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ASSESSING-EMOTIONAL EXHAUSTION AMONG THE AUSTRALIAN CLERGY: INTERNAL RELIABILITY AND CONSTRUCT VALIDITY OF THE SCALE OF EMOTIONAL EXHAUSTION IN MINISTRY (SEEM)

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The concept of emotional exhaustion is central to understanding the phenomenon of burnout among those engaged in people-centred caring professions. The Scale of Emotional Exhaustion in Ministry (SEEM) was developed and tested on a sample of 4,370 Australian clergy who participated in the National Church Life Survey. This 11-item measure of emotional exhaustion was found to be unidimensional using confirmatory factor analysis. The scale was demonstrated to be reliable ($\alpha=0.883$) and construct validity was supported by means of correlations with other survey questions. In addition, the data demonstrated that emotional exhaustion was more prevalent among younger clergy than among older clergy, and more prevalent among clergy associated with some denominations than with other denominations. With such psychometric properties the Scale of Emotional Exhaustion in Ministry can be commended for further use, but with further psychometric evaluation desirable.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of emotional exhaustion is central to understanding the phenomenon of burnout among those engaged in people-centred caring professions (Cordes and Dougherty 1993). This view is consistent with Freudenberger's (1974, 1975) classic understanding of burnout as a discrete factor, signified by physical and emotional indicators and linked with a predisposition to fail, to wear out, or become exhausted by making excessive demands on energy, strength, or resources, and with Christina Maslach's much-used Burnout Inventory.

The model of burnout proposed by Maslach and Jackson (1986) places alongside emotional exhaustion two related constructs defined as depersonalisation and lack of personal accomplishment. The three components model of burnout offers the following definitions. Those involved in the caring professions experience emotional exhaustion as their emo-

tional resources are depleted: workers feel no longer able to give of themselves at a psychological level. Depersonalisation is recognised by the development of negative, cynical attitudes and feelings about clients, seeing them as somehow deserving of their troubles. Reduced sense of personal accomplishment is recognised by the tendency to evaluate work with clients negatively: workers feel unhappy about themselves and dissatisfied with their accomplishments.

The Maslach Burnout Inventory has been used to assess emotional exhaustion among those involved in many of the caring professions, including nursery school teachers (Hisashige 1993), secondary school teachers (Chan 1995), university teachers (Blix, Cruise, Mitchell, and Blix 1994), health care professionals (Bennett, Kelaher, and Ross 1994), adult day care providers (Wilber and Specht 1994), nurses (Lavanco 1997), psychologists (Acklerley, Burnell, Holder, and Kurdek 1988), psychotherapists (van der Ploeg, van Leeuwen, and Kwee 1990), police officers (Beehr, Johnson, and Nieva 1995), and working college students (Chang, Rand, and Strunk 2000). Comparatively little use has been made, however, of the Maslach Burnout Inventory in its original form among clergy, apart from a few studies like Warner and Carter (1984) and Rodgerson and Piedmont (1998).

One reason for the lack of use of the Maslach Burnout Inventory among clergy concerns the inappropriateness of the wording of some of the items for those engaged in pastoral and religious ministry. Clergy often object to referring to those among whom they minister as "clients." The Consulting Psychologists Press have given permission for a modified form of the Maslach Burnout Inventory to be used among clergy reported in a series of studies by Loudon (1998), Rutledge (1999), Musson (2000), and Francis and Rutledge (2000). There are, however, two significant problems in building future research on this instrument. First, while retaining copyright hold on the modified form of the scale, the publishers have declined to make it publicly available, which may lead to uncertainty regarding the long term availability of the instrument. Second, although building on Maslach's original instrument, the modification destroys strict comparability between studies conducted among clergy and studies conducted among other professional groups using the original form. In other words, it makes a great deal of sense to set out to develop a thoroughly new approach to assessing burnout among the clergy.

By assessing separately the negative components of burnout (emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation) and the absence of the positive component (personal accomplishment), Maslach's model of burnout has much in common with the more widely accepted notion of psychological well-being as the product of balanced affect, in the sense of the presence of positive affect and the absence of negative affect (Bradburn 1969). Building on this model, future research concerned with burnout among the clergy might well be advised to make a clear distinction between and to assess separately work-related satisfaction as an indicator of positive affect and emotional exhaustion as an indicator of negative affect.

This clear distinction between assessing positive affect and negative affect may help to resolve a long-standing debate in research concerned with clergy physical and psychological health. On the one hand, one group of studies consistently points to the high level of health and positive affect enjoyed by the clergy and their high levels of job satisfaction. For example, Davies, Watkins and Winter (1991) found positive affect among the rural clergy of the Church of England and Fitcher (1984) dismissed burnout among Catholic clergy as a myth, finding less than 4% troubled with "mental illness." Fletcher (1990) found that the percentages of clergy who scored at significantly elevated levels on the depression, free

flowing anxiety, and somatic anxiety scales were very low indeed. Most recently Rose (1999), using data from the British Household Panel Survey, found that clergy were showing the second highest level of satisfaction with their job, with only medical secretaries scoring higher. On the other hand, a second group of studies draws to the surface the high level of ill health and negative affect experienced by the clergy. For example, Sanford (1982) maintained that ministers are particularly susceptible in their work to the feeling of joyless exhaustion. Coate (1989) maintained that stress-related phenomena among clergy is exacerbated by their reluctance to admit to perceived failure. Davey (1995) concluded that ministry is a particularly stressful occupation. Kirk and Leary (1994:166) explored the problem of illness among the clergy in the following terms.

A job which is often seven days a week, lack of leisure time and holidays, constant nagging worries about money, frequent moves, the inescapability of living "over the shop," the pressures of bearing so many expectations, so much pain, the new skills to be learned, the new role to be discerned, the upheaval and change in the church, the feeling of being at worst a failure, at best an irrelevance—these factors can take a huge toll on physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health of the clergy household.

Alongside more rigorous academic research has grown a wide range of popular literature on burnout, including various instruments for diagnosis. One of the best known instruments designed for use among clergy is the measure of clergy stress proposed by Oswald (1991). This 16-item scale includes items that appear to access the concept of emotional exhaustion in a way appropriate for clergy, alongside items clearly concerned with other aspects of stress. There is no evidence of the psychometric properties of this instrument having been explored in the scientific literature. In order to build on the emotional exhaustion items already incorporated in Oswald's measure, focus groups conducted among clergy generated a set of new items which reflected the context and experience of pastoral ministry.

Against this background, the present study has reshaped the emotional exhaustion related items from Oswald (1991) and added new items in order to profile the experience of emotional exhaustion among the Australian clergy. The opportunity to do so arose as part of a large scale survey conducted among Australian clergy in 1996. Unfortunately space in the survey did not permit at this stage the development of a parallel instrument concerned with assessing positive affect.

METHOD

Participants and procedure

The data in use here were collected as part of the 1996 National Church Life Survey carried out by NCLS Research with the support of all participating denominations. In August 1996 attendees and leaders from around 6,900 congregations in 20 Anglican and Protestant denominations across Australia completed one of several different NCLS survey forms. Around 80% of congregations receiving forms participated in the survey. Further details of the survey can be found in NCLS publications (e.g. Kaldor, Dixon, and Powell 1999).

In parallel with the attendee surveys, the *senior* minister/pastor/priest in each congregation was asked to complete a Leader Survey, including questions about their job role, levels of stress, and coping mechanisms. In addition leaders were asked about their attitudes to a range of church and wider issues. The survey contained items from the Oswald

(1991) burnout inventory and other items probing associated issues. The majority of these items were rated on a six point scale from 1 (low) to 6 (high). The present analysis was based on 3,816 male and 336 female leaders across 20 denominations who completed the Leader Survey. These leaders often represented several congregations, particularly in denominations with multi-congregation parishes.

Analysis

The analysis aimed to assess first the dimensionality of the items used to measure emotional exhaustion. Second, the resulting total scale score was correlated with eleven other items from the survey which related to the *senior* leader in each congregation in terms of their job role, levels of stress, and coping mechanisms. These correlations can be used to assess the construct validity of the emotional exhaustion scale.

Emotional exhaustion was assessed by a group of eleven items. Each item was rated on a six-point scale. All items were scored so that high responses were indicative of emotional exhaustion. The dimensionality of the items was assessed initially by means of exploratory factor analysis and subsequently by fitting a single factor model to the data using LISREL 8.3 (Jöreskog and Sörbom 1999a). Conceptually, all the items were generated to measure a single construct and as an initial test of dimensionality a maximum likelihood exploratory factor analysis was conducted. One factor was extracted with an eigenvalue of 5.12, the second and subsequent factors all had eigenvalues less than one. This led to the specification of a confirmatory factor model with one factor. A matrix of polychoric correlations and an asymptotic weight matrix were computed using PRELIS 2.3 (Jöreskog and Sörbom 1999b) and the parameters estimated using weighted least squares. The effective sample size after listwise deletion of missing data was 4,091. The chi-square and the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) were used to assess the fit of the model (Steiger, 1990). The RMSEA provides an indication of the global fit of the model, where a value less than 0.05 indicates close fit and values up to 0.08 indicating reasonable errors of approximation in the population (Jöreskog and Sörbom 1993). In addition, the Goodness of Fit Index (GFI: Jöreskog and Sörbom 1981), the Incremental Fit Index (IFI: Bollen 1989), and the Comparative Fit Index (CFI: Bentler 1990) were used to evaluate model fit where values greater than 0.90 are considered to reflect acceptable model fit.

RESULTS

Although the chi-square was large ($\chi^2=912$, $df=44$, $p<0.05$), as is expected with such a large sample size, the other fit indices from the one factor model suggested acceptable model fit. The value of the RMSEA (0.069) was less than the cut-off values suggested by Jöreskog and Sörbom (1993) and the other incremental fit indices (GFI=0.93; IFI=0.901; CFI=0.901) were all greater than 0.9. Although some authors have advocated a higher cut-off value for the GFI (Hu and Bentler 1998; Shevlin and Miles 1998), the collective evidence in terms of the exploratory factor analysis and the other indices suggests that the single factor model is not an unreasonable description of the data. All the factor loadings were positive, high, and statistically significant. This suggested that the eleven items of the emotional exhaustion scale were unidimensional in nature. The factor loadings are reported in Table 1. The eleven items generated an alpha coefficient of 0.883 (Cronbach 1951).

The total scale score of the emotional exhaustion scale was correlated with responses from other questions from the survey. This allowed the assessment of the construct valid-

TABLE 1
Factor loadings for the Emotional Exhaustion Scale

Item	Factor 1: Emotional Exhaustion
I feel drained in fulfilling my functions in my congregation	0.723
Fatigue and irritation are part of my daily experience	0.767
I am invaded by sadness I can't explain	0.746
I am feeling negative or cynical about the people with whom I work.	0.710
I have enthusiasm for my work+	0.798
My humour has a cynical, biting tone	0.616
I find myself spending less and less time with attenders	0.714
I feel supported in my work+	0.705
I find myself frustrated in my attempts to accomplish tasks important to me	0.722
I am less patient with people in my congregation than I used to be	0.677
I am becoming less flexible in my dealings with attenders	0.675
+ these items have been reverse coded	

TABLE 2
Scale of emotional exhaustion: construct validity

Item	r
The congregation/parish and I disagree on my role as minister	+0.385*
It is difficult to find suitable people to fill roles in congregational life	+0.381*
I often think that I am not the right kind of person for this congregation	+0.508*
My marriage and/or family have been negatively affected by my ministry role here	+0.380*
I do not feel accepted here by attenders	+0.432*
I am finding it hard dealing with difficult or critical attenders	+0.460*
The need to move as part of my ministry has made it hard for me to make and keep close friends	+0.313*
I still have a strong sense of call to the ordained ministry	-0.192*
I rate highly my overall effectiveness as a clergy person	-0.361*
I feel high stress in my vocation as a clergy person	+0.540*
I often think of leaving ministry	+0.499*

* p<0.05

ity of the index of emotional exhaustion against a set of characteristics that may be expected to be predicted by high scores recorded on such a scale. The correlations are reported in Table 2.

These data demonstrate that clergy who scored high on the index of emotional exhaustion were also significantly more likely to experience disagreement with their congregation, to find difficulty in finding people to fill roles in congregational life, to doubt that they were the right kind of person for their congregation, to feel that their marriage and family life were negatively affected by their ministry, to find it hard dealing with difficult or critical attenders, to find it hard to make and keep close friends, to feel high stress in their vocation, and to think often of leaving ministry. They were also significantly less likely to have maintained a strong sense of call to the ordained ministry, and to rate highly their effectiveness as a clergy person. Such correlates clearly support the construct validity of the index of emotional exhaustion.

Table 3 presents the mean scores on the scale of emotional exhaustion by sex, age, and denomination. These data demonstrate that there was no significant difference in scores between male clergy and female clergy ($F=2.2$, NS), that younger clergy recorded higher scores than older clergy ($F=20.6$, $P<.001$), and that there were significant differences between denominations ($F=10.3$, $P<.001$).

TABLE 3
Mean scale scores of emotional exhaustion by sex, age, and denomination

group	mean	sd	N
<i>Sex</i>			
male	27.3	7.4	3816
female	26.7	7.3	336
<i>Age</i>			
20-29	29.2	6.5	75
30-39	28.3	7.3	792
40-49	28.1	7.9	1380
50-59	26.5	7.0	1205
60-69	25.5	6.9	627
70 plus	24.1	7.1	76
<i>Denomination</i>			
Anglican	27.9	7.4	1111
Baptist	27.2	7.1	454
Churches of Christ	27.2	7.7	270
Assemblies of God	25.0	6.9	364
Lutheran	28.2	7.3	224
Presbyterian	28.0	7.5	118
Salvation Army	29.8	7.7	284
Uniting Church	26.9	7.3	947
Adventist	27.0	7.5	76

CONCLUSION

The present study has developed and tested a new index of emotional exhaustion appropriate for use among clergy. The sample data were used to test the unidimensionality of the items using confirmatory factor analysis. Initial exploratory factor analysis and the fit indices from the confirmatory factor analysis suggested that the one factor model was an adequate description of the data, indicating that the eleven items measured the same construct. In addition, the data have demonstrated the reliability and construct validity of this instrument. The alpha coefficient (Cronbach 1951) was high ($\alpha=0.883$) and the correlations with other survey items were statistically significant and in a theoretically meaningful direction. With such psychometric properties, the Scale of Emotional Exhaustion in Ministry can be commended for further use, but with further psychometric evaluation desirable. In particular, more sophisticated strategies are required for testing and establishing the construct validity of the instrument.

On a large sample of senior clergy across Australia, three demographic correlates of higher levels of emotional exhaustion have been clearly identified. First, the data have demonstrated that senior male clergy and senior female clergy are equally susceptible to emotional exhaustion. This finding is contrary to the conclusion of several studies using the Maslach Burnout Inventory among other professional groups which report higher scores on the emotional exhaustion scale among women than among men (Burke and Greenglass 1989; van der Ploeg, van Leeuwen, and Kwee 1990; Byrne 1991). However, other studies have demonstrated that personality differences generally well established in the population as a whole between men and women are not found among all clergy, with male clergy following a more feminine profile and female clergy following a more masculine profile (Francis 1991; Robbins, Francis, and Rutledge 1997). In other words, generally expected and well established sex differences in the general population may not be routinely replicated among clergy.

Second, the data have demonstrated that younger clergy are significantly more susceptible to emotional exhaustion than older clergy. This is consistent with Maslach's (1976) original finding that burnout is likely to occur in the earlier years of an individual's professional career and with the findings of subsequent studies among a range of professional groups, including McCarthy (1985), van der Ploeg, van Leeuwen and Kwee (1990), and Byrne (1991). It is also likely that the clergy most susceptible to burnout will have exited from the profession at a younger age, thus leaving the older cohorts with a higher proportion of clergy who are less susceptible to burnout.

Third, the data have demonstrated that there are significant differences in the levels of emotional exhaustion among clergy serving in different denominations. It needs to be recognized, however, that, although statistically significant, the differences in mean scale scores are not large. There is a lack of previous research with which to compare these findings. Replication in other cultures is clearly needed to test the extent to which different denominational styles, ecclesiologies, and patterns of belief promote or inhibit emotional exhaustion among the clergy.

There are two steps which future research should take to build on the present study. The present scale of emotional exhaustion contains eleven items. As part of a continuous process of scale development it would be helpful to test further related items. At the same time, the present scale of emotional exhaustion needs to be complemented by a comparable index of satisfaction with ministry in order to balance positive affect and negative affect.

Meanwhile the present scale may serve as a useful tool to identify those individual clergy who score well above the norms established for their peers. Such high scorers may be prime candidates for ministry burnout.

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