

Faith in Research 2018:

The science of clergy work-related psychological wellbeing

Leslie J. Francis (University of Warwick)

David Voas (University College London)

Andrew Village (York St John University)

**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

Francis, L.J. and Turton, D.W. (2004), Reflective ministry and empirical theology: antidote to clergy stress? in C.A.M. Hermans and M.E. Moore (eds) *Hermeneutics and Empirical Research in Practical Theology: the contribution of empirical theology by Johannes A van der Ven*, pp 245-265, Leiden, Brill.

Reflective practice

- no effect on emotional exhaustion
- positive effect on satisfaction

Turton and Francis, 2007

Turton, D.W. and Francis, L.J. (2007), The relationship between attitude toward prayer and professional burnout among Anglican parochial clergy in England: are praying clergy healthier clergy?, *Mental Health, Religion and Culture*, 10, 61-74.

Prayer

- lower emotional exhaustion
- higher satisfaction

Francis, Turton and Loudon, 2007

Francis, L.J., Turton, D.W. and Loudon, S.H. (2007), Dogs, cats and Catholic parochial clergy in England and Wales: exploring the relationship between companion animals and work-related psychological health, *Mental Health, Religion and Culture*, 10, 47-60.

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

| | R ² | Δ |
|--------------------------|----------------|--------|
| • Personal factors | .01 | |
| • Psychological factors | .15 | .14*** |
| • Family-related factors | .16 | .01* |
| • Church-related factors | .16 | .00 |
| • Theological factors | .17 | .01* |
| • Support factors | .19 | .02*** |

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 .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 .07*
- Conservatives more stressed .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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