



Factor structure, reliability and validity of the Francis Burnout Inventory Revised among Catholic priests and religious sisters in Italy

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ABSTRACT

Drawing on the model of balanced affect, the Francis Burnout Inventory (FBI) conceptualised good work-related psychological health among religious leaders in terms of negative affect being balanced by positive affect, and operationalised this model with two 11-item scales. Factor analysis on data provided by 287 Catholic priests and religious sisters in Italy proposes reducing each of these scales to 10 items. Construct validity of these revised scales was supported against an independent measure of wellbeing.

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Introduction

The psychometric assessment of burnout among religious professionals rests on clear conceptualisation of the nature of burnout and on the development of reliable and valid measures that operationalise such conceptualisation. The Maslach Burnout Inventory developed by Maslach and Jackson (1986) proposed a three-dimensional model of burnout operationalised by three scales considered to operationalise emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation, and personal accomplishment. The theory underpinning this model conceptualises burnout as a progressive condition beginning with emotional exhaustion. Then emotional exhaustion leads to depersonalisation and depersonalisation leads to a sense of lack of personal accomplishment. Such a sequential model is highly plausible but difficult to demonstrate through the kind of cross-sectional surveys from which most data on burnout are derived. Over the past two decades the Maslach Burnout Inventory has been employed in a number of studies conducted among clergy, including work reported by Evers and Tomic (2003), Golden et al. (2004), Raj and Dean (2005), Miner (2007a, 2007b), Doolittle (2007, 2010), Chandler (2009), Joseph et al. (2010), Buys and Rothmann (2010), Parker and Martin (2011), Joseph et al. (2011), Rossetti (2011), Küçüksüleymanoğlu (2013), Rossetti and Rhoades (2013), Herrera et al. (2014), Proeschold-Bell et al. (2014), Crea and Francis (2015), Adams et al. (2017), Büssing et al. (2017), and Vicente-Galindo et al. (2017).

During the 1990s Francis and colleagues raised questions about the appropriateness of some of the items of the Maslach Burnout Inventory for use among clergy, since some

items failed to reflect the way that clergy generally spoke about their work-related experiences. For example, clergy generally do not speak about those among whom they exercise ministry as “clients”. In response to this criticism, Rutledge and Francis (2004) developed a modified form of the MBI shaped to reflect the experiences and vocabulary of religious leaders. This modified instrument has been tested in a series of studies, including Francis and Rutledge (2000), Kay (2000), Francis et al. (2004b), Francis and Turton (2004a, 2004b), Randall (2004, 2007), Rutledge (2006), Turton and Francis (2007), Francis et al. (2007), Francis et al. (2010), and Miller-Clarkson (2013). Copyright constraints prevented this modified instrument being made readily available for other researchers.

During the 2000s Francis and colleagues began to challenge the adequacy of the sequential or progressive model of burnout to describe the lived experience of religious professionals. Instead, they drew on the classic model of balanced affect as proposed by Bradburn (1969). According to Bradburn’s theories positive affect and negative affect are not opposite poles of a single continuum but independent psychological phenomena. In this sense it is reasonable and possible for an individual to record both high levels of positive affect and high levels of negative affect. According to Bradburn’s theories high levels of positive affect are able to offset high levels of negative affect. According to this model of balanced affect, warning signs of poor work-related psychological health and burnout occur when *high* levels of negative affect coincide with *low* levels of positive affect. The strength of the model is that it generates theories about how the problems of poor work-related psychological health or burnout among religious leaders may be addressed in terms of remedial and preventative strategies. Even when it may not be possible to reduce the causes of emotional exhaustion in ministry, it may be possible to explore ways of compensating for high levels of emotional exhaustion by maximising strategies for enhancing the sense of satisfaction in ministry.

Francis et al. (2005) developed the Francis Burnout Inventory by operationalising the two constructs of work-related negative affect and work-related positive affect that directly reflected the work-related expectations and experiences of religious professionals. In so doing they translated the construct of negative affect into emotional exhaustion in ministry and the construct of positive affect into satisfaction in ministry. These two work-related psychological constructs were then operationalised by separate 11-item scales: Scale of Emotional Exhaustion in Ministry (SEEM), first reported by Francis et al. (2004), and Satisfaction in Ministry Scale (SIMS). The Francis Burnout Inventory has been employed in a diverse range of studies among clergy and religious professionals, including work reported by Francis et al. (2008), Francis et al. (2009), Robbins and Francis (2010), Brewster et al. (2011), Francis et al. (2012), Robbins et al. (2012), Barnard and Curry (2012), Randall (2013a, 2013b, 2015), Francis, Robbins, and Wulff (2013a, 2013b), Francis et al. (2013), Robbins and Francis (2014), Francis et al. (2015), Sterland (2015), Francis and Crea (2015), and Durkee-Lloyd (2016).

The foundation study reported by Francis et al. (2005) established the internal consistency reliability of the two indices of the Francis Burnout Inventory (the Scale of Emotional Exhaustion in Ministry, and the Satisfaction in Ministry Scale) on data provided by a sample of 6680 clergy from Australia, England and New Zealand. This study also explored the usefulness of the Francis Burnout Inventory to profile differences between male and female religious professionals, differences among the three nations included in the foundation study, and trends associated with age. While the foundation study was not able to do was to explore the validity of the balanced affect model of work-related psychological

wellbeing among religious professionals, since that foundation study did not include appropriate additional measures for that purpose. A series of subsequent studies has begun to address this issue of validation.

The first study to address the validation of the Francis Burnout Inventory, conducted among a sample of 744 clergy in the Presbyterian Church USA, was reported by Francis et al. (2011). The strategy adopted by this study examined the incremental impact on independent measures of burnout of the interaction term created by the product of the measure of negative affect (Scale of Emotional Exhaustion in Ministry) and the measure of positive affect (Satisfaction in Ministry Scale) after taking into account the impact of these two factors considered separately. In this initial study by Francis et al. (2011), the two independent measures of burnout were quite simple indices of self-perceived physical health and self-perceived burnout. Self-perceived physical health was assessed by the question: "How would you rate your overall health at the present time?" with the following four response options: excellent, good, fair, and poor. Self-perceived burnout was assessed by the question: "To what extent do you think you are suffering from burnout in your current call?" with the following four response options: to a great extent, to some extent, to a small extent, and not at all. Consistent with the theory of balanced affect, the data demonstrated that the mitigating effects of positive affect on the two independent measures of burnout increased with increasing levels of negative affect.

The first replication by Francis et al. (2017a) among 658 clergy serving in the Church of England employed three independent measures of burnout: thoughts of leaving ministry since ordination, count of psychosomatic ailments, and count of psychological distress. Thoughts of leaving ministry were assessed by the question, "Have you since ordination considered leaving the priesthood?" rated against four responses (no, once or twice, several times, frequently). Psychosomatic ailments were assessed by a list of five conditions (chronic indigestion, frequent headaches, insomnia, migraines, stomach complaints), prefaced by the question, "Since ordination have you experienced any of the following?". Psychological distress was assessed by a list of four conditions (acute anxiety, depression, nervous breakdown, suicidal thoughts) prefaced by the question, "Since ordination have you experienced any of the following?".

The second replication study by Francis et al. (2017b) among 155 priests serving in the Roman Catholic Church in Italy employed the Purpose in Life Scale developed by Robbins and Francis (2000) as an independent measure of burnout. This is a 12-item measure designed to assess a unidimensional construct related to meaning and purpose in life. Each item is rated on a five-point Likert Scale from disagree strongly, through not certain, to agree strongly. The third replication study by Francis et al. (2017c) among 95 priests and 61 religious sisters serving in the Roman Catholic Church in Italy also employed the Purpose in Life Scale (Robbins & Francis, 2000). The fourth replication study by Village et al. (2018) among 358 Anglican priests serving in the Church in Wales employed a single item index of thoughts of leaving ministry since ordination (no, once or twice, several times, and frequently) as an independent measure of burnout. The fifth replication study by Francis et al. (2019) among 99 Anglican clergy serving in a rural diocese in the Church of England employed the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (Tennant et al., 2007) as an independent measure of wellbeing. All five replication studies, conducted among diverse samples and employing different dependent variables, supported the conclusion advanced by the original study reported by Francis et al. (2011).

Research question

All of the studies that have employed the Francis Burnout Inventory (as cited above) have reported good levels of internal consistency reliability in terms of alpha coefficients (Cronbach, 1951). No study as yet, however, has reported on the factor structure of the Francis Burnout Inventory in order to confirm the proper independence of the two proposed measures of positive affect and negative affect. The first research aim of the present study is to address this lacuna within the literature among a sample of religious professionals.

The second aim of the present study is to continue to develop a series of studies designed to interrogate the construct validity of the Francis Burnout Inventory. This further replication is consistent with the objectives of the much publicised Replication Project within the broad field of psychology (see Fradera, 2015).

Method

Procedure

In the context of programmes operated in Rome for Catholic priests and religious sisters (who were broadly engaged in religious ministry within the community) on the topic of personality and spirituality, participants were invited to complete a questionnaire covering issues relevant to the programme. Participation in the programme was voluntary and responses to the questionnaire were confidential and anonymous. Full data were provided by 287 participants. Ethical approval for the study was granted by the Salesian Pontifical University, Rome.

Participants

Of the 287 participants, 130 were male, 157 were female; 87 were under the age of 35, 59 were between the ages of 35 and 39, 74 were between the ages of 40 and 49, 62 were aged 50 or over, and five did not disclose their age; 97 were of Italian nationality, 184 were not of Italian nationality, and six did not disclose their nationality. Of the 130 men, 42 were diocesan priests, 65 religious priests, 20 religious brothers, and three were in formation. Of the 157 women, 154 were religious sisters, and 3 were in formation.

Measures

Work-related psychological health was assessed by the two scales reported by the Francis Burnout Inventory (Francis et al., 2005). This 22-item instrument comprises the Scale of Emotional Exhaustion in Ministry (SEEM) and the Satisfaction in Ministry Scale (SIMS). Each item is assessed on a five-point scale: ranging from agree strongly (5) to disagree strongly (1).

Purpose in life was assessed by the Purpose in Life Scale, developed by Robbins and Francis (2000), a 12-item instrument designed to assess a unidimensional construct. For example, a core item reads, "My personal existence is full of purpose". Each item is assessed on a five-point scale: ranging from agree strongly (5) to disagree strongly (1).

Data analysis

The data were analysed by means of the SPSS statistical package using the reliability, correlation, factor and regression routines.

Results

The first step in data analysis examined the factor structure of the Francis Burnout Inventory to test the working hypothesis that the inventory reflected a two-factor structure, differentiating between positive affect and negative affect. [Table 1](#) presents the varimax rotated solution that clearly differentiates between the two factors. This clear factor structure, however, required the deletion of two items, one from each of the two hypothesised constructs. The item dropped from the Scale of Emotional Exhaustion in Ministry was the one reverse-coded item: “I always have enthusiasm for my work”. The item dropped from the Satisfaction in Ministry Scale was: “I can easily understand how those among whom I minister feel about things”. These two factors accounted for 39.3% of the variance.

The second step in data analysis examined the psychometric properties of these two revised and shortened scales in terms of the correlations between the individual items and the sum of the other nine items, and the item endorsement as the sum of the agree strongly and agree responses. These data are presented in [Table 2](#). In terms of emotional exhaustion, these data demonstrate that around one in four of the priests and religious sisters experience fatigue and irritation as part of their daily experience (27%), and have been discouraged by the lack of personal support for them in their ministry (25%). Around one in five of the priests and religious sisters feel drained by fulfilling their ministry roles (18%), are less patient with those among whom they minister than they used to be (18%), and feel that they are becoming less flexible in their dealings with those among whom they minister (18%). In terms of satisfaction in ministry, these data demonstrate that nine out of every ten priests and religious sisters find that ministry gives real

Table 1. Varimax rotated structure of the 20-item Francis Burnout Inventory.

	Factor 1	Factor 2
I feel drained by fulfilling my ministry roles		.43
I have accomplished many worthwhile things in my current ministry	.59	
Fatigue and irritation are part of my daily experience		.64
I gain a lot of personal satisfaction from working with people in my current ministry	.57	
I am invaded by sadness I can't explain		.63
I deal very effectively with the problems of the people in my current ministry	.37	
I am feeling negative or cynical about the people with whom I work		.61
I feel very positive about my current ministry	.71	
My humour has a cynical and biting tone		.61
I feel that my pastoral ministry has a positive influence on people's lives	.64	
I find myself spending less and less time with those among whom I minister		.53
I feel that my teaching ministry has a positive influence on people's faith	.67	
I have been discouraged by the lack of personal support for me here		.49
I feel that my ministry is really appreciated by people	.67	
I find myself frustrated in my attempts to accomplish tasks important to me		.54
I am really glad that I entered the ministry	.75	
I am less patient with those among whom I minister than I used to be		.56
The ministry here gives real purpose and meaning to my life	.64	
I am becoming less flexible in my dealings with those among whom I minister		.62
I gain a lot of personal satisfaction from fulfilling my ministry roles	.70	

Note: $N = 287$. All loadings below .30 have been suppressed. The two factors accounted for 39.3% of the variance.

Table 2. Francis Burnout Inventory: Scale properties of 10-item scales.

	<i>r</i>	%
<i>Scale of Emotional Exhaustion in Ministry</i>		
I feel drained by fulfilling my ministry roles	.33	18
Fatigue and irritation are part of my daily experience	.49	27
I am invaded by sadness I can't explain	.53	13
I am feeling negative or cynical about the people with whom I work	.47	9
My humour has a cynical and biting tone	.49	5
I find myself spending less and less time with those among whom I minister	.37	10
I have been discouraged by the lack of personal support for me here	.37	25
I find myself frustrated in my attempts to accomplish tasks important to me	.42	16
I am less patient with those among whom I minister than I used to be	.44	18
I am becoming less flexible in my dealings with those among whom I minister	.51	18
<i>Satisfaction in Ministry Scale</i>		
I have accomplished many worthwhile things in my current ministry	.44	68
I gain a lot of personal satisfaction from working with people in my current ministry	.52	77
I deal very effectively with the problems of the people in my current ministry	.33	62
I feel very positive about my current ministry	.64	83
I feel that my pastoral ministry has a positive influence on people's lives	.50	85
I feel that my teaching ministry has a positive influence on people's faith	.52	84
I feel that my ministry is really appreciated by people	.55	70
I am really glad that I entered the ministry	.69	86
The ministry here gives real purpose and meaning to my life	.54	90
I gain a lot of personal satisfaction from fulfilling my ministry roles	.70	82

Note: $N = 287$.

r = correlation between item and sum of other ten items.

% = sum of agree strongly and agree responses.

purpose and meaning to their life (90%). More than eight out of every ten priests and religious sisters are really glad that they entered the ministry (86%), feel that their pastoral ministry has a positive influence on people's lives (85%), feel that their teaching ministry has a positive influence on people's faith (84%), feel very positive about their current ministry (83%), and gain a lot of personal satisfaction from fulfilling their ministry roles (82%).

The third step in data analysis examines the mean scale scores on the three core variables employed in the analysis (Scale of Emotional Exhaustion in Ministry Scale, Satisfaction in Ministry Scale, and Purpose in Life Scale), together with the correlations between these scales and with age and sex. The data presented in Table 3 demonstrate that religious sisters record significantly higher scores than priests on the Scale of Satisfaction in Ministry, but that there are no significant sex differences on the other two measures; that age is not a significant predictor of scores recorded on any of the three scales; that purpose in life scores are correlated positively with satisfaction in ministry and negatively with emotional exhaustion in ministry; and that there is a clear negative correlation between satisfaction in ministry and emotional exhaustion in ministry.

The fourth and final step in data analysis tests the balanced affect model of work-related psychological health and burnout. To test the notion of balanced affect, the

Table 3. Mean scale scores and correlations.

	Alpha	Mean	SD	Sex	Age	PILS	SIMS
Emotional Exhaustion	.78	22.83	5.84	-.11	-.04	-.43***	-.37***
Satisfaction in Ministry	.84	39.41	5.15	.14*	.04	.53***	
Purpose in Life	.87	52.98	5.48	.06	.01		

Note: * $p < .05$; *** $p < .001$.

Table 4. Multiple regression of PILS on SEEM and interaction with SIMS.

	B	SE	t	p <
Constant	59.1798	1.3743	43.1	.001
SEX	0.0815	0.5394	0.2	NS
SEEM	-0.9230	0.0850	-10.9	.001
SEEM * SIMS	0.0165	0.0022	7.5	.001

(N = 287).

effects of SEEM and SIMS scores on the Purpose in Life Scale were tested in a multiple regression model in which SEEM and SIMS scores were allowed to interact after taking the effect of sex into account. The marginal effect of SIMS on the model with the interaction term included was statistically non-significant which explains why this term does not appear in the model as displayed in Table 4. The results indicated a highly significant interaction. This interaction term suggested that the mitigating effects of ministry satisfaction on burnout were greater when the level of emotional exhaustion was higher, and this is clearly illustrated in Figure 1.

Conclusion

The present study sets out to test the factor structure of the Francis Burnout Inventory, drawing on data provided by a sample of 287 Catholic priests and religious sisters in Italy. Two conclusions emerge from the factor analyses. The first of these conclusions confirms the hypothesis that the two discrete categories of positive affect and negative affect can be recovered from the Francis Burnout Inventory by a varimax rotated solution of classic factor analysis. The second of these conclusions proposes that the factor clarity of

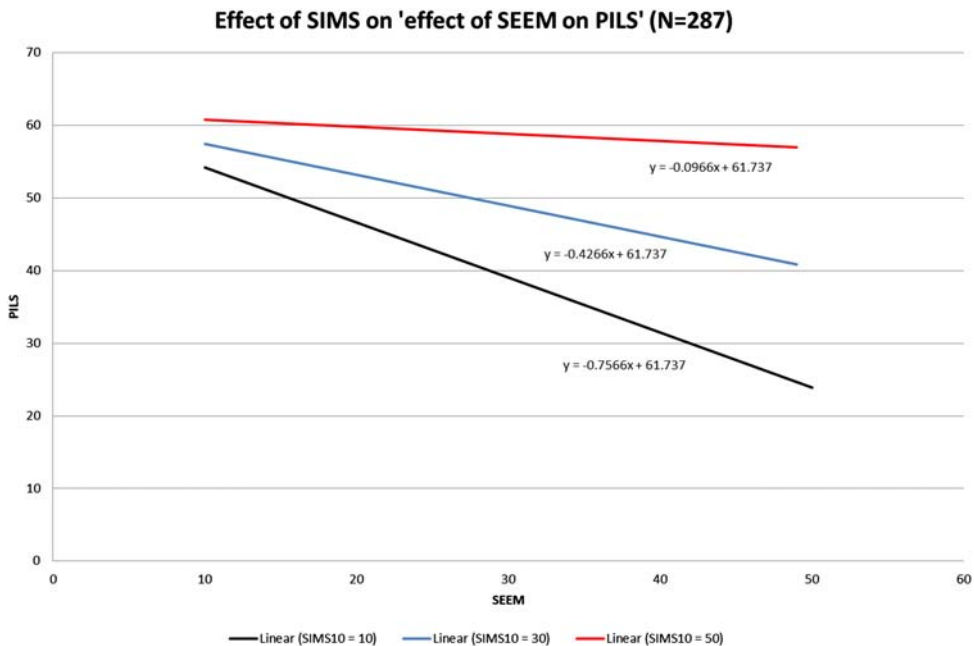


Figure 1. Effect of SIMS on “effect of SEEM on PILS” (N = 287).

the Francis Burnout Inventory can be improved by the removal of one item from each of the two scales. With the removal of these two items, the two resulting 10-item scales can be proposed for future use as the Francis Burnout Inventory Revised.

Having proposed a revised form of the Francis Burnout Inventory, the properties of these new instruments were explored in terms of the alpha coefficient (Cronbach, 1951), the correlations between the individual items and the sum of the remaining nine items, and the item endorsement. On the basis of these statistics, the Francis Burnout Inventory Revised can be commended as displaying good qualities of internal consistency reliability.

Finally, the present study built on the earlier work reported by Francis et al. (2011), Francis et al. (2017a), Francis et al. (2017b), Francis et al. (2017c), Village et al. (2018), and Francis et al. (2019) to test the construct validity of the balanced affect model of clergy work-related psychological wellbeing as operationalised by the Francis Burnout Inventory. These new data confirmed that the two scales of the Francis Burnout Inventory Revised worked in the same way as the two original scales, by demonstrating the significance of the interaction term between emotional exhaustion and satisfaction in ministry against an independent measure of burnout.

The conceptualisation of burnout operationalised by the Francis Burnout Inventory and confirmed by the series of validation studies carries practical implications for managing and dealing with poor work-related psychological wellbeing among religious professionals. The differentiation between positive affect and negative affect allows these distinctive psychological phenomena to be considered independently. While religious leaders need properly to be warned again the experiences and situations that generate negative affect, it is also reasonable and realistic to anticipate that many of these factors cannot be effectively removed from the pastoral experience. The pastoral vocation anticipates being engaged with others in emotionally exhausting contexts. On the other hand, the experiences and the situations that generate positive affect may be more within the control of individual religious leaders. In the light of this theoretical position, initial and continuing ministerial formation programmes may be better equipped to enable religious leaders to become more consciously aware of both of those situations and experiences that resource positive affect for them and of those situations and experiences that fail to resource positive affect for them. Such strategies within initial and continuing ministerial formation programmes may enhance the work-related psychological wellbeing of religious leaders and reduce their vulnerability to professional burnout.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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