

Burnout in the first year of ministry: Personality and belief style as important predictors

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Abstract

Although cross-sectional research has found that personality dimensions and religious styles are associated with distress and burnout in clergy, there is little longitudinal research that considers predictors of psychological health, particularly over the initial twelve months of ministry. The author's study measured demographic and personality characteristics, openness to change in beliefs, and orientation to the demands of ministry in 60 graduating theological students in Sydney, Australia. Twelve months later they completed measures of anxiety and depression and the subscales of burnout: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment. Multiple regression analyses were used to determine the best predictors of distress and burnout after twelve months in ministry. Neuroticism predicted emotional exhaustion, depression, and anxiety; extraversion predicted personal accomplishment; and openness to change of beliefs predicted emotional exhaustion, and depersonalization. The power of openness to belief change as a predictor of burnout supports the inference from secularization theory, that some degree of self-integration is necessary to avoid burnout.

Introduction

Burnout and related anxiety and depression are costly problems for clergy, their families, and congregations. Ministers experience a range of physical and psychological problems associated with burnout (Kaldor & Bullpitt, 2001). Their families may find them fatigued, withdrawn and struggling without a sense of accomplishment (Miner, 1996); whereas congregations either miss the sharpness of an energised minister, or experience the loss of a minister who moves, or retires early. In Australia, about 50% of clergy leave ministry before

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retirement, largely due to burnout and distress (Croucher, 1991). Although many of the issues that lead to psychological ill-health may arise in the interactions between ministers and congregations, it is also important to ask whether relatively stable, personal factors can be identified as predictive of later burnout and distress. If this is the case, individuals who are vulnerable to distress and burnout could be assessed and interventions to change problematic styles could be offered. This article examines whether personal factors measured at the end of theological training are able to predict anxiety, depression, and burnout twelve months later.

Stressors and distress during the initial years are likely to be high, especially for those who are given responsibility for solo ministry, since they lack the buffering effect of supervision within a team (Kalliath & Beck, 2001). Particular problems include: applying theological knowledge to complex situations in congregational life; negotiating expectations and relational patterns of the congregation; practical issues relating to the move to the new parish; and loss of supportive relationships (Whetham & Whetham, 2000). It is important to recognize the special stressors of this first year after completing training and to examine predictors of distress and burnout over this relatively short term.

Personal and religious variables impacting distress and burnout

One study of anxiety and depression in theological students found that cognitive and religious variables predicted distress over a period of six months (Miner, 1995). Specifically, students who perceived stressors as a threat had elevated scores on both anxiety and depression. As their religious well-being decreased, continuing appraisals of stressors as threatening further increased depression. Similarly, as situations were perceived as more threatening, students' existential well-being decreased, leading to increased anxiety. The study did not examine personality characteristics, although neuroticism is a personality dimension related (among other things) to experiencing the world in a negative manner (Wiggins, 1996) and hence, might increase the tendency to perceive stressors as threatening, and so heighten anxiety and depression in the year after training is completed.

Burnout is a psychological condition resulting from chronic work-related stress and has three central factors: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and lack of personal accomplishment (Maslach & Jackson, 1986). Both situational and personal factors have been examined in relation to burnout. A widely-used theory of clergy burnout proposes that mismatches between the person and the job create stress, and subsequent burnout (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001). Based on this theory of burnout, it would be expected that people who perceive their work as stressful because they do not 'fit' their job would be more likely to experience burnout. Another theory focuses on the problems resulting from the way ministers define themselves in their work (Grosch & Olsen, 2000). However, both theories fail to consider the broader social context of ministers, and how such a context could contribute to stress and poorer work-self integration. It is proposed that secularization theory provides a basis for a more

comprehensive account of clergy burnout because such an account can include elements of the job stress view of Maslach et al. (2001) and the focus on self-concept as found in Grosch and Olsen (2000), but also the social context of ministry. This secularization-based theory of clergy burnout is described further below, together with studies giving preliminary support to its usefulness.

Secularization contributing to clergy burnout

Secularization has been defined as a loss of authority for churches as social institutions, and consequently, a loss of authority for clergy (Chaves, 1994). When churches and clergy lose power to prescribe worldviews for a population, people absorb an assortment of religious and secular “taken-for-granted” meanings that lack depth. Hence people become privatized, holding to a precarious structure of personal meaning systems (Luckmann, 1967). Ministers themselves have to rely more on inner resources when they lose the authority they previously held as representatives of honoured religious institutions. However, like others in society, many ministers will be privatized, operating from taken-for-granted personal religious worldviews that lack depth. Some ministers, because of intellectual challenges in their training, or through personal and work-related crises, recognize the possibility of choice, and reject whatever taken-for-granted meanings they previously held. These ministers, labelled as “cognitively secularized” (Miner, 1996), are open to the possibility that their beliefs could change, and hence are liable to greater existential anxiety. Both privatized and cognitively secularized ministers would find it difficult to maintain an integrated sense of their personal and vocational self, and would be vulnerable to distress and burnout (Miner, 1997).

Preliminary studies found that clergy who relied on external authority from their church, lacked a firm sense of inner authority through spiritual practice or relationship with God, and lacked a sense of inner competence, or efficacy, in their work were more likely to score high on burnout and anxiety (Miner, 1997). A reliable measure of whether ministers were externally or internally oriented (relying on external or internal sources of authority and coping) was developed. It was called the “Orientations to the Demands of Ministry Survey” (ODM-S) and has three dimensions: spiritual connectedness, autonomy, and efficacy. Since items are scored such that high scores on each dimension indicate an external orientation, scores on all items may be summed to give a total measure of internality or externality of orientation. Strong relationships were found between an external orientation and measures of depression, anxiety, and burnout, beyond the effects of demographic and religious problem-solving measures (Miner, 2005).

Since the ODM-S did not distinguish between ministers who were privatized (held their beliefs in a taken-for-granted, but nonetheless precarious, fashion), or cognitively secularized (recognized a fundamental choice in beliefs, and so held them in an open, provisional manner) a brief exploratory measure of openness to change of beliefs was developed for this study. A minister with

highly provisional beliefs might have difficulty providing specific teaching and guidance expected by the congregation. Hence, it was expected that openness to change of beliefs would be associated with anxiety and work stress, and hence with burnout, but this was a tentative prediction in the absence of empirical support.

Nonetheless, since orientations to the demands of ministry (ODM) were significantly associated with measures of psychological distress and burnout in cross-sectional studies, it is important to investigate the effects of ministry orientations on burnout in longitudinal studies to shed light on the development of burnout. In such a study it would be important to consider the effects of demographic data and personality traits that might also contribute to burnout.

Demographic data, personality traits, and burnout

Few consistent relationships have been found between demographic variables and clergy stress, and where relationships are found the effects are usually small (Kaldor & Bullpitt, 2001; Miner, 1997). Hence, it is expected that demographic variables will have little to no association with burnout in clergy. Elevated levels of dissatisfaction in ministers were found among those with high scores on neuroticism and psychoticism (Francis & Rodger, 1994). Similarly, high levels of neuroticism and psychoticism, but low levels of extraversion were associated with burnout in Roman Catholic parochial clergy in England and Wales (Francis, Loudon, & Rutledge, 2004) and in Anglican stipendiary ministers in the UK (Hills, Francis, & Rutledge, 2004). Higher burnout in American Baptist pastors has been associated with neuroticism, lower burnout with extraversion, agreeableness and conscientiousness, but little or no consistent effect has been associated with openness (Rodgers & Piedmont, 1998).

Aims and research questions

Although there is a growing body of work providing associations with psychological ill-health in clergy, most of the research is cross-sectional. A study that investigates clergy distress and burnout over the first twelve months of ministry can assess whether the measurement of ministry orientation, openness to change of beliefs, personality, and demographic variables at the beginning of ordained ministry can predict levels of burnout twelve months later. Hence, the following research question was posed: Which set of these variables measured at Time 1 (on exit from theological college) best accounts for burnout in ministers at Time 2 (12 months later)?

Method

Participants

Participants were 60 graduating theological students from training colleges in Sydney, Australia. Of these, 14 were female (23%). The mean age was 33.9 years

(SD = 6.4), with a range of 21–51 years. They reported being a Christian for 18.4 years, on average (SD = 8.4 years) and with a range of 6–51 years. All identified with Protestant denominations, namely Anglican (29%), Presbyterian (24%), Uniting Church (12%), Salvation Army (10%), Baptist (9%) and other Pentecostal, interdenominational and small Christian organizations. The majority had completed a bachelor's degree (86%), while 9% had completed a diploma and 6% had gained higher degrees. Most had some experience in paid ministry: 38% had no experience, 34% had two years or less, while 28% had 3–10 years of paid ministry experience prior to completing a formal theological qualification.

Materials

In addition to demographic items, exploratory questions relating to aspects of secularization were also devised for this study. Four items relating to openness to change of religious beliefs, such as “Most of my Christian beliefs are open to change, few are really firm” comprised a scale with alpha of 0.72. A number of psychological scales were then presented in a counterbalanced order.

The Orientations to the Demands of Ministry Scale (Miner, 1995) comprises 29 items covering the three dimensions of satisfaction with spiritual practice, autonomy, and competence. Typical items for these areas are as follows: “I’m frustrated with the lack of effect my spiritual practice has in my life”; “I feel pulled around by different people’s expectations”; “I feel out of my depth in areas of my ministry”. Respondents use a 7 point rating scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree, with the option of a “not applicable” response. Two studies found good internal consistency for the scale, with Cronbach’s alpha of 0.84 and 0.86, and its validity has been supported through its factor structure and significant correlations with related constructs (Miner, 2005).

The Maslach Burnout Inventory (Maslach & Jackson, 1986) is a 22 item inventory with three subscales of *Emotional Exhaustion* (9 items such as “I feel used up at the end of the workday”), *Depersonalization* (5 items such as “I worry that this job is hardening me emotionally”), and *Personal Accomplishment* (8 items such as “I have accomplished many worthwhile things in this job”). Each item is rated on a 7 point scale from “never” to “every day”. High scores on Personal Accomplishment indicate low burnout. Cronbach alpha reliabilities for the three subscales are reported as 0.90, 0.79, and 0.71 respectively.

The *Trait Anxiety* subscale of the State–Trait Anxiety Inventory Form Y (Spielberger, 1983) comprises 20 items, such as “I feel nervous and restless” rated on a 4 point scale from “almost never” to “almost always”. The median alpha coefficient reported for the normative samples was 0.90 and the measure has good concurrent and predictive validity.

The Beck Depression Inventory (BDI-II) of Beck, Steer and Brown (1996) comprises 21 items related to cognitive, affective, and somatic aspects of depression. Reliability as measured by Cronbach alpha is reported as 0.92 for outpatient samples and 0.93 for college student samples. The authors report good

construct validity and satisfactory discriminant validity between depression and anxiety.

The NEO Five Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI) Form S (Costa & McCrae, 1992) comprises 60 items relating to personality dimensions of neuroticism, extraversion, openness, agreeableness, and conscientiousness. Cronbach alpha reliabilities for each of the domains are reported as between 0.86 and 0.92. There is a large body of correlational data attesting to the construct validity of the measure (see McCrae & Costa, 1996).

Procedure

Letters were sent to all colleges training students for Protestant Christian ministry in Sydney, Australia, informing them of the study. Where permission was given, students were contacted via individual letters or were given information sheets at assemblies. In sum 450 information sheets or letters were distributed. Those students who agreed to participate ($N=103$) were given or sent copies of the questionnaire to be returned via pre-paid envelopes or via e-mail. Only 60 graduating theological students returned responses. Twelve months later follow-up questionnaires were sent to all participants who could be contacted (six participants had moved or changed e-mail service and given no forwarding address) and 44 forms were returned.

Analysis of results

Means and standard deviations for all variables were calculated. Since the number and proportion of female respondents was small, scores were compared with published male norms of the psychological scales by means of *t*-tests. Product moment correlations were calculated between the predictors (demographic variables, personality dimensions, and religious styles) and outcome measures of burnout, anxiety, and depression. Those variables that were significantly correlated with an outcome measure were entered into a standard multiple regression analysis. The small sample size renders it necessary to interpret the results with caution.

Results

Levels of burnout and distress in sample at graduation and after twelve months

Both on graduation from college and after 12 months, mean scores on burnout subscales and anxiety did not differ significantly from mean scores of the relevant normative samples: for burnout, "other" occupational groups that included clergy (Maslach & Jackson, 1986); for anxiety, "working adults" (Spielberger, 1983).

On graduation mean scores for emotional exhaustion and personal accomplishment fell in the "moderate" category, whereas the mean score for depersonalization fell just within the "low" category. A year later the sample means fell into the "moderate" category for each burnout subscale (see Table I), suggesting

Table 1. Means and standard deviations for all measures at Time 1 and outcome measures at Time 2, and inter-correlations between Time 2 burnout, anxiety and depression measures, and personality factors, ODM-S and openness to change measured at Time 1.

	BDI	ANX	EE	DP	PA	N	E	O	C	ODM-S	OTC
ANX	0.57**										
EE	0.46**	0.71**									
DEP	0.28	0.43**	0.63**								
PA	0.50**	0.46**	-0.25	-0.21							
N	0.46**	0.73**	0.36*	0.28	-37*	-33**					
E	-0.06	-0.27	-0.20	-0.20	0.47**	0.35**	0.02				
O	0.00	0.34*	0.28	-0.01	0.13	-0.18	0.32*	-0.31*			
C	-0.05	-0.24	-0.12	-0.24	-0.10	0.48**	-0.33*	0.20	-0.44**		
ODM-S	0.25	0.41**	0.18	0.15	-0.35*	0.07	0.03	0.16	-0.03	0.05	
OTC	-0.07	0.14	0.33*	0.31*	0.14	18.6	31.8	29.1	32.5	110.2	13.7
Mean1	5.9	36.4	19.2	5.6	34.2	8.0	6.6	5.7	7.1	11.4	4.9
SD1	5.2	8.5	8.5	3.4	6.2						
Mean2	6.0	34.2	23.5	7.0	35.4						
SD2	5.2	8.5	8.3	4.5	5.8						

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$.

BDI – depression; ANX – anxiety; EE – emotional exhaustion; DP – depersonalization; PA – personal accomplishment; N – neuroticism; E – extraversion; O – openness to experience; C – conscientiousness; ODM-S – orientations to the demands of ministry survey; OTC – open to change in beliefs.

that ministers were experiencing a degree of burnout after 12 months in ministry. Compared with measures of distress and burnout on graduation from theological college, scores after 12 months showed similar levels of distress, but slightly elevated scores on all burnout subscales. The mean score for depression (6.0) falls into the minimally depressed category (Beck, Steer, & Brown, 1996) and was significantly lower than the mean for college students (12.6): ($t(43) = -7.2, p < 0.001$). Overall, these results indicate that ministers at 12 months after graduation did not report elevated levels of burnout, anxiety or depression.

At graduation from college the sample did not differ significantly from previous samples of ministers on ODM-S (Sterland, 2000), nor did their mean for neuroticism differ from adult norms (Costa & McCrae, 1992). However, their mean scores on extraversion (31.8) and openness (29.1) were significantly higher than adult means of 19.1 and 27.0 respectively ($t(59) = 5.48, p < 0.001$ and $t(59) = 2.91, p < 0.01$). The mean score for conscientiousness (32.5) was significantly lower than the adult mean of 34.6 ($t(59) = -2.45, p < 0.05$).

Measures taken at Time 1 correlated with subsequent burnout and distress

For subsequent emotional exhaustion, significant Time 1 associations were found for neuroticism and the secularization scale, openness to change. This measure, openness to change, was also a significant correlate of subsequent depersonalization. High levels of neuroticism and an external orientation to ministry were negatively associated with personal accomplishment, whereas extraversion was positively associated with personal accomplishment. Depression was associated with high levels of neuroticism. High levels of anxiety were associated with personality characteristics of neuroticism and openness to experience, and with an external orientation to ministry. For all inter-correlations and relevant descriptive statistics see Table I.

Predictors of burnout and distress after twelve months in ministry

A series of standard multiple regression analyses was performed (Table II) with subscales of burnout, and measures of depression and anxiety after 12 months in ministry as criterion variables, and other measures having a significant correlation with each criterion (as indicated in Table I) as predictors. No cases were deleted from the analyses because of multivariate outliers. With neuroticism and openness to change as predictors of emotional exhaustion, 23% of the variance in emotional exhaustion was explained ($R = 0.48, R^2 = .23, F(2,39) = 5.76, p < 0.01$). Both measures were significant predictors of emotional exhaustion. Since only one variable, openness to change, was significantly correlated with depersonalization, no multiple regression analyses were performed with respect to this criterion variable. The model in which personality variables of neuroticism, extraversion and conscientiousness, and ODM-S were predictors of personal accomplishment accounted for 30% of the variance in personal accomplishment

Table II. Multiple regression of neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience, conscientiousness, orientations to the demands of ministry and openness to change at Time 1 as predictors of emotional exhaustion, personal accomplishment and anxiety at Time 2.

DV	Variables	<i>B</i>	β	<i>R</i> ²
EE	Neuroticism	0.356	0.342*	0.228
	Open to change	0.501	0.311*	
PA	ODM	-0.04	-0.125	0.297
	Neuroticism	-0.105	-0.143	
	Extraversion	0.315	0.357*	
	Conscientiousness	-0.07	0.097	
ANX	Neuroticism	0.831	0.709**	0.530
	Open to experience	-0.049	-0.029	
	ODM	0.036	0.060	

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.001$; ODM – Orientation to the Demands of Ministry.

($R = 0.54$, $R^2 = 0.30$, $F(4,37) = 3.90$, $p < 0.05$). Of the four predictors, extraversion contributed significantly to the variance in personal accomplishment but the others did not add explanatory power. As only one variable, neuroticism, predicted subsequent depression no multiple regression analysis related to depression was performed. The predictors of neuroticism, openness to experience and ODM-S together accounted for 53% of the variance in trait anxiety ($R = 0.73$, $R^2 = 0.53$, $F(3,39) = 14.63$, $p < 0.001$). However, only neuroticism contributed significantly to the variance in anxiety.

Discussion

Although anecdotal accounts by clergy suggest that the transition from theological college to paid ministry is stressful (Miner, 1996), the finding that ministers experience moderate, but not high levels of burnout after 12 months is consistent with findings of Kaldor and Bullpitt (2001) that clergy are more likely to experience burnout in the period from 6–20 years after ordination than in earlier or later ministry careers. Since depression is moderately correlated with burnout and anxiety (Leiter & Durup, 1994), it is not surprising that levels of depression and anxiety were not elevated. These results point to the robust psychological health, on average, of clergy after 12 months in ministry.

The study explored some characteristics of graduating theological students to ascertain which of these might predict higher levels of distress and burnout after 12 months of ministry. Two personality characteristics and one cognitive style measured on entry to ministry were significantly associated with burnout and distress at the end of the first year of ministry. The personality trait of neuroticism was the best predictor of subsequent anxiety, depression, and emotional exhaustion, along with the exploratory measure of being open to changing beliefs. Extraversion was the best predictor of personal accomplishment, and openness to change of beliefs the best predictor of depersonalization.

These results support and extend a number of cross-sectional studies that link personality characteristics with burnout.

Personality dimensions as predictors of burnout and distress

Neuroticism is associated with trait anxiety, hostility, depression and a tendency to use emotion-focused coping to counter stress, and is consistently related to the emotional exhaustion component of burnout in cross-sectional studies (Deary et al., 1996). Since neuroticism represents a general tendency to negativity in thinking, mood and coping, it is not surprising that such a style would be conducive to a sense of emotional exhaustion, together with anxiety and depression, after 12 months of ministry. Thus, its value as a predictor of a range of subsequent negative outcomes should not be overlooked.

The finding that extraversion predicts high personal accomplishment is consistent with other work. Deary et al. (1996) found a direct relationship between extraversion, a measure of sociability, assertiveness and energy, and positive feelings of personal accomplishment in their study of a large sample of medical practitioners. Since Christian ministry is a relational pursuit, ministers who are sociable and find stimulation in interactions with others are likely to find satisfaction in their work through the matching of personality type and work requirements, consistent with the person-job fit theory of burnout (Maslach et al., 2001).

Openness to change of beliefs as a predictor of burnout

The exploratory measure of openness to change of beliefs on exit from theological college was significantly associated with emotional exhaustion a year later. In addition, openness to belief change was the only attribute that was significantly correlated with subsequent depersonalization. The items relate to active engagement in examining beliefs and a willingness to change beliefs. Ministers who are very open to change in their worldview lack a firm set of reasonably well-integrated beliefs, according to predictions from privatization theory (Luckmann, 1967; Miner, 1996). As a result, they would struggle to find an inner basis for their ministry in word and action. These ministers may then find it difficult to develop long-term plans and to maintain and inspire confidence that goals can be achieved, both strong correlates of clergy burnout according to Kaldor and Bullpitt (2001). The increased effort they would have to make could result in heightened emotional exhaustion.

Significant associations between openness to change in beliefs and subsequent depersonalization suggest it is implicated in the further development, or worsening, of burnout. This conclusion is based on findings by Leiter and Durup (1994), and further supported by Maslach et al. (2001), that depersonalization occurs when people attempt to cope with the pressure of emotional exhaustion by reducing and avoiding contacts with service recipients. It would appear that newly qualified ministers who lack a coherent, well-integrated

worldview struggle to overcome emotional exhaustion resulting from their work, and may then succumb to defensive strategies such as depersonalization.

Since openness to change in beliefs is a significant predictor of subsequent emotional exhaustion and depersonalization in ministers, further work to replicate these findings and extend the research to ministers of other denominations, and having more experience in ministry, is warranted. In addition, its value as a predictor of clergy burnout points to the utility of secularization theory for understanding burnout in ministers.

Variables that failed to predict distress and burnout

Although some cross-sectional studies have linked younger age with burnout in ministers (Francis et al., 2004; Hills et al., 2004; Kaldor & Bullpitt, 2001; McKown, 2002; Randall, 2004; Roberts et al., 2003) the effects have usually been small (particularly over restricted age ranges) or complicated by time in ministry and, as expected, age and other demographic factors did not predict distress and burnout in this author's study.

Orientation to ministry measured on exit from theological college (Time 1) is not a good predictor of burnout after 12 months of ministry. This may seem surprising, given the measure's utility as a concurrent predictor of burnout (Miner, 2005). Perhaps, a sense of satisfactory spiritual practice, competence and autonomy at graduation from theological college reflects adjustment to the requirements of ministry training. An internal ministry orientation as measured at Time 2 would represent a sense of satisfaction in these areas in the light of actual ordained ministry. Hence, differences between the two contexts could result in small differences between the two types of ODM measures that nonetheless have an important impact on burnout scores. In other words, notions of satisfactory spiritual practice, competence and autonomy may have different meanings at the end of theological training and after a year of ministry. On the other hand, a low score (internal orientation) at Time 1 could indicate a reasonable capacity for dealing with the stressors of ministry. However, if the experience of ministry places pressure on the minister's resources and modifies his or her ODM in small but significant ways then initial ODM-S scores may not suffice as indicators of later burnout. Further examination of these suggestions is warranted.

Limitations of the study

The results should be considered with caution because of the small sample size for phase 1 of the study and more particularly for the follow-up. Comparisons between the mean personality and distress scores of those who participated in the study and adult norms suggest that participation was not driven by high levels of trait anxiety, nor a general tendency towards negativity, agreeableness, or high conscientiousness. However, felt stress and anxiety may have been a factor in the choice regarding participation at both phases of the

study: those feeling under pressure at each stage of parish ministry may have declined to participate. Hence, burnout levels may be an under-estimate of those actually experienced by ministers on graduation from college and after 12 months in ministry. Large studies that engage a high proportion of all ministers within a target population are needed to address issues of general burnout levels at different stages of ministry.

Applications and conclusion

The study aimed to specify, from personality and religious styles, those features of graduating theological students that best predict burnout and distress after a year of ministry. It would be helpful to identify characteristics in theological students that could be modified before they enter ministry, in order to reduce the risk of later burnout and distress. Some tentative suggestions for specific interventions are offered.

It is unlikely that fundamental personality dimensions can be changed in order to reduce risk of burnout. Nonetheless, theological students who have been challenged to explore their beliefs over the course of their training could be encouraged to integrate their beliefs before entering ministry. This is not to argue that students should be pressured towards premature closure of beliefs, nor that students' worldviews should be protected from questioning. Indeed, if students do not challenge taken-for-granted Christian beliefs during their training then they remain privatized, and would function in ministry on the basis of precarious and untested assumptions (Luckmann, 1967). This author's research did not address this issue. However, it suggests when theological students question to the extent that they leave college with provisional, tentative Christian beliefs, they risk burnout. Staff having pastoral oversight of students could support those who have not settled upon a core of foundational beliefs, and help them work towards integration.

In conclusion, this study has investigated the psychological health of ministers in a specific social context of secularization. A narrow slice of ministry experience, the first 12 months following completion of theological studies, has been examined. Personality dimensions of neuroticism and extraversion, and the religious attribute of being open to changing one's beliefs, were associated with a moderately large proportion of variance in burnout and distress measures after the first 12 months in ministry. The approach to clergy burnout based on secularization theory offers promise for a more precise theory of stress-burnout in ministry and could provide a foundation for helpful intervention strategies.

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