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The Role of Critical Life Events in the Development of Authentic Leadership and its Socioeconomic Outcomes: An Empirical Study



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The Role of Critical Life Events in the Development of Authentic Leadership and its Socioeconomic Outcomes: An Empirical Study

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Abstract

Purpose: The study explored the moderating effect of critical life events on the relationship between developmental life attributes, authentic leadership, and its subsequent socioeconomic outcomes.

Methodology: Anchored on Moral Development Theory, Psychodynamic Theory, and Life Course Theory, the study adopted a convergent parallel research design. Both quantitative and qualitative data was drawn from a combined sample of 417 media professionals in Nairobi County, Kenya, using a questionnaire and an interview guide respectively.

Findings: Findings demonstrated that childhood adversities as well as formative experiences significantly amplify the contribution of psychological attributes ($\beta = .137$, $p < 0.05$) and sociological attributes ($\beta = 0.188$, $p < 0.05$) in the formation of authentic leadership, improving explanatory power by 29.2% and 9.6% respectively. Results further revealed that adulthood events, such as career transitions, loss of income, family responsibilities, and health challenges significantly moderate the influence of authentic leadership on socioeconomic outcomes ($\beta = 0.220$, $p < 0.05$), enhancing model's explanatory power by 13%. Respondents affirmed that when authentic leadership is strengthened through adaptive responses to critical life events, it is positively associated with socioeconomic outcomes including career progression, organizational citizenship, and greater positive social influence.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Policy and Practice: The study recommends the integration of life-phase experiences into leadership development frameworks, emphasizing how personal growth trajectories contribute to broader socioeconomic success. Policy makers can adopt a holistic approach by providing resources to employees undergoing CLE, thereby creating environments where adversity fuels growth and positive socioeconomic outcomes.

Keywords: *Authentic Leadership, Developmental Life Attributes, Critical Life Events, Self-Awareness, Socioeconomic Outcomes*

JEL Codes: *M12, M14, J24, O15, Z13*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Leadership and Socioeconomic Outcomes

Leadership is universally recognized as a critical driver of socioeconomic progress, shaping outcomes that extend well beyond organizational performance to encompass ethical conduct, human flourishing, and societal well-being. In contemporary organizations, leadership is evaluated not only by financial or operational results but also by its capacity to bring about trust, accountability, and social responsibility. Among the various leadership paradigms, authentic leadership (AL) has emerged as one of the most empirically robust frameworks for achieving these multidimensional outcomes. Operationalized by Walumbwa et al. (2008) through self-awareness, relational transparency, balanced processing, and an internalized moral perspective, AL is widely regarded as an effective response to ethical failures and declining trust in professional practice (Cavazotte et al., 2021).

The influence of AL is evident across multiple levels of analysis. It has been established that at the individual level, AL has been associated with enhanced career success, stronger moral reasoning, and improved psychological well-being (Mbugua & Ndonye, 2025). Within organizations, it promotes employee commitment, stimulates innovation and creativity, and encourages discretionary behaviour and organizational citizenship. At the societal level, it can strengthen corporate social responsibility by aligning organizational conduct with broader stakeholder and community interests. These outcomes position authentic leadership as a strategic pathway through which organizations can generate sustainable socioeconomic value while simultaneously advancing ethical and relational excellence.

Emerging scholarship however cautions against treating AL as a universally uniform construct. Its development, expression, and outcomes are profoundly impacted by socio-cultural contexts, institutional environments, and individuals' life-course experiences. Studies in Asia and Europe underscore how cultural traditions and institutional structures influence leadership formation (Al-Balushi, 2025; Yusoff, 2025), while research in Africa highlights the importance of communal values, historical experience, and local realities in shaping leadership behaviours that may differ from dominant Western models (Grobler & Powell, 2025; Okechaa et al., 2024; Ndonye et al., 2024). This contextual sensitivity is especially important in sectors such as media, where public trust is indispensable. In such settings, AL offers a compelling avenue for rebuilding credibility, fostering innovation and advancing sustainable socioeconomic outcomes. Consequently, understanding AL requires careful attention to both context and developmental life pathways through which leaders are formed.

Developmental Life Attributes and Authenticity

Two strands of perspectives explain the concept of Authenticity. Liensenfeld et al. (2024) hold that authenticity develops through processes such as continuity of self, independence from external validation and reflective self-awareness, making it a product of ongoing developmental attributes.

In contrast, traditional trait-based perspectives, such as those outlined by Sedikides and Schielgel (2024) conceptualize authenticity as a relatively stable personality characteristic, defined by consistency between one's internal states and external behaviours. While trait-based models highlight authenticity as a measurable disposition, the development approach underscores its fluidity and emergence over time, shaped by life experiences and self-reflective practices. Based on the first strand, developmental life attributes frames authenticity as a dynamic outcome of inner work and psychological growth, rather than a fixed personality trait.

In the context of this study, psychological developmental life attributes were examined through four dimensions: values, attitudes, self-concept, and personality, due to the role they play in shaping human behaviour (Milenkova & Nakova, 2023). Values reflect the internal principles that guide behaviour and decision-making, while attitudes encompass predispositions and feelings that drive actions. Self-concept relates to an individual's perception of their identity and abilities, and personality encompasses the stable traits that define behaviour and interaction. These attributes provide a comprehensive understanding of the psychological foundations of leadership. This study explored the dimensions of sociological developmental as the roles family, school, religion, and culture play in influencing the development of the attributes of authenticity.

The dominance of young professionals in Kenya's workforce presents both opportunities and challenges, especially in the media industry, which has high cognitive and reflective demands owing to frequent digital disruptions and ethical uncertainty. While youth bring adaptability and creativity, their limited exposure to formative life events may constrain authentic leadership development (Wolny et al., 2025). This raises critical questions about how organizations can support leadership growth through mentorship, experiential learning, and resilience building interventions. It also underscores the importance of investigating how critical life events shape the emergence of authentic leadership and influence its developmental trajectory among young professionals.

Critical Life Events in Leadership

Critical life events according to Marc et al. (2023) refer to stressful or disruptive occurrences that threaten an individual's social or economic status, self-esteem, or physical and mental well-being, requiring adaptation. They have also been conceptualized as turning points that disrupt established trajectories, drain resources, and necessitate social role adjustments (Comolli et al., 2024). These events are not isolated stressors but part of interconnected trajectories (family, work, health) and their clustering is commonly believed to intensify social inequality effects.

Critical life events (CLE) across the lifespan, particularly those experienced in childhood and adulthood, play a central in shaping AL by influencing identity, construction, moral reasoning, and emotional regulation. According to Ćwiąkała et al. (2025), early-life contexts characterized by either adversity or nurturing care significantly affect the development of empathy, resilience, and

ethical judgement. Scholars highlight that these formative experiences interact with cognitive and psychological development processes, reinforcing or constraining the emergence of self-awareness and internalized moral perspectives central to authentic leadership (Gardner et al., 2011; Lemoine et al., 2019). As individuals transition into adulthood, critical incidents such as career disruptions, organizational crises, or significant personal challenges continue to refine leadership identity through reflective meaning-making and adaptive learning, thereby strengthening authenticity and ethical consistency in leadership practice.

Moreover, specific categories of CLE including relational disruptions, economic shocks, and natural or existential, function as moderating forces determining how underlying life attributes translate into authentic behaviours and subsequent socioeconomic outcomes. These events can either catalyze through resilience-building and perspective taking or hinder development by exacerbating stress and instability, depending on contextual and individual coping mechanisms (Oburu, 2024). Recent empirical studies emphasize that the impact of such events is particularly pronounced in youthful labour markets, where limited cumulative life experience may constrain the depth of reflective processing required for authentic leadership development (Karagianni et al., 2023; Mbugua & Ndonge, 2025). In contexts such as Kenya's media industry, characterized by a predominance of young professionals, understanding how CLE moderate leadership emergence is essential for designing interventions that foster ethical leadership and sustainable socioeconomic contributions.

1.1 Problem Statement

Despite the growing recognition of authentic leadership as a driver of ethical accountability and socio-economic outcomes, significant gaps remain in understanding how critical life events shape its development. In Kenya's media industry, where young professionals dominate, weak accountability structures and digital disruption exacerbate risks of misinformation and ethical lapses (Muli, 2022; Njoroge, 2024). These challenges mirror broader concerns across Africa, where leadership development is often constrained by socio-cultural and institutional factors (Okechaa et al., 2024). Globally, similar issues are evident where rapid technological change and organizational crises demand leaders who can act consistently with their values (Al-Balushi, 2025).

Emerging evidence suggests that AL outcomes are contingent upon the effects of critical life events (Almutairi et al., 2025; Dedzo et al., 2026). At the individual level, authentic leadership enhances wellbeing, moral conduct, and career success (Helmuth et al., 2023). Organizationally, it fosters innovation, creativity, and citizenship behaviours that strengthen collective performance (Farid et al., 2020). Societally, authentic leadership contributes to corporate social responsibility and ethical climates that benefit communities (Maheshwari, 2025). Yet, the extent to which these outcomes are contingent upon critical life events remains insufficiently explored, especially in African contexts.

Specifically, there is scarce evidence on how young professionals, particularly in Kenya's media industry, develop AL under uncertain environments. This lack of contextualized evidence hinders the ability of organizations to design effective leadership development interventions. Addressing this gap is urgent, as the ethical accountability of media professionals has far-reaching implications for public trust, organizational performance and societal wellbeing. The present study investigated how critical life events moderate both the development of AL from life attributes and its subsequent socio-economic outcomes.

2.0 THEORETICAL REVIEW

2.1.1 Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development

Lawrence Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development, developed in the late 1950s and 1960s extends Jean Piaget's cognitive development framework by proposing that individuals progress through levels and stages of moral reasoning. The theory posits that moral development is a lifelong process shaped by cognitive growth and exposure to complex social and ethical dilemmas. Contemporary scholarship affirms that leadership ethics, particularly AL, are rooted in higher-order moral reasoning aligned with post-conventional thinking, where individuals rely on internalized ethical principles rather than external authority (Koen & Grobler, 2026; Shields, 2026). Thus, moral maturation is not static but evolves through experiences that challenge one's ethical frameworks.

Recent leadership has however questioned the theory's linear progression assumption, suggesting that individuals may operate across multiple stages depending on context (Karakose et al., 2024). Nonetheless, the framework strongly supports this study by explaining how CLE, such as ethical crises, leadership challenges, and professional transitions, serve as catalysts for advancing moral reasoning, hence fostering AL. Leaders who reach higher moral stages are more likely to demonstrate transparency, integrity, and ethical consistency, which in turn influence socio-economic outcomes.

2.1.2 Psychodynamic Theory

Psychodynamic Theory, originally advanced by Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) and later expanded by Erik Erikson and Carl Jung, emphasizes that human behaviour is shaped by unconscious processes, early life experiences, and internal psychological conflicts. Erikson's psychosocial stages extended this perspective into a lifespan framework, suggesting that individuals encounter developmental crises that define identity and behaviour across life stages. Contemporary leadership studies continue to apply psychodynamic principles, highlighting that leaders' perceptions, emotional responses and interpersonal behaviors are deeply influenced by accumulated life experiences and internalized narratives (Koen & Grobler, 2026; Watson, 2024).

Despite its relevance, the theory is criticized for limited empirical verifiability and overreliance on clinical interpretation. Modern scholarship however increasingly integrates psychodynamic insights with empirical approaches, particularly in understanding identity formation and leaders self-awareness (Lê & Hoang, 2025). In this study, psychodynamic theory provides a strong foundation for explaining how critical life events, especially emotionally significant or formative experiences shape leaders' self-concept, values, and authenticity. Since AL emphasizes self-awareness and relational transparency, the theory supports the proposition that leaders' behaviours and socioeconomic outcomes are products of deeply internalized life experiences.

2.1.3 Life Course Theory

Life Course Theory, primarily developed by Glen H. Elder Jr. in the 1970s, examines how individuals' lives unfold over time through a sequence of socially embedded experiences, transitions, and trajectories. The theory emphasizes key principles such as timing of life events, linked lives (social relationships), historical context, and human agency, suggesting that development is shaped by the interaction between individual choices and broader socio-economic environments. Extant literature highlights that leadership development is a dynamic, lifelong process influenced by experiences across different stages, from childhood through adulthood, and across multiple domains beyond workplace (Liu et al., 2021; Reitan & Stenberg, 2025). This perspective broadens leadership beyond isolated professional experiences to include early-life and contextual influences.

Critics however argue that Life Course Theory can be methodologically complex, requiring longitudinal data, and may lack predictive precision due to its broad and integrative nature. Additionally, isolating the effects of specific life events from the broader contextual influences can be challenging. Nevertheless, the theory is relevant to the current study as it directly supports the assertion that critical life events act as turning points that shape leadership development trajectories and socioeconomic outcomes over time. It also provides a credible framework for understanding how life attributes, such as upbringing, education, career transitions, interact with critical life events to influence the emergence of AL. Importantly, it also explains the moderating role of such events, as their impact varies depending on timing, context, and individual agency (Kamau et al., 2025; Kwalanda, 2024).

3.0 METHODOLOGY

Mixed-methods approach was adopted to enhance analytical depth, integrating quantitative and qualitative evidence. A convergent parallel design enabled simultaneous collection, analysis, and integration of data to strengthen the validity and complementarity of findings (Creswell & Clark, 2023; Feters & Molina-Azorin, 2023). Quantitative data was collected through structured questionnaires administered to 406 young media professionals from 45 randomly selected TV stations in Nairobi, Kenya. Concurrently, qualitative data was generated through semi-structured

interviews conducted with 11 purposively selected senior managers, whose industry experience provided rich, contextual insights.

Instrument validity was established using Cronbach's alpha to assess internal consistency, while face and content validity were confirmed through expert evaluation of item relevance and clarity (Boateng et al., 2018; Taber, 2018). Diagnostic tests confirmed adherence to key regression assumptions, including normality, linearity, multicollinearity, and homogeneity (Hair et al., 2018). Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, whereas qualitative data was subjected to thematic content analysis to trace patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Integration of results occurred at the interpretation stage to generate a coherent and corroborated understanding of the study phenomena.

Empirical Models

To establish the moderating effect, simple and multiple linear regression was employed through the following two steps recommended by Baron and Kenny (1986):

Step one involved regressing authentic leadership (AL) on psychological (Psy) and sociological (Soc) developmental life attributes, noting R^2 value and the significance level ($p < 0.05$). Statistical models were:

$$AL = \beta_0 + \beta_{41}Psy$$

$$AL = \beta_0 + \beta_{51}Soc$$

It also involved regressing socioeconomic outcomes (SEO) on AL, noting R^2 value and the significance level ($p < 0.05$), for the model:

$$SEO = \beta_0 + \beta_{61}AL$$

Step two evaluated whether critical life events (CLE-childhood & CLE-adulthood) amplify the effect of the relationships in step one through the interaction terms. By introducing the moderator, the new R^2 and the significance level ($p < 0.05$) for the interaction term were noted.

$$AL = \beta_0 + \beta_{41}Psy + \beta_{42}CLEc + \beta_{43}(Psy * CLEc)$$

$$AL = \beta_0 + \beta_{51}Soc + \beta_{52}CLEc + \beta_{53}(Soc * CLEc)$$

$$SEO = \beta_0 + \beta_{61}AL + \beta_{62}CLEa + \beta_{63}(Soc * CLEa)$$

Where β_0 = Constant; $\beta_{41} - \beta_{63}$ = Beta coefficients

Moderation was supported when the interaction in the regression model was statistically significant. The regression coefficient for the interaction term ($\beta_{43}, \beta_{53}, \beta_{63}$) provided an estimate of

the moderation effect on the relationship between the predictor and the dependent variable. When the coefficient was significantly different from zero, it indicated that CLE significantly moderated the relationship between the variables. Thus, if $p < 0.05$, moderation was established (Hayes, 2018; Memon et al., 2019).

4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1.1 Demographic Responses

Response rate for the questionnaires was 58%, while 92% of the targeted key informants availed for the in-depth interviews. Gender composition was 52% male and 48% female, enhancing the inclusion of diverse perspectives essential for examining relational and ethical dimensions of AL. Majority respondents were aged 30-35 (54%), followed by 24-29 (37%), indicating a concentration of young and mid-career professionals, developmental phases widely recognized as critical for shaping leadership identity and aligning behaviour with core values. Recent scholarship affirms that leadership development is particularly dynamic during these stages when individuals integrate life experiences with evolving professional roles to construct authentic capacities (Pan et al., 2021).

A high level of educational attainment was recorded (70% holding degrees or higher) reflecting the cognitive and reflective demands of the media industry. Contemporary studies have linked higher education to enhanced ethical reasoning and self-awareness in leadership practice (Holmes et al., 2021; Northouse, 2022). Furthermore, with 43% of respondents possessing 1-5 years of work experience, the sample captured a formative stage where leadership values are actively cultivated.

4.1.2 Factor Analysis

Results indicated that CLE such as parental separation or divorce, loss of income, natural disasters, and the death of a family member significantly contributed to the development of self-knowledge, honesty, and the ability to assess issues from multiple perspectives. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) value of 0.790 (within the acceptable range of 0.6 to 1.0) and a significant Bartlett's Test ($\chi^2 = 57.727$, $p < .001$) confirmed the adequacy of the data for factor analysis. Principal component analysis extracted one dominant factor explaining 50.1% of the variance, suggesting that these childhood experiences collectively form a strong underlying construct that influences AL development through enhanced emotional regulation and perspective taking.

Above results were also extended in the analysis of similar events in the adulthood phase. KMO value of 0.702 and a significant Bartlett's Test ($\chi^2 = 233.508$, $p < .001$) again confirmed suitability for factor extraction. Two major components emerged, explaining 65.3% of the variance, with rotated factor loadings showing strong associations (e.g. .958 for parental separation or divorce, and .923 for death of a close family member). This indicates that adulthood phase events are more multifaceted, shaping authentic leadership through distinct but interrelated dimensions. Both

childhood and adulthood CLE therefore serve as formative experiences that strengthen AL capacities and socioeconomic adaptability.

4.1.3 Descriptive Analysis

Results showed that a significant proportion of respondents (43.3%) reported experiencing CLE, with descriptive statistics showing that such experiences generally contributed positively to aspects of AL development. Notably, death of a family member had the highest mean score (4.109), suggesting it was most strongly associated with self-knowledge, honesty, and perspective taking. Other events such as parental separation or divorce, natural disasters, and parental loss of income showed moderate contributions, with aggregate scores around 3.6, indicating that while challenging, these experiences often fostered resilience and personal growth. Overall, childhood adversities appear to have played a formative role in shaping leadership related attributes.

Nearly half of the respondents (47.6%) reported experiencing critical adulthood events, with descriptive statistics showing slightly lower aggregate contributions compared to childhood events (mean aggregate 3.470). Among adulthood experiences, death of a close family member had the strongest influence (mean 3.730), while natural disasters and parental separation or divorce scored lower, suggesting varied impacts depending on the type of critical event. The results implied that while adulthood adversities continue to shape self-awareness and leadership qualities, their influence may be less pronounced than childhood experiences.

4.1.4 Regression Analysis

Moderation was tested through a two-step regression process. The first step assessed the direct effect of the variables while the second incorporated critical life events and the interaction term in the relationships. This process allowed for the evaluation of the independent and interactive contributions of these variables to the emergence of AL and its related socioeconomic outcomes.

Childhood Critical Life Events (CLEc), Psychological Developmental Life Attributes (Psy) and Authentic Leadership (AL)

Step 1: Direct Effect of Psy on AL

Authentic leadership was regressed on psychological developmental life attributes (*Psy*) and Table 1 is the summary of results. The model summary reveals that *Psy* accounted for 8.6% of the variance in AL ($R^2 = .090$, Adjusted = .086), which while modest, is still noteworthy in behavioral research. The ANOVA shows that *Psy* significantly predicted AL ($F=22.790$, $p<.05$), meaning the predictor variable contributes meaningfully to explaining variance in AL scores. Coefficient results further confirmed this relationship: the predictor had a positive and significant effect ($B=.324$, $\beta = .300$, $t = 4.774$, $p<0.05$). This implies that for every one-unit increase in psychological

developmental life attributes, authentic leadership increased by approximately 0.300 units, holding other factors constant. The regression equation thus derived was:

$$AL = 2.592 + 0.300(Psy)$$

Table 1. Regression Results: AL on Psy

Model Summary:

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.300 ^a	.090	.086	.27440

ANOVA:

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	1.716	1	1.716	22.790	.000 ^b
	Residual	17.393	231	.075		
	Total	19.109	232			

Coefficients:

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.592	.288		8.988	.000
	Psychological developmental life attributes (Psy)	.324	.068	.300	4.774	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Authentic Leadership (AL)

b. Predictors: (Constant), Psychological developmental life attributes

Step 2: The Moderating Effect of Childhood CLE on Psy and AL

Results in Table 2 show that psychological development life attributes (Psy) significantly predict authentic leadership (AL) with model 1 explaining a moderate proportion of variance (Adj. $R^2 = .199$, $p < 0.05$). When childhood critical life events (CLEc) and the interaction term (Psy*CLEc) are introduced in model 2, explanatory power increases markedly from Adjusted R^2 of .086 to .378. This indicates that CLEc not only exerts a direct effect on AL, but also moderates the Psy-AL relationship, as confirmed by the significant interaction term ($\beta = .137$, $p < 0.05$). In practical terms, leaders with formative adversity experiences tend to demonstrate stronger authenticity when psychological attributes are considered alongside CLEc. The coefficient results were fitted in the model as follows:

$$AL = 2.055 + 0.370(Psy) + 0.338(CLEc) + 0.137(Psy * CLEc)$$

Table 2. Moderation Effect**Model Summary:**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics					
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. Change	F
1	.300 ^a	.090	.086	.274	.090	22.790	1	231	.000	
2	.620 ^b	.384	.378	.210	.294	45.125	2	229	.000	

ANOVA:

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	1.716	1	1.716	22.790	.000 ^b
	Residual	17.393	231	.075		
	Total	19.109	232			
2	Regression	1.849	3	.616	8.179	.000 ^c
	Residual	17.260	229	.075		
	Total	19.109	232			

Coefficients:

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	2.592	.288		9.000	.000
	Psychological developmental life attributes	.324	.068	.300	4.765	.000
2	(Constant)	2.055	.190		10.816	.000
	Psychological developmental life attributes	.382	.047	.370	8.128	.000
	Childhood Critical Life Events	.396	.047	.338	8.426	.000
	Psy*CLE	.150	.039	.137	3.846	.007

a. Dependent Variable: Authentic Leadership

b. Predictors: (Constant), Psychological developmental life attributes

c. Predictors: (Constant), Psychological developmental life attributes, Childhood Critical Life Events, Psy*CLEc

Interpretively, these findings suggest that childhood adversity can act as a developmental catalyst, fostering resilience and psychological maturity then enhance AL capacities. Psy alone contributes positively to AL, but the presence of CLE amplifies this effect, implying that adversity strengthens leaders' self-awareness, and relational transparency. This interpretation is consistent with Zhang

et al. (2022), who found that contextual moderators significantly shape authentic leadership outcomes, and Satish and Kumar (2026), who demonstrated that psychological capital buffers the effects of childhood adversity, thereby reinforcing resilience and authenticity. Similarly, Purushothaman and Ammerman (2026) observed that leaders under pressure sustain authenticity by drawing on values shaped by formative challenges, echoing the moderating role of CLE. Industry expert P1, expressed this sentiment. He said,

Yes, I have a friend who both parents lost their income and he had to take on responsibilities. He had to look for ways to support his family. He had to wake up and now he is running a business and is earning pretty well. But I also have a lady friend who lost both parents and got more of the negative aspect. She looked for a job, found none, and has now resorted to giving her body. She got bitter with her family and became negative.

Childhood Critical Life Events (CLEc), Sociological Developmental Life Attributes (Soc) and Authentic Leadership (AL)

Step 1: Direct Effect of Soc. on AL

Table 3 is the summary of results when AL was regressed on sociological developmental life attributes (Soc). The results show that Soc accounted for 23.2% of the variance in AL ($R^2 = .235$, Adjusted = .232). ANOVA indicates that Soc significantly predicted AL ($F=70.905$, $p<0.05$), contributing meaningfully to explaining variance in authentic leadership scores. Coefficient results posted a positive and significant effect ($B=.300$, $\beta = .485$, $t = 8.421$, $p<0.05$). The implication was that holding other factors constant, for every one-unit increase in sociological developmental life attributes, authentic leadership increased by approximately 0.485 units. The model was summarized as follows:

$$AL = 2.830 + 0.485(Soc)$$

Table 3: Regression Results: AL on Soc**Model Summary:**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.485 ^a	.235	.232	.25159

ANOVA:

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	4.488	1	4.488	70.905	.000 ^b
	Residual	14.621	231	.063		
	Total	19.109	232			

Coefficients:

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.830	.136		20.824	.000
	Sociological developmental life attributes	.300	.036	.485	8.421	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Authentic Leadership (AL)

b. Predictors: (Constant), Sociological developmental life attributes (Soc)

Step 2: The Moderating Effect of Childhood CLE on Soc and AL

The first model in Table 4 shows that sociological developmental life attributes (Soc) significantly predict authentic leadership (AL). This suggests that leaders' socialization, education, and cultural exposure are strong foundations for AL. When childhood critical life events (CLEc) are added as a moderator in model 2, the explanatory power increases to 32.8% of the variance, meaning that the inclusion accounted for an additional 9.6% ($\Delta R^2 = +0.096$), of the variance in AL. This indicates that childhood adversity strengthens the Soc-AL relationship. The coefficients indicate that Soc ($\beta = 0.536$, $p = .018$) and CLEc ($\beta = 0.312$, $p < 0.05$) both positively predict AL, while the interaction term ($\beta = 0.188$, $p < 0.05$) confirms a significant moderation effect. The fitted model is expressed as:

$$AL = 1.866 + 0.536(Soc) + 0.312(CLEc) + 0.188(Soc * CLEc)$$

Table 4: Moderation Effect**Model Summary**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics					
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. Change	F
1	.485 ^a	.235	.232	.25159	.235	70.905	1	231	.000	
2	.580 ^b	.336	.328	.22047	.101	22.678	2	229	.000	

ANOVA:

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	4.488	1	4.488	70.905	.000 ^b
	Residual	14.621	231	.063		
	Total	19.109	232			
2	Regression	4.701	3	1.567	24.908	.000 ^c
	Residual	14.408	229	.063		
	Total	19.109	232			

Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error			
1	(Constant)	2.830	.136		20.824	.000
	Sociological developmental life attributes	.300	.036	.485	8.421	.000
2	(Constant)	1.866	0.361		5.169	.000
	Sociological developmental life attributes	0.635	0.163	0.536	3.896	.018
	Childhood Critical Life Events	0.307	0.136	0.312	2.257	.041
	Soc*CLEc	0.188	0.016	0.188	6.688	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Authentic Leadership

b. Predictors: (Constant), Sociological developmental life attributes

c. Predictors: (Constant), Sociological developmental life attributes, Childhood Critical Life Events, Soc*CLEc

These findings provide evidence that sociological attributes are structural basis for AL. Further, childhood CLE does not hinder leadership; instead, it can enhance authenticity when combined with strong sociological development. Practically, leaders who integrate personal adversity into their leadership style may therefore demonstrate greater empathy, adaptability and credibility. This interpretation was confirmed by eight out of 11 industry experts interviewed, who indicated knowing someone who had experienced a critical life event during their childhood. They stated that these events provoked deeper self-reflection and a crystallization of self-efficacy beliefs that result in promoting authentic leadership traits.

Adulthood Critical Life Events (CLEa), Authentic Leadership (AL) and Socioeconomic Outcomes (SEO)

Step 1: Direct Effect of AL on SEO

Results in Table 5 show that AL has a clear and statistically significant influence on SEO. With the model suggests that AL accounts for about one-fifth ($R^2 = .203$, Adjusted. = .198) of the variance in SEO, which is meaningful, though it also indicates that other factors contribute to these outcomes. The standardized coefficient ($\beta = 0.450$, $p < 0.05$) demonstrates a moderately strong positive relationship, meaning that for every unit increase in AL, socioeconomic outcomes improves by 0.45 units, holding other factors constant. In practical terms, when leaders act authentically, followers report better social outcomes, such as trust, collaboration, and organizational citizenship behaviours. The regression equation is expressed as:

$$SEO = 4.110 + 0.450AL$$

Table 5. Regression Results: SEO on AL**Model Summary:**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.450 ^a	0.203	0.198	0.09550

ANOVA:

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	0.620	1	0.620	56.364	.000 ^b
	Residual	2.476	231	0.011		
	Total	3.096	232			

Coefficients:

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	4.110	.105		39.113	.000
	Authentic Leadership	.200	.045	.450	4.486	.001

a. Dependent Variable: Socioeconomic Outcomes (SEO)

b. Predictors: (Constant), Authentic Leadership (AL)

Vast empirical evidence points that AL consistently predicts stronger socioeconomic outcomes. Jun et al. (2023) confirmed that AL enhances hope and organizational citizenship behaviour through follower identification, reinforcing the role of social identity processes. Similarly, Schoofs et al. (2014) held that AL fosters self-actualization at work, mediated by follower authenticity and psychological need satisfaction.

Step 2: The Moderating Effect of Adulthood CLE on AL and SEO

In the first model, AL was entered as a predictor of SEO, yielding a significant effect (Adj. $R^2 = .198$) which indicates that AL alone explains about 20% of the variation in SEO. In the second model, adulthood CLE and the interaction term were included, which improved the explanatory power (Adj. $R^2 = .328$) as shown in Table 6, meaning that the inclusion accounted for an additional 13% ($\Delta R^2 = +0.130$), of the variance in SEO. The significant interaction term ($\beta = .220$, $p < 0.05$) from the coefficient results demonstrates that CLEa moderates the relationship between AL and SEO. The fitted model is expressed as:

$$SEO = 3.578 + .360(AL) + .280(CLEa) + .220(Soc * CLEa)$$

Table 6. Moderation Effect**Model Summary:**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics					
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change	
1	.450 ^a	.203	.198	.09550	.203	56.364	1	231	.000	
2	.580 ^b	.336	.328	.07650	.133	26.601	2	229	.000	

ANOVA:

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	0.620	1	0.620	56.364	.000 ^b
	Residual	2.476	231	0.011		
	Total	3.096	232			
2	Regression	.596	3	.199	18.190	.000 ^c
	Residual	2.501	229	.011		
	Total	3.096	232			

Coefficients:

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error			
1	(Constant)	4.110	.105		39.113	.000
	Authentic Leadership	.200	.045	.450	4.486	.001
2	(Constant)	3.578	.956		3.743	.000
	Authentic Leadership	.249	.056	.360	4.446	.001
	Adulthood Critical Life Events	.205	.063	.280	3.254	.013
	AL*CLEa	.150	.036	.220	4.167	.005

a. Dependent Variable: Socioeconomic Outcomes

b. Predictors: (Constant), Authentic Leadership

c. Predictors: (Constant), Authentic Leadership, Adulthood Critical Life Events, AL*CLEa

Interpretively, the positive coefficient for CLE ($\beta=0.280$, $p<0.05$) suggests that adulthood phase critical life events, serving as transformative experiences that refine a leader's relational and ethical capacities, independently contribute to socioeconomic outcomes. The interaction term ($\beta=0.220$, $p<0.05$) confirmed that adulthood CLE amplify the positive effects of AL. Seven industry experts who indicated knowing colleagues who had experienced adulthood critical events during their career corroborated these findings. These events positively provoked them to make the most of their lives mainly through self-awareness and self-acceptance. These aspects were integrated into their career provoking individual success, organizational success and societal impact.

It was observed that the standardized coefficient of AL dropped from .450 to .360 ($\Delta\beta = -0.09$) after the introduction of the moderator. This could imply that when critical life events or their memory is brought to the attention of the young professionals, the contribution to socioeconomic outcomes by authenticity declines. Research in psychology suggests that unresolved traumatic experiences, for instance, may continue to impair emotional regulation, reflective capacity, and interpersonal functioning, which are core foundations of AL. When young professionals recall or reactivate CLE, they trigger intrusive memories, emotional distress, or avoidance, which reduces their ability to translate authenticity into positive socioeconomic outcomes. This helps explain why the influence of AL may weaken when salient adverse experiences remain insufficiently processed.

Padmanabhanunni (2020) who established that traumatic exposure among university students in South Africa was highly prevalent and significantly associated with ongoing distress, indicating lasting effects on adaptive functioning, further supports the foregoing view. Another study in Kenya and Uganda also reported that trauma exposure was strongly linked to probable post-traumatic stress disorder, with persistent symptoms such as hypervigilance, intrusive recollections and emotional dysregulation (Sharma et al., 2024). These findings underscore that unless traumatic experiences are adequately processed, they may constrain the reflective self-awareness and relational effectiveness necessary for AL to generate optimal socioeconomic outcomes.

5.0 SUMMARY, DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Summary and Implications

The study first sought to determine the moderating effect of childhood phase CLE on the relationship between developmental life attributes and AL analyzing both primary quantitative and qualitative data. Descriptively, findings indicated that the level of authentic leadership embraced and adopted was to a high extent while the level of socioeconomic outcome attained was to a moderate degree. Both psychological and sociological sources contributing to this authenticity were considered important to a high extent. Critical life events both in childhood and adulthood phases were perceived to have affected the respondents in a relatively positive way.

Regression results established that CLE in childhood moderated the relationship between psychological and sociological life developmental attributes and AL. These life events amplified the contribution of psychological and sociological traits such as values, attitudes, self-concept, and personality to the formation of AL. These findings raised an important implication. Both the explanatory power and the effect of psychological and sociological developmental attributes were enhanced as the index of childhood critical life events was introduced as a moderating factor. The effect of psychological developmental attributes improved by 0.07 while the level of variation in the amount of AL formed improved by 0.294, while that of sociological developmental attributes improved by 0.051 and 0.096 respectively. This indicated that childhood experiences strengthen the degree of contribution of the psychological and sociological developmental attributes to the formation of AL attributes among the sampled leaders. Thus, critical childhood life experiences are relevant for consideration when developing programs for developing authentic leaders.

While some scholars such as Comolli et al. (2024), Satish and Kumar (2026), and Marc et al. (2023) emphasize that CLE are well established risk factors that can impair adult social functioning, our findings highlight a more nuanced picture. Specifically, when psychological attributes are strong, childhood CLE appear to act as developmental crucibles that enhance authenticity. This extends the common assertion that adversity can hinder function in some domains, yet simultaneously foster resilience and authenticity when buffered by psychological capital and mindfulness. In this way, CLE may produce divergent outcomes: risk in one trajectory and growth in another, depending on the presence of protective psychological resources. Our results therefore align with resilience theory, suggesting that adversity is not uniformly detrimental but can, under certain conditions, strengthen the Psy-AL relationship.

The researchers also sought to study the moderating effect of adulthood phase CLE on the relationship between AL and SEO. Descriptive statistics showed that half of the respondents reported experiencing critical adulthood events with a mean aggregate score of 3.470. The experience of death of a close family member had the strongest influence, while natural disasters and parental separation or divorce each had a lower impact. Regression analysis depicted CLE in adulthood enhancing the relationship between AL and SEO. This was echoed in the qualitative findings, as interviewees recounted how adversity made them value leaders who were genuine and empathetic. Respondents noted that these experiences served as transformational moments that refined leaders' ethical decision-making and relational transparency.

These findings have two major implications. First, the researchers were interested in understanding how the adulthood CLE affect the contribution of the formed level of authentic leadership towards socioeconomic outcomes. The mixed experience was observed in the difference in the manner the construct of authenticity behaved when CLE was introduced as a moderating factor. The explanatory power displayed by the adjusted R^2 improved by 0.13 while the effect of AL on socioeconomic outcomes was positive but declined by 0.09. This was interpreted to mean that when CLE or the memory is brought to the attention of the young professionals, the contribution

to socioeconomic outcomes by authenticity declines. This point is vital to the management of the organizations to pay attention to coping mechanisms by the practicing young professionals when they face interruptions arising from CLE.

Secondly, the implications of the fitted moderation models are important for both theory and practice. Theoretically, they support the contingency perspectives in leadership research, showing that leadership effectiveness depends on contextual moderators such as life events. Practically, it suggests that leadership development programs should not only cultivate AL behaviours but also recognize and integrate employees' lived experiences into organizational strategies. By doing so, organizations can maximize the socioeconomic benefits of leadership.

Based on the descriptive characteristics and the regression results, the study makes several conclusions:

First, psychological and sociological developmental attributes serve as valid sources of the attributes of AL. Even though both contribute positively, sociological developmental attributes have a relatively higher level of contribution to the formation of authenticity. Second, AL traces its nature from its psychological and sociological sources based on the exposure individuals have experienced from their contexts of birth, growth and development. The components of AL most of which are related to individual's personality vary in the degree to which they trace their source from the psychological and sociological developmental attributes.

Finally, empirical evidence revealed that authentic leadership significantly predicts socioeconomic outcomes. Critical life events that an individual experiences in their childhood and adulthood phases of life contribute to the level of authentic leadership that they form as well as the corresponding outcomes of their practice of authenticity. Thus, both childhood and adulthood CLE strengthen the level of authenticity formed from its psychological and sociological antecedents as well as the outcomes of authenticity in the form of individual, organizational and societal socioeconomic developmental outcomes. When integrated, these findings suggest that AL is most effective when contextualized by lived experiences, offering a fuller explanation of the variances in their outcomes.

6.0 LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Methodologically, convergent parallel design raises the issue of timing and equivalence. Since both quantitative and qualitative data is collected simultaneously, it can be challenging to ensure that both strands truly address the same research agenda with equal depth. When one strand is more robust than the other, the integration may appear unbalanced, potentially skewing the interpretation of findings.

Secondly, while quantitative findings may be statistically generalizable, qualitative insights are context-specific and tied to participants' lived experiences. This duality means that while mixed methods approach provides richer understanding, it may not always yield conclusions that are

broadly applicable. Additionally, practical constraints such as sample size, and resource demands limit the depth of analysis. Recognizing these limitations helps situate the findings appropriately and underscores the need for cautious interpretation.

Drawing on the study findings, the authors propose key recommendations. First, organizations should prioritize authentic leadership development in their training and mentoring programs. Since AL has shown to positively influence socioeconomic outcomes, especially when moderated by adulthood CLE, leaders should be encouraged to cultivate self-awareness, transparency, balanced decision making, and relational authenticity. This will help employees not only achieve career progression but also navigate life challenges more effectively.

Second, organizations should integrate employees' lived experiences into leadership and career development frameworks. The moderation effect of CLE suggests that individuals derive greater benefits from AL when they have experienced adversity or transitions. Frameworks that acknowledge and leverage these experiences can enhance adaptability and meaning-making, thereby amplifying the positive impact of leadership. In the media industry, lived experiences, especially CLE can be leveraged as assets in story-telling and reporting. Journalists and media professionals who have navigated adversity often bring unique perspectives that enrich coverage and resonate with diverse audiences.

Finally, policy makers and organizational leaders should adopt a holistic approach to employee support, recognizing that career success is shaped by both leadership structures and personal life contexts. This means designing inclusive policies that provide resources for employees undergoing CLE such as relocation, family changes, or health challenges. By doing so, institutions can create environments where adversity becomes a catalyst for growth, ultimately leading to stronger socioeconomic outcomes for individuals and more resilient organizations.

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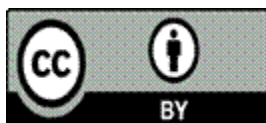
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