

Effects of Emotional Exhaustion on Clergy's Mental Health in Africa Inland Church, Ainamoi Sub-County, Kericho County Kenya.

Kennedy Kipkemoi^{1*}, Dr. Gladys Bett², Dr. Daniel Ngeno³

¹Kenya Highlands University P O Box 123. 20200 Kericho Kenya

² University of Kabianga

³Department of psychology Kenya Highland University Kenya

*Corresponding Author

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ABSTRACT

Clergy are vital community resources that provide assistance among those in need and are frequently the first to be relied upon amid emotional difficulties. As such, they experience increased risk exposure to burnout. The study aimed to investigate the effect of burnout on clergy's mental health in Africa Inland Church in Ainamoi Sub-County, Kericho County, Kenya. The study was guided by the following specific objectives: - establishing the effect of emotional exhaustion on clergy's mental health. The study was conducted in Ainamoi Sub-County, Kericho County, Kenya. This is because Ainamoi Sub-County is where Africa Inland Church (AIC) has the majority of its churches. The study targeted 69 clergy members of AIC from 89 local churches in Ainamoi Sub-County in Kericho County. The findings revealed that emotion exhaustion was common and affected the clergy work since they felt emotionally drained, caused mental illness and stress. The study found that emotional exhaustion had a significant influence on mental health illness ($\beta_1 = 0.269$, $P = 0.033 < 0.05$). The study concluded that all the three-burnout dimension that is emotional exhaustion. It was recommended that interventions that enhance the frequency and depth of debriefing by professional counsellors should be enhanced. The whole spectrum of predisposing and risk factors that are detrimental to clergy's mental health should be considered for future psychosocial resource programming. The church should have proper structures to ensure that clergy can assess the needed counselling

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

There has been connection between religion and mental health which has been a topic of discussion for ages. The idea that the first mental health treatment facilities were run by clerics and subsidized by the church when they were originally formed in the fourteenth century is supported by historical data (Winfrey, & Friedman, 2018). People with mental disorders benefited from the compassionate care that was provided at the churches' sponsored hospitals because it is claimed that the concept and approach of treating those with mental health problems came from religious people. According to Ghuman and Sarles, (2018), those who practice less religion would be mentally healthier, this statement implies that religious beliefs may contribute to mental illnesses like schizophrenia and depression. As stated by Yoo et al. (2022), clergy members have a special opportunity to regularly engage with a big number of people, giving them the capacity to also affect their perceptions and ensuing way of life. Therefore, the clergy have a vital role in addressing the mental health of their members (Huguelet & Koenig, 2019).

Kichen and McKibbin (2018) looked at factors that might influence a rural mainstream Christian clergy member's decision to counsel congregants who are depressed rather than refer them to another clergy member or a mental health professional. According to a study by Freire et al. (2017), religious leaders see themselves as crucial players in protecting and advancing the mental health of their members as well as supporting their healing

process. A large portion of the population in Africa is also regarded as religious, and they frequently go to their faith for comfort and solutions to their social, psychological, and physical difficulties (Koenig & Bonelli, 2018).

Religious community is believed to be the place where all challenges and ailments are to be resolved, as long as the person has faith, and restoration achieved, Clergy are frequently the first responders to mental health crises. Thus, clergy would act as informal aiders and conduits to the formal mental health care systems, but few researchers have looked at whether such clergy have the capacity to identify mental illnesses that require medical interventions, willingness to refer to mental health professionals which may largely depend on perceptions and the attitudes necessary to support mental health management programs (Vermaas et al., 2017).

Globally, in line with the viewpoint of Gauger and Christie (2018) point out that irrespective of their season in life, the demands of clergy work place them at high risk of burnout and other stressors that may reduce their psychological and material resources to effectively deliver clergy services to members including their own families. High incidences of burnout have been reported among clergy in united states of America, with self-reports ranging from 13 percent to 45 percent of clergy experiencing burnout (Jackson, 2018). Similar statistics are reported in Europe, with research data indicating that 27 percent of pastors from a number of denominations in New Zealand, England and Australia experienced burnout on a daily basis (Barnard & Curry, 2022).

Comparatively limited empirical work has been published in the African context, with the few studies on burnout and clergy reported in South Africa (Buys & Rothmann, 2020). Those studies reveal that the prevalence of burnout among clergy in Africa seems to mirror the numbers reported in other parts of the world although relatively lower. For instance occurrences of burnout have been reported in South Africa (Buys & Rothmann, 2020). In a recent study among clergy in Johannesburg and Cape Town in South Africa, a higher percentage was reported, whereby 26 percent of the respondents suffered burnout (Van, 2021).

Locally, a research was conducted among Guatemalan and Kenyan faith based humanitarian organizations and reported that clergy are frequently exposed to stressful working conditions that takes a toll on their psychosocial reserves (Putman and Erickson 2021). The study further adds that Guatemalans were especially vulnerable to natural and man-made disasters such as disease and armed conflict. This resonates well with the Kenyan clergy whereby a study by Ruto (2020) in Africa Gospel Church (AGC) in Bomet County, Kenya showed the existence of a high prevalence of burnout with notable adverse implications on mental health of the clergy, their families, and congregants they serve.

A study by Kokonya et al. (2020) among Kenyatta National Hospital medical workers showed that of the 345 poled. Ruto (2020) confirmed prevalence of burnout among AGC pastors in Bomet County that was attributed to poor communication, too many demands from members, too much work and lack of cooperation as major triggers. Current study sought to contribute to body of knowledge by exploring the relationship between different types of burnout on mental health of clergy in Kenya with special reference to Africa inland church clergy.

Clergy in Kenya experience stress in the workplace because of their roles as spiritual leaders, social providers, moral and financial supporters to their congregations, and families. As the clergy responsibilities in the church expand, so does the strain they feel at work (Bonsu, 2017). Rossetti and Rhoades (2018) found out that factors like happiness at work, contentment with oneself, a strong faith, and supportive systems all contributed to the mental health of Nigerian priests. For Catholic priests, especially those in care roles, having a robust psychological and spiritual support system was the most significant factor in prevention.

A paradox comes however, when the Clergy (refuge and hope) of the faithful and society, becomes stressed. It is not only scandalous but also a disaster to both the church and society at large. A WHO report ranked Kenya the fifth among African countries with the highest number of depression cases. Mental health experts have made an estimation that 1 in every 4 Kenyans may be suffering from a mental health related issue, ranging from mild to severe disorders (Erickson, 2021). There are incidents of some frustrated clergy due to the celibate vow and self- righteousness established splinter reformed churches, in India and Africa, as evidenced in Kenya.

Bakker et al. (2020) portend that burnout occurs in small moderations and can easily go undetected until affected individuals gradually lose energy and vitality. A condition supported by Robbins and Hancock (2018) whose

study showed high levels of exhaustion and stress despite attempts to maintain a positive mental attitude and gratitude in the work undertaken by clergy. Huhtala et al. (2021) add that there exists a link between the nature of work being undertaken and the environment from which the clergy functions. However, Huhtala et al. (2021) draw conclusions based on a study of public sector workers rather than clergy. In the current study, focused directed at clergy of evangelical orientation. Parker and Martin (2021) decompose burnout into three constructs. These are: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization or cynicism directed towards service recipients and feelings of low personal work accomplishments

Burnout has been found to affect one's overall mental health – defined as satisfaction with and excitement about life as well as interest in and positive relations with others; along with sense of competence, personal growth, autonomy and purpose in life (Hone et al., 2019). In sum total, mental health has a hedonic component and a functional component, both of which define a healthy mental state of an individual (Winefield et al., 2022). It can be surmised from the foregoing definition that everyone, including members of the clergy, are considered mentally well if they relate positively with others, cope well with their environment and are generally satisfied with life

The health of a person with a mental illness or disorder may suffer as a result of clergy and spiritual leaders' single intervention in cases where a person with training in the diagnosis or treatment of mental illnesses should be involved (Gichinga, 2017). Given that the two groups have historically viewed one another with skepticism and, at times, outright hostility, collaboration between psychologists and religious organizations may therefore present special challenges related to attitudes and perceptions (Blalock & Dew, 2021).

With clergy, mental health illness can result from rigid work schedules, bureaucracy, denominational structures, conflicts between personal and congregational needs, high congregational expectations and conflicted personal relationships (Blalock & Dew, 2021). Although religion has been known to be a major source of coping during adverse situations, it is surprising to note that most religious people like clergy go through diverse form of stressors on a daily basis which affects their well-being (Gichinga, 2017). The import from the views expressed is that clergy go through varied stressors which have the tendency to affect their mental wellness. What is significant to note is that extended and long periods of stress and exhaustion can lead to burnout.

Burnout is considered to be a psychological response to chronic work stress, a state of mental weariness and, most commonly, characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and lack of personal accomplishment (Blalock & Dew, 2021). Pastoral work is riddled with an incredible amount of work-related stressors and pressures. Potential for burnout is increased when there is little time to recover from the strains of workload and emotional distress. Several authors have therefore claimed that burnout is a common condition among pastors (Winefield et al., 2022).

Clergy refers to religious leaders who discharge pastoral functions such as spiritual teaching, preaching, counselling, pastoral care and other religious duties. Burnout among clergy has attracted much research interest because of its ramifications on clergy's mental health. There are numerous reports across the globe of clergy being found to suffer burnout (Winefield et al., 2022). Clergy may manifest lowered sense of accomplishment, feeling cynical and have difficulty concentrating (Blalock & Dew, 2021). Clergy's mental health is a matter of great importance due to their unique contribution to overall societal health and functioning (Bonner et al., 2018).

Often clergy are the first responders to mental health issues and the religious sphere is assumed to be the place where all problems and diseases are to be healed and restoration achieved as long as the person has some little faith. Therefore clergy serves as informal helpers and conduits to the formal mental health care systems but few researchers have examined whether such clergy have the ability to recognize mental illnesses that require medical interventions, willingness to refer to mental health professionals which may largely depend on perceptions and the attitudes necessary to support mental health management programs (Velando et al., 2018).

Africa Inland Church was founded by Africa Inland missionaries a century ago (1895) has expanded to become one of the largest protestant churches in Kenya with a membership of 2.4 million. The quality of evangelization demonstrated by church is reflection of the kind of training its personnel go through. Literature linking burnout with mental health of clergy is well not developed (Buys & Rothmann, 2020). However, burnout facets such as

depersonalization, emotional exhaustion and low sense of accomplishment as well as reduced personal account and interventions that can be used to mitigate burnout among the clergy in Kenya remain under-researched. Current study used Africa Inland Church (AIC) in Ainamoi Sub-County, Kericho County as a case study to delve further into the dimensions of burnout and their relationship with mental health of the clergy in Kenya.

Although the subject of burnout is complex, its implication on mental health of clergy makes it a subject of continuing psychosocial importance (Muse et al., 2017). 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 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.

At Africa Inland Church, disgruntled service providers is identified as a threat to achievement of the church's vision while inadequate pastoral care program is acknowledged as one of the weaknesses the church is grappling with (AIC, 2023). Yet the church identifies itself as an evangelical church submitted to the Holy Spirit, who is described as a helper and counsellor (John 14:26). It further articulates as a statement of faith, a belief in Jesus Christ who offers the liberating gift of the spirit in whom clergy should find encouragement, comfort, affection and compassion (Philippians 2:1). Reading through the bible we tend to come across the following characters who struggled with mental health issues Hannah in 1st samwel:11-20, Elijah 1st kings 19 king Nebuchadnezzar in 2nd kings chapter 24-25 and Jesus Christ in Luke 22:41-44 This warrants a research to determine the interaction between clergy burnout and spiritual resources for AIC clergy

Statement of the Problem

Burnout is a universal issue increasingly being experienced by many clergy. It has been documented that in some countries, as high as 45 percent of clergy suffer from burnout (Jackson, 2018). Their effectiveness in ministry depends on their mental health. When clergy experience burnout, they may disengage from service or behave in counterproductive ways to their calling. Therefore, if burnout among clergy is not prevented or contained, the mental health of a whole church is at risk, (Proeschold et al., 2018). Studies including one by Muasa et al. (2021) investigated the prevalence of burnout among Catholic religious men and women in the rural areas of Lodwar Diocese in Turkana County in Kenya. Results showed above average burnout prevalence, with personal accomplishment leading, followed by emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. However, the study was descriptive in nature and did not analyses the relationship between the burnout and clergy mental health. Furthermore, research was conducted in the rural areas and thus, may not be generalized to clergy within sub-urban contexts. The problem of research was that clergy are at the forefront of most Kenyan churches and are often the first responders to many mental health challenges on people seeking help, and because of this clergy are at risk of burnout themselves, there was need to investigate burnout among clergy in Kenya and especially how burnout interact with psychosocial resources at their disposal to influence their mental health. It is against this backdrop that the current study sought to examine the facets of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and low sense of accomplishment and how they affect the clergy's mental health of Africa Inland Church while taking psychosocial resources into account.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Emotional Exhaustion on Clergy's Mental Health

Clergy are at the frontline in terms of moral issues in society through religious participation and guidance. Samau and Schoeffel (2018) 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 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). Clergy families 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 (Aulthouse, 2018).

Pickens (2021) argue 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 (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., 2020). The role of clergy in maintaining a coherent world order cannot be gain said.

Proeschold et al. (2018) posit that the pastoral work 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, 2018). 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, 2018). 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, 2018). Other studies have also found inverse relationship between length of tenure in clergy work and emotional exhaustion (Jin, 2017). 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 (2018) 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 (2018) 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 (2018) 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

Research Design

The study employed a descriptive research design that allowed for quantitative data to be collected and analyzed with the aim of fulfilling the research objectives. 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, measuring as well as explaining their influence of burnout on clergy's mental health in Africa Inland Church in Ainamoi Sub-County, Kericho County, Kenya.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Emotional Exhaustion Dimensions

The first objective of the study was to establish the influence of emotional exhaustion on clergy's mental health of Africa Inland Church in Ainamoi Sub-County, Kericho County Kenya.

Extent of Emotional Exhaustion Dimensions on Clergy's Mental Health

Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which emotional exhaustion affects clergy's mental health of Africa Inland Church in Ainamoi Sub-County, Kericho County Kenya. The study finding was presented in the table below.

Table 4.1: Extent of Emotional Exhaustion Dimensions on Clergy's Mental Health

Extent	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Very Great Extent	8	16.0
Great Extent	25	50.0
Moderate Extent	16	32.0
Low Extent	8	16.0
Very Low Extent	0	0.0
Total	50	100

Source: Researcher, (2024)

From the data findings, 50% of the respondents indicated that emotional exhaustion affects clergy's mental health of Africa Inland Church in Ainamoi Sub-County, Kericho County to a great extent, 32% of the respondents indicated that emotional exhaustion affects to a very moderate extent, 16% of the respondents indicated that emotional exhaustion affects clergy's mental health both very high. Similarly, 16% of the respondents indicated that emotional exhaustion affected to a low extent. Samau and Scholffel (2021) 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 pressure to the members of the clergy in attempts to keep up with societal expectations thus resulting in emotional exhaustion

Statements Relating Emotional Exhaustion Dimensions and Clergy's Mental Health

The study sought to find out the level of agreement on the statement relating emotional exhaustion dimensions and clergy's mental health. Therefore, respondents were asked to indicate how emotional exhaustion affects clergy's mental health of Africa Inland Church in Ainamoi Sub-County, Kericho County. Specifically, they were asked to rate on a scale of 1 to 5 where 1=strongly disagree, 2- Disagree, 3- Neutral, 4-Agree and 5-Strongly agree.

From the findings, 48% of the majority agreed with the statement that emotional exhaustion always makes them feel emotionally drained by clergy work for the period they have been working as a clergy with a mean of 3.60 and a standard deviation of 0.86. In response to working with people all day long affecting clergy effort leading to mental health 48 majority were neutral and 36 agreed with a mean of 3.48 and standard deviation of 0.81?

On the statement that clergy work stresses me too much to work in direct contact with people around me due to emotional exhaustion 46% of the respondent neutral, 26% agreed with a mean of 3.02 and a standard deviation of 0.81. Lastly, 34% of the respondent also agreed with the statement that emotional exhaustion makes them feel like clergy work is breaking me down and frustrating more a lot due to working hard on it. This was evidenced by the mean of 3.04 from the results with a standard deviation of 1.030.

This is consistent with a USA study by Chartrand (2021) which found that most clergy are overworked and feel fatigued every week. The study implied that clergy work is characterized by working conditions that make clergy susceptible to burnout. This is also corroborated by Robins and Hancock (2019) who studies showed high levels

of emotional exhaustion and stress among members of the clergy despite spirited attempts to maintain a positive mental attitude.

Table 4.2: Emotional Exhaustion Dimensions and Clergy's Mental Health

Statement	Strongly Disagreed (%)	Disagreed (%)	Neutral (%)	Agreed (%)	Strongly Agreed (%)	Mean	Std. Dev.
Emotional exhaustion always makes me feel emotionally drained by clergy work for the period I have been working as a clergy	0.0	12.0	28.0	48.0	12.0	3.60	.86
Working with people all day long requires a great deal of effort which may cause mental health illness	2.0	4.0	48.0	36.0	10.0	3.48	.81
Clergy work stresses me too much to work in direct contact with people around me due to Emotional exhaustion	2.0	24.0	46.0	26.0	2.0	3.02	.82
Emotional exhaustion makes me feel like clergy work is breaking me down and frustrating more a lot due to working hard on it	4.0	26.0	34.0	34.0	2.0	3.04	.92

CONCLUSION

Emotional exhaustion had positive significant influence on clergy mental health in African Inland Church in Kericho County. However, not all dimensions of emotional exhaustion significantly influenced clergy wellbeing. Further, not only was there a weak negative relationship between emotional exhaustion and clergy mental health, the relationship lose significance in the presence of psychosocial resources. Therefore, it was concluded that emotional exhaustion was neutralized by psychosocial resources at the disposal of members of AIC clergy in Ainamoi Sub-County, Kericho County Kenya.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the findings and conclusions, the following recommendations for improvement are made:

1. Emotional exhaustion was found to be the most prevalent among clergy.
2. Division of duties and activities in church through decentralization of responsibility to different clergy members the burden of the clergy will be reduced.
3. Church members should participate in the church activities to reduce tasks done by member of the clergy.
4. The introduction of guidance and counselling group will assist the clergy in reducing their responsibility as well as assist them to reducing emotional exhaustion.

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