

EMOTIONAL EXHAUSTION AND ITS EFFECT ON CLERGY MENTAL HEALTH IN KENYA: A CASE OF CHRIST IS THE ANSWER MINISTRIES

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ABSTRACT

Purpose of the study: The present study sought to contribute to knowledge production on the link between clergy emotional exhaustion and mental health by empirically investigating the influence of emotional exhaustion on mental health of clergy in Kenya using the case of Christ Is the Answer Ministries.

Short introduction of problem statement: Emotional exhaustion is a complex phenomenon associated with the clergy profession. Its implication on mental health of clergy makes it a subject of continuing psychosocial importance. This is because effectiveness of clergy in ministry depends on their mental health. However, its implications on mental health of clergy in Kenya has not been adequately addressed in literature.

Method/methodology: A combination of descriptive and correlational research design was used. Christ Is The Answer Ministries was selected for the research. The focus of this study was 91 clergy members of CITAM. The accessible population was 86 clergy members based in Kenya. Scale of Emotional Exhaustion in Ministry was used to measure emotional exhaustion prevalence levels. Mental health was measured using a simple 5-point Likert scale developed after examining both the Riff's Psychological Well-Being Scale and Warwick-Edinburgh Mental-Wellbeing Scale. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques such as mean and standard deviation. Spearman's Rank Correlation was used to estimate correlation of study variables.

Results of the study: Clergy mental health was negatively and significantly correlated to feelings of emotional drain, perceived emotional breakdown. Overall, emotional exhaustion

score was not statistically significant. The adverse impact of emotional exhaustion was potentially tempered by fulfilment from undertaking clergy work.

Conclusion and recommendation: Emotional exhaustion is prevalent among members of the clergy profession. Given that members of the clergy are often among the first responders to traumatic experiences of members of the congregation, interventions that enhance the frequency and depth of Psychological First Aid by professional counsellors should be enhanced. Clergy should also be equipped with self-care strategies to navigate the psychological ramifications of the profession.

Keywords: *Emotional Exhaustion, Clergy, Mental Health, Psychological Resources, Psychological First Aid*

INTRODUCTION

The role of clergy in maintaining a coherent world order cannot be gainsaid. According to McBride *et al.* (2013), clergy's work is among the most trusted profession, with individuals and families turning to clergy for help in a wide variety of traumatic experiences. Proeschold-Bell *et al.* (2015) posit that the counselling in which clergy engage often touches on grief as they officiate funerals and clergy are the first responders to many people seeking help when depressed. They also often mediate over difficult conflict in church and between family members and deal with related emergencies which added to already exacting routine tasks of preparing and delivering sermons, leading worship and providing organizational leadership to the church (Doehring, 2013). This exposure leads to often traumatic experiences, coupled with time-pressure that multiple roles exact on the clergy can take a toll on them if psychosocial resources are not available to cushion them from emotional shocks. This has led to the emergence of the notion of emotional exhaustion among the clergy.

Emotional exhaustion refers to the mental and physical wear and tear that results from interaction with co-workers and with beneficiaries of the service provided (Velando-soriano *et al.*, 2018). It is the product of depletion of internal emotional resources in the provision of clergy services. Its symptoms include emotional drain from clergy work, struggle to work with people, frustration in work and morning fatigue. It is associated with feelings of psychological depletion. It manifests in the form of tiredness, lack of pleasure in hitherto pleasurable activities and difficulty in concentration (Fekadu *et al.*, 2017). Everyone can experience emotional exhaustion. However, people who work in the helping profession such as the clergy are among the most vulnerable to emotional exhaustion. This is because clergy are frequently exposed to highly distressing news and situations in the course of discharging

their duties such as death of a member or a members' loved one, distressed marriages, hospitalization of a member and other forms of traumatic experiences (Proeschold-Bell et al., 2013). This is because clergy are important community resources offering support to persons in need and are often the first to be called upon during emotional struggles.

Pickens (2015) argues that too many members of the clergy do not have anyone close enough around them to relax and just be themselves. This results to loneliness in clergy work which has negative impact on their mental health. This adds to the emotional exhaustion associated with clergy work. This manifest in fatigue at the end of working hours, frustrations with work, sleep disorder, loss of energy and being emotionally discharged (Abarghouei et al., 2016; Sinthya et al., 2019).

Although the subject of emotional exhaustion is complex, its implication on mental health of clergy makes it a subject of continuing psychosocial importance (Muse et al., 2016). This is because effectiveness of clergy in ministry depends on their mental health. This fact underscores the importance of ensuring that clergy are mentally healthy and fit to discharge their duties since the mental health of not just the clergy but a whole congregation depends on the ministry they receive. When clergy experience emotional exhaustion, they may disengage from service or behave in counterproductive ways to their calling. Therefore, if emotional exhaustion among clergy is not prevented or contained, the mental health of a whole church is at risk.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Emotional exhaustion has been found to lead to numerous forms of psychological distress including anxiety and depression (Miles & Proeschold-Bell, 2013). Putman and Erickson (2011) conducted research among the Native Guatemalan and Kenyan faith based humanitarian organizations and reported that they are frequently exposed to stressful working conditions that takes a toll on their psychosocial reserves. The study further adds that natives were especially vulnerable to natural and man-made disasters such as disease and armed conflict. Francis and Crea (2015) studied the psychological health of catholic priests in Italy and whether it was related to clergy profession. Results revealed significant correlation between emotional exhaustion and low mental health as indicated by psychological distress and low morale. Given the strong link between low morale and low sense of accomplishment,

it can be deduced that burnout had deleterious effects on psychosocial efficacy. Whether the same results are applicable to the Kenyan context was the subject of the current study. This resonates well with the Kenyan clergy whereby a study by Ruto (2015) in African Gospel Church in Bomet County, Kenya showed the existence of a high prevalence of emotional exhaustion with notable adverse implications on mental health of the clergy, their families, and congregants they serve.

Research has also established that the multiple roles that clergy often perform lead to role strain and conflicts which can cause stress and emotional depletion (Miles & Proeschold-Bell, 2013). Other studies have found inverse relationship between length of tenure in clergy work and emotional exhaustion (Jin, 2014). However, whether these assumptions are a true representation of the experiences of clergy in Kenya has not adequately been documented, thus making the current study necessary. Muasa et al. (2021) studied prevalence of emotional exhaustion among Catholic clergy in Lodwar Diocese in Turkana County, Kenya. Descriptive study design was used. Data was collected through questionnaire administration and Focus Group Discussion guide administered on a sample of 131 participants. Results showed that emotional exhaustion was moderately high among respondents. The research was significant for the present study because it highlighted the extent to which emotional exhaustion manifested among the clergy in Kenya. The study however did not investigate implications on mental health of participants hence presenting a knowledge gap.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The present study sought to contribute to knowledge production on the link between clergy emotional exhaustion and mental health by empirically investigating the influence of emotional exhaustion on mental health of clergy in Kenya using the case of Christ Is the Answer Ministries.

RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

H₀: There is statistically significant effect of emotional exhaustion on clergy mental health in Kenya.

EMPIRICAL REVIEW

Clergy are at the frontline of moral purity in society through religious participation and guidance. Calling it the “Fishbowl Effect”, Samau and Schoeffel (2015) observe that clergy are expected to provide a model of an ideal family. Arguably, this high expectation is also traced to the Bible where it states inter alia that a church minister “must be the husband of but one wife, a good manager of his children and of his own household” and should make every effort to present himself as “one approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth” (1 Timothy 3:12; 2 Timothy 2:15). The claims by Samau and Schoeffel (2015) are however subject to empirical analysis since most of the arguments presented are supported by anecdotal evidence which is less compelling than evidence obtained from scientific research.

Clergy are also susceptible to emotional exhaustion because they are often at the frontline of moral purity in society through religious participation and guidance. They are thus routinely accorded a different treatment from the rest; their children may be excluded by their peers, and spouses may find it difficult to confide with non-family members (Aulhouse, 2013). The public nature of clergy work magnifies work stress associated with ministry. They are always believed and expected to be healthy both emotionally and spiritually, and should be available and prepared to meet every congregant at their point of emotional and spiritual need (Doehring, 2013). In the process, they get emotionally exhausted in attempts to keep up with these expectations. Gauger and Christie (2013) argue that while administering pastoral care work, the clergy experience more negative interaction from congregants such as criticisms, distress calls, conflict with parishioners, forceful resignations, discouragement and rejection. These negative interactions with the congregation exert a variety of deleterious effects on the clergy potentially affecting their mental health. The negative interactions may deplete the emotional resources the pastor’s spouse and children need to function effectively as members of the pastor’s family and this has a knock-on effect on clergy mental health.

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work, sleep disorder, loss of energy and being emotionally discharged (Abarghouei et al., 2016; Sinthya et al., 2019).

Although the subject of burnout and its subtype of emotional exhaustion is complex, its implication on mental health of clergy makes it a subject of continuing psychosocial importance (Muse et al., 2016). The role of clergy in maintaining a coherent world order cannot be gainsaid. According to McBride et al. (2013), clergy's work is among the most trusted profession, with individuals and families turning to clergy for help in a wide variety of traumatic experiences. Proeschold-Bell et al. (2015) posit that the counselling in which clergy engage often touches on grief as they officiate funerals and clergy are the first responders to many people seeking help when depressed. They also often mediate over difficult conflict in church and between family members and deal with related emergencies which added to already exacting routine tasks of preparing and delivering sermons, leading worship and providing organizational leadership to the church (Doehring, 2013). This exposure leads to often traumatic experiences, coupled with time-pressure that multiple roles exact on the clergy can take a toll on them if psychosocial resources are not available to cushion them from emotional shocks. This has led to the emergence of the notion of emotional exhaustion. Emotional exhaustion has been found to lead to numerous forms of psychological distress including anxiety and depression (Miles & Proeschold-Bell, 2013).

Research has established that the multiple roles that clergy often perform lead to role strain and conflicts which can cause stress and emotional depletion (Miles & Proeschold-Bell, 2013). Other studies have also found inverse relationship between length of tenure in clergy work and emotional exhaustion (Jin, 2014). However, whether these assumptions are a true representation of the experiences of clergy in Kenya has not been documented, thus making the current study necessary.

Francis and Crea (2015) studied the psychological health of catholic priests in Italy and whether it was related to clergy profession. Results revealed significant correlation between emotional exhaustion and low mental health as indicated by psychological distress and low morale. Given the strong link between low morale and low sense of accomplishment, it can be deduced that burnout had deleterious effects on psychosocial efficacy. Whether the same results are applicable to the Kenyan context was the subject of the current study.

Miles and Proeschold-Bell (2013) draw from a number of studies to argue that support from peers can buffer clergymen against occupational stress and burnout through being an emotional outlet and avenue for comparison. They argue that relief can be gained from such peer groups because they provide understanding, support, and forum for emotional release. Members compare notes, encourage each other and share wisdom that help stressed out clergymen to cope. The study by Miles and Proeschold-Bell (2013) was however not undertaken in non-western context, and there is limited evidence of generalizability of studies done in the western world to other parts of the world. There could be potential social and cultural differences that warranted further research enquiry.

Muasa et al. (2021) studied prevalence of emotional exhaustion among Catholic clergy in Lodwar Diocese in Turkana County. Descriptive study design was used. Data was collected through questionnaire administration and Focus Group Discussion guide administered on a sample of 131 participants. Results showed that emotional exhaustion was moderately high among respondents. The research was significant for the present study because it highlighted the extent to which emotional exhaustion manifested among the clergy in Kenya. The study however did not investigate the interaction effect of psychosocial resources on the relationship between emotional exhaustion and mental health of participants hence presenting a knowledge gap.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A combination of descriptive and correlational research design was used. According to Weiten (2012), such a design allows researchers to describe patterns of behaviour and establish associations between variables. Specifically, it was a cross-sectional research. A salient feature of any cross-sectional study is that data is collected at a specific point in time (Kesmodel, 2018). This study design has been applied in related studies such as the investigation of job stress among teachers (Schonfeld et al., 2017), clergy burnout (Smith, 2019) and the role of spirituality and resilience in mitigating burnout (Williams, 2017). The selected research design was relevant for this study because of the researcher's interest in collecting data at one point in time and in the process, measure the prevalence of emotional exhaustion and estimate its relationship strength on clergy mental health.

Christ Is The Answer Ministries (CITAM) was selected because it unapologetically articulates as a statement of faith, a belief in Jesus Christ who offers the liberating gift of the

spirit in whom the clergy should find encouragement, comfort, affection and compassion (Philippians 2:1). This means that CITAM clergy is uniquely resourced than the average member of the helping profession to overcome emotional exhaustion and its adverse effects on their mental health. The focus of this study was 91 clergy members of CITAM. The accessible population was 86 clergy members based in Kenya. A census study was conducted. CITAM church had 25 assemblies in most parts of Kenya, with just a few in the diaspora. Majority of the assemblies in Kenya are located in Nairobi. The rest are scattered over five counties including Machakos County, Kajiado County, Kisumu County, Nakuru County, Uasin Gishu County, Kiambu County, Nyeri County and Kisii County.

Scale of Emotional Exhaustion in Ministry (SEEM) was used to measure emotional exhaustion prevalence levels (Randall, 2013). The scale was specifically designed for application in studies measuring emotional exhaustion among members of the clergy (Burnette, 2016). The SEEM scale comprises eleven items covering aspects such as feeling drained by ministry roles, daily experiences of fatigue and irritation, unexplained sadness, cynicism towards people, lack of enthusiasm towards work, spending less time with flock, sense of discouragement and lack of personal support, frustrations when undertaking tasks, impatience and less flexibility in dealing with flock (Village et al., 2018).

Mental health was measured using a simple 5-point Likert scale developed after examining both the Riff's Psychological Well-Being Scale (WBS) and Warwick-Edinburgh Mental-Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS). The WBS is a 44-item questionnaire that characterizes psychological wellbeing as a construct comprising of self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life and personal growth (Kallay & Rus, 2014). Henn et al. (2016) however cautioned its use after investigating the validity and reliability of its factor structure on a sample of South Africans and found that it was not satisfactorily replicable in the South African context. The tool was found to be unnecessarily lengthy and thus would place a large response burden on research participants (Smith, 2018). The WEMWBS was developed by researchers at the University of Warwick and Edinburgh (Stewart-Brown & Janmohamed, 2008). Unlike the WBS, this is a 14 item scale that covers the subjective wellbeing and psychological functioning of the study subjects to measure positive mental health.

Data was analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques such as mean and standard deviation. Spearman’s Rank Correlation, a non-parametric technique of data analysis that provides a measure of association between study variables (Schober *et al.*, 2018). This technique does not depend on assumption of normality, which made it a suitable test since the data in this research was not normally distributed. Assumptions of association were made only if the coefficients were statistically significant at $p < .05$. All ethical protocols were observed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

After the administration of questionnaires, 60 successful responses were obtained. Table 1 presents descriptive statistics related to emotional exhaustion sub-scales. The table shows the minimum (Min), maximum (Max), mean (μ) and Standard Deviation (σ) Scores for each item.

Table 1: Descriptive Analysis of Emotional Exhaustion Sub-scales

Emotional Exhaustion Dimensions	Min	Max	μ	σ	N
Working with people all day long requires a great deal of effort	1	5	3.60	1.37	60
I feel I work too hard at my job	1	4	2.93	1.21	60
I feel emotionally drained by clergy work	1	5	2.47	1.18	60
I feel like my work is breaking me down	1	4	1.83	0.94	60
I feel frustrated by my work	1	4	1.63	0.78	60
It stresses me too much to work in direct contact with people	1	4	1.53	0.83	60
I feel like I am at the end of my rope	1	4	1.27	0.63	60
Mean index	1	3	2.18	0.64	60

The results indicate that on a scale of 1 to 5, a moderately high mean score was obtained ($\mu=3.60$, $\sigma=1.37$, $N=60$), suggesting that on average, respondents perceived that working with people all day long required a great deal of effort. With respect to whether respondents felt they worked too hard for their job, a moderate mean score was obtained ($\mu=2.93$, $\sigma=1.21$, $N=60$). The frequency distribution of the views of the respondents is presented in figure 8 which clearly shows the proportion of respondents who agreed and those who disagreed as well as those who were neutral. As pertains whether respondents felt emotionally drained by clergy work, a moderately low mean score was computed on a 5-point scale ($\mu=2.47$, $\sigma=1.18$, $N=60$). Concerning whether respondents felt like their work was breaking them down, a low mean score was obtained ($\mu=1.83$, $\sigma=0.94$, $N=60$). This implied that on average, members of CITAM clergy did not experience a sense of break down as a result of clergy work.

Regarding whether respondents felt frustrated by their work, a low mean score was realized on a 5-point scale ($\mu=1.63$, $\sigma=0.83$, $N=60$), suggesting that most of the respondents disagreed that they felt frustrated by clergy work. This implies clergy work was not frustrating for majority of CITAM clergy members within the local assemblies. Table 1 shows that concerning whether respondents felt stressed too much to work in direct contact with people, the mean score was low ($\mu=1.53$, $\sigma=0.83$, $N=60$). This indicates that most of the respondents did not feel too stressed to work in direct contact with people, suggesting that they were probably at their element when working with people. As pertains whether respondents felt like they were at the end of their rope, a very low mean score was obtained ($\mu=1.27$, $\sigma=0.63$, $N=60$), implying that on average, members of CITAM clergy did not feel that they were at the end of their rope.

It was hypothesized that emotional exhaustion had no influence on mental health of clergy. This hypothesis was tested by running Spearman's Rank Correlation analysis at $p<.05$. The output of the computations is a correlation matrix displaying the relationship between various items of emotional exhaustion and the composite measure of clergy mental health. Table 2 shows that clergy mental health was negatively and significantly correlated to feeling of emotional drain due to clergy work ($r=-.267$, $p<.05$, $N=60$), feeling that work is breaking them down ($r=-.312$, $p<.05$, $N=60$), feeling frustrated at work ($r=-.242$, $p>.05$, $N=60$), and feeling at the end of the rope ($r=-.340$, $p<.01$, $N=60$). These results imply that mental health of CITAM clergy declined with increased feelings of emotional drain, frustration with clergy work and feeling that one is at the end of their rope. It means that some aspects of emotional exhaustion were potentially responsible for decreased mental health of clergy. However, although all the correlation coefficients were negative, there was no statistically significant relationship between mental health and feeling that working with people all day long requires a great deal of effort ($r=-.118$, $p>.05$, $N=60$), feeling like working too hard as a clergy ($r=-.016$, $p>.05$, $N=60$), and feeling stressed to work in direct contact with people ($r=-.140$, $p>.05$, $N=60$). This was taken to imply that not all dimensions of emotional exhaustion influenced mental health of CITAM clergy. The correlation between overall emotional exhaustion and mental health of clergy, though negative, was not statistically significant ($r=-.209$, $p>.05$, $N=60$). The results imply that the composite measure of emotional exhaustion did not influence mental health of CITAM clergy.

Table 2: Correlation Coefficient between Emotional Exhaustion Items and Mental Health

Spearman's rho		1
1. Mental health	Correlation Coefficient	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.
	N	60
2. I feel emotionally drained by clergy work	Correlation Coefficient	-.267*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.041
	N	60
3. Working with people all day long requires a great deal of effort	Correlation Coefficient	-.118
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.371
	N	60
4. I feel like work is breaking me down	Correlation Coefficient	-.312*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.015
	N	60
5. I feel frustrated at my work	Correlation Coefficient	-.242
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.063
	N	60
6. I feel work too hard at my job	Correlation Coefficient	-.016
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.901
	N	60
7. It stresses me to work in direct contact with people	Correlation Coefficient	-.140
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.288
	N	60
8. I feel like I am at the end of the rope	Correlation Coefficient	-.340**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.008
	N	60
9. Overall emotional exhaustion	Correlation Coefficient	-.209
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.108
	N	60

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**.. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

DISCUSSION

It was observed from descriptive results that respondents perceived that working with people all day long required a great deal of effort. This finding aligns with past empirical works by Baruch et al. (2014) that reported that clergy work sometimes entailed prolonged engagements with the community which calls for investment of effort. Most of the participants were of the view that working with people demanded a great deal of effort. This

was taken to imply that members of CITAM clergy were at risk of emotional exhaustion due to the effort required to work with people all day long. This is in line with research reports across the globe that suggests that members of the clergy were likely to suffer emotional exhaustion (Cocklin, 2013; Currier, 2016; Miles & Proeschold-Bell, 2013). Samau and Scholffel (2015) observed a similar outcome in which the study found that the expectation of the clergy to provide a model of an ideal family where moral purity was a requirement in a given society besides active religious participation and offering moral guidance, these exert psychological pressure to the members of the clergy in attempts to keep up with societal expectations thus resulting in emotional exhaustion. Likewise, Francis and Crea (2015) found a significant correlation between emotional exhaustion and low mental health in a study on the psychological health of Roman Catholic priests in Italy. The results from the correlation analysis are thus a demonstration of the implications of emotional exhaustion on mental clergy mental health.

From the distribution of findings, it was notable that a section of CITAM clergy believed that they were working too hard at their job while a similar proportion did not perceive so. It is therefore noteworthy that among members of CITAM clergy were a sizeable proportion of clergymen and women who felt drained, which means that they were prone to emotional exhaustion. This is consistent with a US study by Chartrand (2015) which found that most clergy are overworked and feel emotionally fatigued every week. The study implied that clergy work is characterized by working conditions that make clergy susceptible to emotional exhaustion. Robins and Hancock (2015) whose study showed high levels of emotional exhaustion and stress among members of the clergy despite spirited attempts to maintain a positive mental attitude also corroborate this. This may be because the level of emotional exhaustion among the clergy exceed personal resources available to neutralize adverse effects of ministry.

Further findings indicated that a substantial proportion of CITAM clergy experienced emotional drain, which also means that they were prone to emotional exhaustion. This is in keeping with prevalence of emotional drain reported in other parts of the world such as the USA where self-reports ranged from 13 percent to 45 percent (Jackson-Jordan, 2013) and in Europe where research data indicated that 27 percent of pastors from a number of denominations in New Zealand, England and Australia experienced emotional exhaustion on

a daily basis (Barnard & Curry, 2012). In light of the results, it can be construed that emotional drain is a universal experience of the profession.

The findings showed that most of the participants held the view contrary to the claim that clergy work was breaking them down, suggesting that they got fulfilment from undertaking clergy work. This is contrasted to the viewpoint by Miles and Proeschold-Bell (2013) who suggested that clergy were prone to emotional depletion due to the nature of their work. This was taken to imply that experiences of emotional breakdown and depletion varied from context to context as there are potential personal and environmental influences that may regulate such experiences. The experiences of emotional exhaustion reflected in the responses may be attributable to the multiple roles and responsibilities as well as expectations that go with church leadership. As Doehring (2013) notes, members of the clergy are expected to assume multiple and sometimes conflicting roles including as preachers, pastoral caregivers, administrators, liturgists and educators. Further, they are expected to distinguish between these roles, manage their boundaries in an environment where drawing the line between professional work and social role is extremely difficult. The empirical evidence demonstrates that this working condition can be emotionally exhausting.

CONCLUSIONS

Emotional exhaustion is prevalent among members of the clergy profession. However, not all dimensions of emotional exhaustion significantly influenced clergy wellbeing. The dimensions that were significant included: Perceived emotional drain, perceived emotional breakdown, and perceived hopelessness.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Given that members of the clergy are often among the first responders to traumatic experiences of members of the congregation, interventions that enhance the frequency and depth of Psychological First Aid (PFA) by professional counsellors should be enhanced. This should be made readily available to clergy members in need of PFA and should be a requirement for all members of the clergy who have been exposed to traumatic events. Clergy should also be equipped with self-care strategies to navigate the psychological ramifications of the profession.

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