Faith in Research 2018:
The science of clergy work-related psychological wellbeing

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Stress levels among parish clergy: The benefit of feeling supported

New insights from the Church Growth Research Programme
Structure

- Abstract
- Introduction
- Results
- Conclusion
ABSTRACT
Abstract

The present study draws on data generated by the Church Growth Research Programme among 1,268 full-time stipendiary Church of England clergy aged 68 or under to test the extent to which the sense of feeling supported by professional advisers (positive affect) may offset the sense of feeling stressed (negative affect), after taking into account a range of personal, psychological, environmental and theological or ecclesial factors.
Abstract

The data found that the sense of feeling supported by professional advisers reduced the levels of self-reported stress after controlling for personal, psychological, environmental, and theological or ecclesial factors. The implications of these findings for the provision of formal support mechanisms within dioceses is discussed.
INTRODUCTION
Part 1
Conceptualisation
Shaping the field

- How we conceptualise good work-related psychological health matters
- How we describe poor work-related psychological health matters
- How we discuss burnout matters
- Consider two contrasting models
Christina Maslach

Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI)

- high emotional exhaustion
- high depersonalisation
- low personal accomplishment
Christina Maslach

- a sequential model
- one thing leads to another
Leslie J. Francis

Francis Burnout Inventory (FBI)

- high emotional exhaustion
- low satisfaction
Leslie J. Francis

- a balanced affect model
- one thing off sets another
Part 2
Learning from the balanced affect model
Personal factors
Age

Older clergy record

- lower emotional exhaustion
- higher satisfaction
Sex

No clear pattern
Contextual factors
Denomination

Catholic clergy

• higher emotional exhaustion
• higher satisfaction
Denomination

Newfrontiers Lead Elders

- lower exhaustion
- higher satisfaction
Environment

Rural clergy

- lower satisfaction
- no difference in exhaustion
Psychological factors
Eysenck’s model

- stable extraverts are more resilient
- neurotic introverts are more vulnerable
Psychological type

- Introverts are more vulnerable
- Thinking types are more vulnerable
Preventative strategies
Francis and Turton, 2004

Reflective practice

- no effect on emotional exhaustion
- positive effect on satisfaction
Prayer

- lower emotional exhaustion
- higher satisfaction
Cats

• no effect on emotional exhaustion
• no effect on satisfaction
Dogs

- higher emotional exhaustion
- no effect on satisfaction
Research aim
Research aim

- Secondary analysis of data from the Church Growth Research Programme to see how far this supports the balanced affect model
- Take stress as negative affect
- Take feeling supported as positive affect
METHOD
Procedure

- Church Growth Research Programme 2013
- Online survey of churches (Voas & Watt, 2014)
- 3,735 churches invited
- 1,703 churches responded (46%)
- 1,516 clergy responses
Participants

- 1,268 full-time stipendiary clergy aged 68 or under
Dependent variable

- ‘How stressed are you’
- Very low stress (1)
- Very high stress (7)
- Mean = 4.6; SD = 1.4
Informal support

Among your family, colleagues and contacts, do you have someone with whom you are able to be completely honest, who encourages and supports you and is really concerned for you in your daily life and work

- None (1)
- Three or more people (4)
Formal support

How much support do you receive from professional advisers

- ‘Very little’ or ‘some support but not enough’ (1)
- ‘A great deal of support’ (4)
Analysis

A series of hierarchical linear regression models

- Personal factors
- Psychological factors
- Family-related factors
- Church-related factors
- Theological factors
- Support factors
RESULTS
Profile
Age

- Under 40 8%
- 40-49 27%
- 50-59 46%
- 60-69 19%
Sex

- Male 81%
- Female 19%
Marital status

- Single 11%
- Not single 89%
Children at home

- Yes      48%
- No       52%
Other churches

- 0: 49%
- 1: 18%
- 2: 12%
- 3: 9%
- >3: 12%
Other responsibilities

- Some  80%
- None  21%
Clergy colleagues

- Some  67%
- None  33%
Church tradition

- Anglo-Catholic 29%
- Broad Church 37%
- Evangelical 35%
Conservatism

- Liberal 30%
- Middle 49%
- Conservative 21%
Charismaticism

- Not Charismatic 25%
- Middle 51%
- Charismatic 24%
Informal support

- None: 7%
- One person: 33%
- Two people: 26%
- Three or more people: 34%
Formal support

- Very little or not enough 35%
- Reasonable or a great deal 65%
Psychological type

- I 55%
- N 56%
- F 59%
- J 76%
RESULTS

Levels of stress
Stress score on 7-point scale

- Mid point is 4
- Less than 4 23%
- 4 19%
- More than 4 58%
- 6 21%
- 7 7%
RESULTS
Regression
## Six models

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Personal factors

- No sex differences
- Older clergy less stressed
Psychological type

- Introverts more stressed
Emotionality

- Key psychological predictor  .36***
Family-related factors

- Children at home more stressed 0.09***
- No marital status difference
Church-related factors

- No effect from more churches
- No effect from clergy colleagues
- No effect from other responsibilities
Theological factors

- Anglo-Catholics more stressed \(0.07^*\)
- Conservatives more stressed \(0.07^*\)
- No effect from Charismatics
Support factors

- Informal support less stressed
- Formal support less stressed \(-.15^{***}\)
CONCLUSION
Conclusion

Working with the balanced affect model of clergy work-related psychological wellbeing, this study has suggested that clergy who feel that they receive support from professional advisers also report lower levels of stress, compared with clergy of comparable sex, age, psychological profile, and theological formation.
Conclusion

This finding raises further research questions concerning what experiences underpin such positive perceptions and how diocesan structures may best promote the view among Anglican clergy that they are well supported in this way.
Conclusion

What is, however, already clear from the present analysis is that the positive experience of professional support far outweighs the positive experience of personal support from family and friends. This suggests that there is something special for Anglican clergy in feeling that the Church itself may be investing in their wellbeing and promoting their sense of personal and professional worth.
Conclusion

Inevitable weaknesses with the present study arise from the very nature of the re-analysis of data largely collected for other purposes. The two core variables in these analyses, namely the measure of stress and the measure of formal support, could both have been much stronger. The findings, however, are of sufficient merit to encourage further research of this nature to employ both richer measures of stress, burnout or negative affect, and a more nuanced measure of perceived formal support.
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