessity of cultural sensitivity and multicultural adaptation to ensure that pastoral counselling remains relevant and responsive within diverse social and religious contexts. Through this guiding question, the study aims to construct a holistic, ethically responsible, culturally aware, and spiritually authentic philosophical foundation for contemporary pastoral counselling.

## Methods

This study employed a qualitative research design using an interdisciplinary literature review approach to explore and reframe the philosophy of pastoral counselling through the integration of theology, existential psychology, and positive psychology. This approach was chosen because it enables an in-depth conceptual and theoretical analysis of complex interdisciplinary relationships while allowing the synthesis of diverse scholarly perspectives into a coherent framework.

A total of 50 scholarly sources were used as the primary data of this study, consisting of 40 peer-reviewed journal articles and 10 academic books and book chapters. These sources were selected purposively based on their relevance to the research focus, theoretical contribution, and academic credibility. The inclusion criteria comprised studies published in English between 2000 and the present, focusing on the philosophy of pastoral counselling or the integration of theology and psychology within counselling contexts. Priority was given to peer-reviewed and indexed publications, particularly those indexed in reputable databases such as Scopus, to ensure the quality and reliability of the data. In addition, foundational theoretical works were included where necessary to support conceptual development.

The exclusion criteria eliminated studies that focused solely on technical or practical counselling applications without a clear theoretical or philosophical foundation, as well as studies that did not integrate theological perspectives into psychological discourse. Publications outside the specified time range were also excluded unless they were considered seminal contributions to the field.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the data, several strategies were applied. First, source triangulation was conducted by comparing and cross-examining findings across multiple disciplines, including theology, psychology, and counselling, to ensure conceptual consistency and depth of interpretation. Second, only peer-reviewed and academically credible sources were included to maintain data trustworthiness. Third, a systematic selection process involving identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and final inclusion was implemented to minimize bias. Fourth, an audit trail was maintained throughout the research process to ensure transparency and allow for methodological rigor and replicability.

Data collection was conducted through a systematic search of academic databases, primarily Scopus, using keywords such as “pastoral counselling,” “theology and psychology,” “existential psychology,” and “positive psychology in counselling.” The search process was followed by screening titles, abstracts, and full texts to ensure alignment with the research objectives.

The data were analysed using thematic analysis, conducted through several systematic stages. First, all selected literature was read thoroughly to achieve data familiarization. Second, initial coding was performed by identifying recurring concepts, key arguments, and theoretical constructs across the studies. Third, the codes were organized into broader categories and themes, such as meaning-making, virtues and character development, ethical considerations, and multicultural adaptation. Fourth, these themes were reviewed and refined to ensure coherence, internal consistency, and alignment with the research objectives. Finally, the themes were synthesized and interpreted to construct an integrated interdisciplinary framework that provides a renewed philosophical foundation for pastoral counselling.

## Results and Discussion

### **The Intersection of Theology, Existential Psychology, and Positive Psychology in Pastoral Counselling**

The intersection of theology, existential psychology, and positive psychology in pastoral counselling presents a multifaceted approach that addresses both the spiritual and mental health needs of individuals. By integrating these disciplines, pastoral counselling can offer a more comprehensive framework for supporting people through personal challenges, existential crises, and emotional struggles. This integration provides a holistic model that not only addresses the psychological aspects of human experience but also incorporates the spiritual and moral dimensions that are central to the practice of pastoral care.

Existential psychology contributes to pastoral counselling by emphasizing the importance of subjective experience and the search for meaning in life (Jacobsen, 2008; Peter, 2024). This is particularly relevant when addressing existential crises, such as anxiety, depression, or a lack of purpose, which can often be exacerbated by the challenges of modern life (Richter, 2024). The focus on meaning-making in existential psychology aligns with the theological perspective that spiritual development and a relationship with a higher power can be central to coping with life’s conflicts and suffering (Radionov, 2017; Schuhmann et al., 2025). The existential emphasis on personal responsibility, freedom, and the quest for purpose can be integrated with theological teachings to help individuals find hope and meaning in their spiritual lives, even amidst hardship (Serra, 2023, 2024).

In addition, positive psychology provides a useful complement to pastoral counselling by focusing on positive emotions, personal strengths, and virtues that contribute to well-being (Rashid et al., 2025). This discipline emphasizes the role of positive traits such as hope,

gratitude, and love in fostering psychological health. These same virtues are often emphasized in theological teachings and can serve as a bridge between the two fields. For example, the emphasis on forgiveness in both positive psychology and theology can serve as a powerful tool in pastoral counselling, helping individuals navigate personal conflict and promote emotional healing. Furthermore, positive psychology's research on the benefits of optimism, resilience, and social connections aligns with the pastoral counsellor's goal of promoting mental health through the development of healthy spiritual practices and relationships (Ağilkaya-Şahin, 2018).

A collaborative approach that integrates narrative therapy and positive psychology has been proposed as a way to enhance pastoral care. Narrative therapy, with its focus on the importance of personal stories and meaning-making, complements the strengths of positive psychology, which emphasizes personal strengths and positive emotions. By combining these two approaches, pastoral counsellors can assist individuals in reshaping their personal narratives in ways that promote resilience and well-being. This approach provides a comprehensive framework for addressing both the existential challenges individuals face as well as the positive aspects of their experiences, creating a more nuanced and supportive approach to counselling (Brunsdon, 2014).

Cognitive-Existential Family Therapy (CEFT) represents another integration model that combines cognitive and existential principles within a Christian framework. This model emphasizes the importance of mental health and spiritual growth by integrating psychological insights with theological teachings. It offers a structure for pastoral counsellors to help individuals and families navigate both the cognitive and existential challenges they face, while maintaining a strong theological foundation. By blending the therapeutic benefits of cognitive psychology with the existential emphasis on meaning and purpose, CEFT offers a balanced approach to mental health that can be particularly beneficial in pastoral counselling (Brunsdon, 2014).

However, the integration of theology and psychology in pastoral counselling presents certain challenges. One of the primary concerns is maintaining the distinct theological profile of pastoral counselling while incorporating psychological insights. It is essential for pastoral counsellors to ensure that the spiritual dimensions of their practice remain intact while also benefiting from the empirical findings and therapeutic techniques offered by psychology. This balance requires careful consideration of the epistemological and ontological assumptions of both disciplines to create a cohesive and effective counselling approach. It is crucial that counsellors avoid allowing psychological theories to overshadow theological perspectives, ensuring that the spiritual aspect of pastoral care remains central to the therapeutic process (Churchill & Fisher-Smith, 2025; Gärtner, 2010).

A holistic approach to pastoral counselling involves addressing not only the psychological needs of individuals but also their spiritual, moral, and existential concerns. This approach integrates practical frameworks that include spiritual practices, character development, and principles from positive psychology. By incorporating elements such as mindfulness, prayer, and virtue cultivation, pastoral counsellors can provide a more comprehensive form of care that nurtures both mental health and spiritual well-being. This holistic model promotes a deeper understanding of the complexities of human experience, offering a richer and more integrated form of support for those seeking guidance (Pembroke, 2025).

In conclusion, the intersection of theology, existential psychology, and positive psychology in pastoral counselling offers a rich and multidimensional framework for supporting individuals' mental health and spiritual well-being. By integrating these disciplines, pastoral counsellors can address both the existential challenges that individuals face and the positive dimensions of their human experience. This integrated approach fosters

personal growth, resilience, and spiritual development, offering a more comprehensive and effective form of care for those navigating life's challenges.

### **Integration of Religious and Psychological Frameworks in Pastoral Counselling**

The integration of religious and psychological frameworks in pastoral counselling presents a dynamic approach to addressing the diverse needs of individuals. By combining contemporary psychological theories with traditional religious elements, pastoral counselling aims to provide a holistic approach that addresses both the psychological and spiritual aspects of the client's life. This integration allows counsellors to support individuals not only in dealing with mental health issues but also in navigating existential crises, enhancing their quality of life, and fostering spiritual growth (Dumulescu et al., 2022; Maheshwari, 2026; Phalatsi-Shilubana, 2025; Serra, 2024).

One key element of this integration is the holistic approach, which seeks to address the psychospiritual concerns of individuals in a comprehensive manner. This model views the client as a whole person, considering both their psychological and spiritual dimensions, and helps them cope with existential challenges. By integrating psychological theories with religious perspectives, counsellors can offer clients a more well-rounded framework for understanding their experiences. This approach is particularly effective in fostering personal growth, as it encourages individuals to explore their spiritual beliefs while addressing their psychological struggles (Dumulescu et al., 2022; Maheshwari, 2026; Phalatsi-Shilubana, 2025; Serra, 2024).

Psychosynthesis, a transpersonal psychology model, provides another framework that effectively combines psychological and spiritual perspectives. This model emphasizes the development of the client's will and relationships, including their connection with the Higher Self, which is central to both psychological well-being and spiritual awakening. Techniques derived from psychosynthesis, such as working with the superconscious, help individuals explore their spiritual values and cultivate a deeper connection with their inner self. This process can lead to profound personal growth and a greater sense of spiritual fulfilment, aligning well with the goals of pastoral counselling. By integrating these techniques into the counselling process, pastoral counsellors can offer clients a more expansive approach to personal development and spiritual transformation (Lombard, 2017).

Cognitive-Existential Family Therapy (CEFT) is another model that integrates Christian principles with psychological frameworks. It focuses on the cognitive and existential dimensions of therapy, helping individuals understand their psychological issues within a spiritual context. CEFT promotes a sense of continuity and coherence in clients' lives by integrating existential and cognitive-behavioural principles with Christian values. This integration allows individuals to make sense of their experiences while fostering a deeper understanding of their psychological struggles through a spiritual lens. By addressing both psychological and existential challenges, CEFT helps individuals maintain their mental health while promoting spiritual growth (Dumulescu et al., 2022; Saunders, 2015; Serra, 2024).

Effective interventions in pastoral counselling often involve spiritual and religious practices that enhance therapeutic outcomes. Spiritual narrative therapy, client-centered therapy, mindfulness, and prayer therapy are examples of interventions that help clients find meaning, resilience, and adaptive coping mechanisms in the face of psychological challenges. Using sacred texts and incorporating spiritual behaviors into the therapy process can assist in addressing difficult topics, such as the meaning of life, trauma, and death anxiety. These spiritual interventions provide clients with tools to process their emotional pain and create a sense of meaning and purpose, which is particularly important in the context of existential struggles (Dumulescu et al., 2022; Maheshwari, 2026).

Empathy and communication are crucial elements in the integration of religious and psychological frameworks in pastoral counselling. Effective communication regarding

spiritual and religious issues is necessary for building trust and empathy with clients. Counsellors must understand their clients' spiritual beliefs and values to facilitate open and honest discussions about deeply held convictions. This understanding enables counsellors to create a safe and supportive environment for clients to explore their spiritual concerns. Training and education for counsellors in integrating spirituality into therapy are essential to ensure they are adequately equipped to address clients' spiritual needs. This training helps counsellors navigate the complexities of integrating religious beliefs with psychological care, ensuring a balanced and effective therapeutic approach (Curry & Haddock, 2025; Maheshwari, 2026; Oji & Powell, 2024).

In conclusion, the integration of religious and psychological frameworks in pastoral counselling offers a comprehensive and multifaceted approach to supporting individuals through both psychological and spiritual challenges. By combining psychological theories with spiritual practices, pastoral counsellors can address existential concerns, promote personal growth, and foster a deeper sense of meaning and purpose in clients' lives. This integration provides a rich and supportive framework for individuals seeking to navigate the complexities of human experience with both psychological and spiritual guidance.

### **Ethical Considerations in Pastoral Counselling: Navigating Religious Values and Professional Boundaries**

Pastoral counselling presents unique ethical considerations, particularly when navigating the intersection of religious values and professional boundaries. These challenges are especially prominent in maintaining the professional nature of counselling while addressing the spiritual needs of clients. One key ethical issue involves the maintenance of professional boundaries. Pastoral counsellors must navigate complex roles that include spiritual guidance, counselling, and often, familial or community relationships. This can blur the lines between personal and professional roles, making it essential for counsellors to carefully manage boundaries to avoid harm. Ethical codes emphasize the importance of clear boundaries to maintain the professional integrity of pastoral relationships and ensure that counsellors act competently in their roles (Parent, 2006; Peeters, 2020).

The risk of potential legal challenges also requires heightened awareness of boundaries, particularly concerning sensitive issues such as sexuality, age, and confidentiality. In pastoral counselling, confidentiality is especially important because counsellors often hear deeply personal and sensitive disclosures. However, the unique nature of pastoral counselling, where spiritual guidance may be intertwined with psychological counselling, requires an even more nuanced approach to confidentiality and risk management. Counsellors must be aware of both the spiritual and legal expectations that apply to their practice, ensuring that the counselling process remains protective for both the client and the counsellor (Parent, 2006).

The integration of religious values into pastoral counselling presents further ethical challenges, particularly with regard to spiritual competence. The Association for Spiritual, Ethical, and Religious Values in Counselling (ASERVIC) has developed competencies designed to help counsellors address religious and spiritual issues ethically. These competencies ensure that counsellors are equipped to navigate the diverse spiritual needs of clients in a way that is both respectful and ethically sound. By emphasizing cross-cultural sensitivity, these competencies help pastoral counsellors consider the specific religious and spiritual needs of their clients while respecting their autonomy (Hull et al., 2016; Piedmont, 2024).

One significant aspect of religious integration in pastoral counselling is the use of religious practices such as Scripture reading, prayer, and other spiritual rituals. While these practices may be central to a counsellor's approach, ethical guidelines stress that counsellors must clearly explain these practices to clients. This ensures that clients are comfortable and consensually engage with the religious components of counselling. This practice respects the

client's religious autonomy, ensuring that they are not coerced into spiritual practices they do not agree with or feel uncomfortable with. Transparent communication about the use of religious practices is essential to maintain ethical standards in counselling (Pan et al., 2015).

Ethical codes for pastoral counsellors typically offer guidelines that are consistent with both professional and spiritual values. These codes help counsellors navigate the complexities of integrating religious elements into their practice while maintaining professional ethics. They often focus on the importance of interpersonal relationships, confidentiality, and the counsellor's responsibility to provide competent, compassionate care. Furthermore, ethical guidelines encourage counsellors to engage in ongoing self-awareness and reflect on how their own religious beliefs and values might influence the counselling relationship. This self-awareness helps counsellors recognize and mitigate any potential biases or conflicts between their personal and professional roles (Giordano, 2025; Peeters, 2020).

A particularly challenging ethical consideration in pastoral counselling is the potential for value imposition. Counsellors must be careful not to impose their religious beliefs on clients, respecting the client's autonomy and worldview. This issue is particularly relevant for Christian pastoral counsellors, who may feel a tension between their religious convictions and their professional responsibility to provide nonjudgmental, unbiased care. Ethical guidelines assert that counsellors should avoid the imposition of values and instead foster a counselling environment that is supportive of the client's own beliefs, regardless of whether they align with the counsellor's religious convictions (Evans et al., 2022).

Respecting client autonomy while providing spiritual care can also pose ethical dilemmas. Pastoral counsellors must balance honouring a client's religious practices with their responsibility to provide competent, professional care. This balance can be particularly difficult when a client's religious practices may conflict with mental health needs or professional therapeutic techniques. Counsellors are tasked with ensuring that they provide care that respects both the client's religious beliefs and their mental health needs, fostering an environment where clients feel empowered to make decisions about their spiritual and psychological well-being (Ali et al., 2025).

To address these challenges, ongoing professional development is crucial for pastoral counsellors. Training in both ethical and spiritual competencies helps counsellors navigate the integration of religious practices in counselling while ensuring they maintain professional boundaries. This training helps counsellors understand the nuances of balancing religious and professional responsibilities, equipping them with the tools necessary to handle complex ethical situations. Additionally, supervision plays a vital role in the development of counsellors, particularly in ensuring that they can ethically integrate spirituality into their practice. Supervisory tools that promote both ethical and spiritual growth are essential for helping counsellors navigate the challenges of integrating religious values into their counselling work (Giordano, 2025; Hull et al., 2016).

In conclusion, pastoral counselling requires careful consideration of both ethical standards and religious values. The integration of these frameworks offers valuable opportunities for supporting clients, but it also demands that counsellors maintain clear professional boundaries and respect the autonomy and beliefs of their clients. Through ongoing training, self-awareness, and the application of ethical guidelines, pastoral counsellors can navigate these challenges effectively, ensuring that they provide compassionate, competent, and ethically sound care to those they serve.

### **Cultural Sensitivity and Multicultural Adaptation in Pastoral Counselling**

To ensure pastoral counselling remains relevant and effective across diverse cultures and societies, cultural sensitivity and multicultural adaptation are paramount. In this context, pastoral counsellors must recognize the importance of cultural sensitivity and competence, as these are foundational for building trust and ensuring effective counselling. Cultural

sensitivity involves understanding and respecting clients' individual needs, life experiences, and worldviews. This is particularly crucial in counselling settings like schools, where culturally sensitive techniques and interventions are essential for addressing the unique needs of diverse student populations. By fostering an environment where cultural differences are acknowledged and respected, counsellors can create a space where clients feel understood and supported (Butler, 2004).

Multicultural competence extends beyond cultural sensitivity to encompass awareness, knowledge, and skills related to both ethnic cultures and the specific culture of the presenting problem. This competence ensures that counsellors are equipped to bridge the gap between research and practice, particularly when engaging with clients from diverse cultural backgrounds. By enhancing their understanding of the cultural contexts in which clients operate, counsellors can offer more tailored and effective clinical services that resonate with clients' lived experiences. The integration of multicultural competence into counselling practices is essential for providing quality care and maintaining the relevance of counselling in a multicultural society (Bean & Titus, 2009).

Adapting counselling approaches to clients' spirituality and religion, alongside other multicultural factors such as race, gender, and culture, is also crucial for enhancing relational responsiveness and treatment effectiveness. Despite the historical tendency to overlook spiritual and religious aspects due to a lack of training or fear of causing offense, integrating these dimensions into counselling has shown to improve therapeutic outcomes. Understanding a client's spirituality allows pastoral counsellors to better engage with their worldview and provide care that is not only culturally informed but also spiritually aligned. Such an approach acknowledges the significant role that faith and religious practices play in many clients' lives, enhancing the counsellor-client relationship and making the therapeutic process more meaningful and impactful (Evans & Nelson, 2021).

An ecological perspective is essential for fostering multicultural competency, as it emphasizes the dynamic interaction between individuals and their environments. This perspective encourages counsellors to consider not only the internal experiences of clients but also the external factors, such as cultural, social, and environmental influences, that shape their lives. By adopting an ecological approach, counsellors can facilitate meaning-making processes and empower clients to navigate their challenges within the context of their environment. This ecological validity is crucial for ensuring that counselling is not only culturally sensitive but also contextually relevant to the diverse backgrounds of clients (Tang & Bashir, 2015).

In practice, counsellors can use various techniques to foster cultural sensitivity and adapt counselling approaches to diverse populations. One such technique is the cultural audit, which involves reflection on and an assessment of cultural practices in the counselling process. This tool helps counsellors examine their own cultural biases, expand their cultural knowledge, and ensure that their therapeutic approaches are culturally respectful and inclusive. The cultural audit supports counsellors in building stronger, more effective therapeutic alliances with clients by ensuring they are attuned to the cultural dimensions of the counselling relationship (Boyer, 2022).

The pastoral circle method is another practical approach in pastoral counselling that facilitates a culturally sensitive process. This method involves four stages: reflection, revelation, response, and restoration. It is particularly effective in intercultural counselling settings, as it provides a structured way to address clients' personal, social, and cultural needs. The pastoral circle allows counsellors to explore the meaning of the client's experiences within their cultural context, respond with empathy and understanding, and restore a sense of balance and well-being. This method helps to integrate cultural awareness into the counselling process, ensuring that clients' spiritual and cultural dimensions are respected and addressed throughout the counselling journey (Kim, 2025).

In conclusion, ensuring that pastoral counselling remains relevant and effective across diverse cultures requires a commitment to cultural sensitivity, multicultural competence, and the adaptation of counselling practices to fit the unique needs of clients. By integrating spirituality, using tools like cultural audits, and employing approaches like the pastoral circle method, counsellors can create a supportive and responsive environment that fosters growth, healing, and empowerment for clients from all backgrounds. The ongoing development of cultural and spiritual competencies is essential for ensuring that pastoral counselling continues to meet the evolving needs of a multicultural society.

## **Implications**

The findings of this study offer several important implications for the development of pastoral counselling in contemporary contexts. Theoretically, this study contributes to the enrichment of pastoral counselling philosophy by demonstrating that an integrative framework combining theology, existential psychology, and positive psychology is not only possible but necessary. The integration of these disciplines provides a more comprehensive conceptual foundation that moves beyond fragmented approaches, enabling pastoral counselling to address human experience in a holistic manner that includes spiritual, psychological, existential, and moral dimensions. This interdisciplinary synthesis also reinforces the relevance of theological perspectives within modern counselling discourse, positioning pastoral counselling as a distinctive yet dialogical field that can engage constructively with empirical psychological sciences.

Practically, the findings highlight the need for pastoral counsellors to develop competencies that extend beyond traditional theological training. Counsellors are required to integrate meaning-making processes, character strengths, and virtue-based interventions into their practice, while remaining grounded in theological principles. The incorporation of existential insights, such as responsibility, freedom, and purpose, alongside positive psychology constructs like resilience, gratitude, and forgiveness, provides concrete strategies for enhancing client well-being. In addition, the findings emphasize the importance of ethical sensitivity in practice, particularly in maintaining professional boundaries, avoiding value imposition, and respecting client autonomy. This suggests that training programs for pastoral counsellors should include structured education on ethical decision-making and spiritually integrated counselling competencies.

Furthermore, this study has implications for multicultural and contextual counselling practices. The findings underscore that pastoral counselling must be culturally responsive and adaptable to diverse social and religious contexts. This requires counsellors to develop multicultural competence, including awareness of cultural differences, sensitivity to clients' spiritual backgrounds, and the ability to contextualize counselling approaches without compromising core theological values. The integration of ecological and intercultural perspectives in counselling practice is therefore essential to ensure relevance and effectiveness in increasingly pluralistic societies.

At the institutional level, these findings suggest that seminaries, theological institutions, and counselling training programs should adopt interdisciplinary curricula that integrate theology with contemporary psychological theories. Such integration would better prepare future pastoral counsellors to navigate complex ethical, cultural, and psychological challenges. Additionally, professional organizations and regulatory bodies may consider developing clearer guidelines for spiritually integrated counselling practices to support ethical consistency and professional accountability.

Finally, this study opens opportunities for further theoretical and empirical development in the field of pastoral counselling. The proposed interdisciplinary framework can serve as a foundation for future research exploring its application in various contexts, including clinical settings, faith-based communities, and cross-cultural environments. By advancing a more

integrative and contextually responsive model, this study contributes to the ongoing transformation of pastoral counselling into a field that is both academically rigorous and practically relevant in addressing contemporary human needs.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the research design is based on a qualitative literature review, which relies entirely on secondary data. While this approach allows for a comprehensive synthesis of existing theories and interdisciplinary perspectives, it does not provide empirical validation of the proposed framework. As a result, the findings remain conceptual and interpretative in nature, limiting their direct generalizability to practical counselling settings.

Second, the selection of literature, although systematically conducted, is restricted to publications in English and within the timeframe of 2000 to the present. This may have excluded relevant studies published in other languages or earlier foundational works that could offer additional theoretical insights. Furthermore, despite efforts to ensure rigor through inclusion criteria and source triangulation, the possibility of selection bias cannot be entirely eliminated, particularly in interpreting interdisciplinary concepts across theology and psychology.

Third, the interdisciplinary nature of this study, while offering richness and depth, also presents challenges related to conceptual integration. Differences in epistemological assumptions between theology and psychology may lead to tensions or inconsistencies in interpretation. The synthesis proposed in this study represents one possible framework and may not fully capture the diversity of perspectives within each discipline.

Future research is encouraged to address these limitations by incorporating empirical approaches to test and validate the proposed interdisciplinary framework. Quantitative studies, experimental designs, or mixed-method research could be conducted to examine the effectiveness of integrating existential and positive psychology constructs within pastoral counselling practice. In addition, qualitative field studies involving pastoral counsellors and clients would provide valuable insights into how this framework is applied in real-world contexts.

Further studies should also explore cross-cultural applications of pastoral counselling, particularly in non-Western and multicultural settings, to enhance the contextual relevance of the framework. Expanding the scope of literature to include diverse cultural and theological perspectives would contribute to a more globally representative understanding of pastoral counselling. Additionally, future research may investigate the development of specific intervention models, training modules, or assessment tools based on the integrative framework proposed in this study. By addressing these directions, future research can strengthen the empirical foundation, contextual adaptability, and practical applicability of pastoral counselling as an interdisciplinary field.

### **Conclusion**

This study affirms that the philosophy of pastoral counselling requires renewal through an interdisciplinary integration of theology, existential psychology, and positive psychology, demonstrating that these disciplines are complementary and together form a holistic framework that addresses the spiritual, psychological, existential, and moral dimensions of human life. Existential psychology enriches pastoral counselling by emphasizing meaning making, freedom, responsibility, and the search for purpose, which align closely with theological reflections on suffering, hope, and spiritual formation, while positive psychology contributes research-based insights on virtues such as forgiveness, gratitude, resilience, and hope that resonate deeply with core theological values. The study further highlights that such integration must be accompanied by strong ethical awareness, particularly in maintaining

professional boundaries, avoiding value imposition, and respecting client autonomy, requiring ongoing professional development and adherence to ethical standards. In addition, cultural sensitivity and multicultural adaptation are essential to ensure that pastoral counselling remains relevant and responsive within diverse social contexts, incorporating ecological perspectives and intercultural approaches to address the lived realities of clients. Overall, reframing the philosophy of pastoral counselling through this interdisciplinary lens offers a more robust, ethically grounded, culturally responsive, and spiritually authentic model of care capable of addressing contemporary challenges while remaining faithful to its theological foundations.

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### Author Contributions Statement

E conceptualized the study, developed the research framework, conducted the literature review, performed the thematic analysis, and drafted the manuscript. JG contributed to the refinement of the theoretical framework, provided critical revisions to the intellectual content, supervised the research process, and reviewed the final version of the manuscript. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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