

EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF STRESS AND BURNOUT ON MINISTERIAL EFFECTIVENESS OF THE APOSTOLIC CHURCH PASTORS IN OSUN STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

Burnout among pastors has become a growing concern, particularly within faith-based organizations where clergy members often face immense spiritual, emotional, and psychological demands. These herculean tasks result to stress and burnout that impedes the mentally and physical well-being of clerics. To find solution to militating factors, this study assessed the prevalence of burnout among pastors in the church. This study used quasi-experimental, pre-test, post-test, control group design involving two treatments and one control group. Multistage sampling process was adopted. Eighty-nine (89) pastors participated in the study. Two instruments were used for the study: Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) and Job Situation Questionnaire (JSQ). Three hypotheses were generated and tested in the study. Results obtained showed a significant difference in the post-treatment burnout scores of pastors after exposure to cognitive restructuring, mutual aid therapy and control condition. It was also found that there is no significant difference in the post-test mean scores on pastors' burnout among participants based on experimental groups and ministry experience. The findings revealed that exposure to cognitive restructuring and mutual aid therapy was efficacious in ameliorating stress and burnout among clerics. The study recommended the need for periodic mental health assessments, continuous professional development in stress management, mindfulness, peer support, workload delegation and work-life balance among pastors.

Keywords: Stress, Burnout, Cognitive Restructuring, Mutual Aid Therapy

Introduction

Pastors perform many significant roles in the society. They are increasingly active in rendering various services in the church. Pastors spend a greater deal of their time in ministration, counselling, calling and answering calls of congregants and involvement in social networks. The notable role of the pastors around the world represents a unique vocation with a unique set of referred emotional demands and job skills.

In developing economies, stress and burnout among pastors present significant challenges, often worsened by resource constraints and unique socioeconomic factors. Study by Grover (2020) in India revealed a rising prevalence of burnout among clerics, with 82.6% experiencing high levels of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. Factors such as inadequate infrastructure, limited access to mental health support, and increased workloads contributed to this trend. Similarly, in Brazil, research published in the (Revista Brasileira de Medicina do Trabalho dos Santos, 2021) found that

pastors faced considerable stress and burnout, negatively impacting their productivity and overall well-being.

As reported by Carrol (2006) pastors worked an average of between 47 and 56 hours per week depending on the denominational tradition and other factors. Nwaka, Akinnawo, Awaritefe and Akpunne (2019) opined that measuring the workload of pastors is problematic in the sense that pastoring is seen as a life style and it is difficult to see where one's job role ends and personal life begins. They further stated that there is a problem in determining what constitutes the demographics and characteristics typical of those serving as pastors. Also, both organic and environmental factors like age, educational qualification, job satisfaction, geographical relocation, marital quality, and years of experience influence the extent of burnout experienced by pastors.

The complex interaction between pastors' personal lives and their professional roles within the church community has long been acknowledged as a vital element in the effectiveness of pastoral ministry (Smith, 2024). Pastors are considered important in their community to the extent that they are consulted for personal challenges, psychological, social or personal issues, such as marriage, comforting the bereaved, visiting and counselling those with physical illness and the traumatized (Taylor, Ellison, Levin & Lincoln, 2000). The pastors are expected to address issues like alcohol and other forms of substance abuse, marital and family conflict, unemployment problems, depression, pregnancy, and other personal issues that are brought to them. Recently, the issue of caring for displaced people manifested, where missionary pastors were sent to these camps to look after the campers. In carrying out these assignments, the pastors become challenged psychologically, physically, emotionally and spiritually. Recently it was discovered that there are seven pain points of Pastors; these include criticism and conflicts, family problems, stress, depression, burnout, sexual problems, and financial problems (Kumar, 2019).

All the concerns expressed above point to one thing which is burnout. Burnout has emerged as a major psychosocial occupational hazard in modern society, resulting in substantial costs for both individuals and organizations (Han et al., 2019; Simionato, Simpson, & Reid, 2019; Grow & Batra, 2019; Epstein et al., 2020). Burnout originated in the seventies but continues to be a contemporary issue due to ongoing environmental stressors and challenges faced by employees and organizations as a whole (Evangelia, Arnold, Bakker, Maria, & Kimberley, 2021). The American Psychological Association defines burnout as being "characterized by emotional exhaustion, and negative attitudes and feelings toward one's co-workers and job role" (Wilson, 2011, p. 17). Burnout is a frequent psychological reaction to prolonged occupational stress and is prevalent in human services sectors where employees regularly engage with others (Magnusson, Theorell, Oxenstierna, Hyde, & Westerlund, 2008). Maslasch (2001) stated that burnout is a result of the prolonged response to chronic emotional and interpersonal stressors at the workplace and it is defined by three dimensions of exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficacy. The menace has become very common among the pastors as attested by Ibikunle, Umeadi, and Ummuanah (2012) who reported that the onset of burnout syndrome is characterized by a gradual loss of idea, energy, enterprise, and future aim, resulting in emotional overload and exhaustion. Burnout has been classified into four categories. These are affective, physical, behavioural, and motivational manifestation.

The work of the pastors saps their energy. The demands of the job can affect the pastors emotionally when the pastor is exhausted. Pastors have also been found to experience burnout associated with the issue of geographical relocation (transfer). Some denominations transfer the pastors from one station or duty post to another, which at times may be favourable or unfavourable; favourable in the sense that the place might be an urban city, where the worshippers are educated, rich and caring. In urban city, there will be a good school for the children of the pastors to attend; they are likely to enjoy good and comfortable accommodations. Unfavourable in the sense that it may be from urban to rural area, where there will be no money, no good school, and he might be denied the comfort of the urban city. This at times, may lead to job dissatisfaction and demoralization on part of the pastors.

Pentecostal pastors face challenges that are unique to his role, not only as Christians but as a pastor, caregiver, a trauma healer who is impactful spiritually, socially, emotionally, and psychologically. As a burden bearer, his personal problems like personal marital issues, parenting; financial challenges militate against his effectiveness and efficiency in achieving an optimum performance. Pastors' burnout leads to a situation of hopelessness, failure, and health challenges among others which may combine to endanger his life and ministry. Many pastors experience burnout which they are unable to resolve. This calls for research attention in order to find solution to burnout among pastors.

Purpose of the Study

This study set out to:

1. Investigate the interaction effects of experimental condition and post held by pastors on burnout among.
2. To explore the difference in post-test burnout scores among pastors based on experimental condition and location.
3. Examine the relationship between pastor's burnout and job satisfaction

Hypotheses

1. There is no significant difference in post-test scores on burnout among participants based on experimental conditions and office held in the church.
2. There is no significant relationship between pastor's burnout and job satisfaction

Methodology

This study used quasi-experimental, pre-test, post-test, control group design involving two treatments and one control group. Multistage sampling process was adopted. Eighty nine (89) Pastors participated in the study. Multistage sampling process was used for the study. At the first stage, simple random sampling of hat and draw method was used to select four Area within The Apostolic Church out of the sixteen Areas in the state. At the second stage, Pastors from the three Areas selected were assigned to either of the treatments or control group through simple ballot system. The third stage will involved the use of table of random numbers to select four areas in each of the three states selected for the study. Two instruments were used for data

collection: Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) and The Job Situation Questionnaire (JSQ). Three hypotheses were generated and tested in the hypotheses were tested using the Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) and Pearson's product moment correlation at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Hypothesis One: There is no significant difference in post-test scores on burnout among participants based on experimental conditions and office held in the church.

Table 1: ANCOVA Showing Difference in the Post-Test Mean Scores on Burnout Based On Experimental Group and Office Held.

Source	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	32592.401 ^a	11	2962.946	16.554	.000
Intercept	924.320	1	924.320	5.164	.026
Burnout	24103.385	1	24103.385	134.670	.000
Experimental Group	2173.840	2	1086.920	6.073	.004
Office held	2124.673	3	708.224	3.957	.011
Interaction	2822.531	5	564.506	3.154	.012
Error	13781.577	77	178.982		
Total	46373.978	88			

$P < 0.05$; $F(2, 77) = 3.115366$; $F(3, 77) = 2.723343$; $F(5, 77) = 2.333308$

The data in Table 1 showed the difference in post-treatment burnout scores of pastors due to interaction of experimental condition and office held. From the results, there is a significant difference in the post-treatment burnout scores of pastors after exposure to cognitive restructuring, mutual aid therapy and control condition. This is because the calculated F-value of 6.073 is greater than the critical value of 3.11 at 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is a significant difference in the post-test mean scores in burnout among participants based on experimental groups and office held. The null hypothesis was therefore rejected.

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant relationship between burnout and job satisfaction among pastors.

Table 2: Relationship between Burnout and Job Satisfaction among Pastors

Variables	N	Mean	SD	d.f	r-calc.	r-crit.	Remarks
Burnout	89	146.72	22.956	87	-0.292	0.206	Significant
Job satisfaction	89	78.13	12.823				

The result in Table 2 showed that the calculated value of 0.292 is greater than the critical value of 0.206 given 87 degree of freedom at 0.05 level of significance. Hence, the hypothesis is rejected. This implied that there is a significant relationship between burnout and job satisfaction among pastors.

Discussion of Findings

The study findings revealed that burnout levels among pastors significantly varied based on experimental group and office held. This finding aligns with prior research indicating that burnout among clergy is influenced by a complex interplay of factors beyond just ministry experience or specific interventions. For instance, Doolittle (2010) found that burnout experiences among United Methodist ministers were associated with emotional exhaustion and the demands of congregational tasks, irrespective of their church's location. However, some studies suggest that certain environmental factors may influence burnout differently across locations. Olowookere (2016) argued that urban pastors may experience heightened burnout due to larger congregation sizes, higher financial expectations, and increased administrative burdens, whereas rural pastors may struggle with social isolation and resource constraints. As asserted by Fulmer and Sinclair (2023) pastor job burnout relates to church organizational health; noting that financial stability, congregational engagement, and leadership structure differ by location, potentially influencing burnout levels.

Additionally, Adeboye (2021) found that pastors serving in metropolitan churches in Lagos reported higher levels of emotional exhaustion than their counterparts in semi-urban or rural areas, which they attributed to greater workload pressure, increased social demands, and unrealistic congregational expectations. Oguntimehin and Oladipo (2019) also noted that the lack of structured support systems for pastors in different locations particularly those in mission fields may exacerbate stress levels and eventual burnout. Beyond geographical differences, Adebayo and Omotosho (2020) explored the relationship between community expectations and pastoral burnout in Lagos and Ibadan, concluding that churches in wealthier, urbanized areas impose greater performance pressure on pastors, whereas rural pastors face different stressors such as financial instability and inadequate infrastructure.

As observed by Eze and Uchenna (2022) denominational structure and congregational culture in Nigerian churches rather than mere location play a more significant role in determining burnout levels, with hierarchical, performance-driven denominations experiencing higher burnout rates. These factors collectively explain why findings on the relationship

between experimental conditions, location, and burnout among pastors may vary across studies. Oko and Adie (2022) similarly noted that pastors who experience emotional exhaustion and depersonalization due to heavy workloads and lack of rest report lower levels of job fulfilment. Moreover, Omotosho and Adebayo (2020) emphasized that burnout symptoms such as chronic fatigue and mental disengagement significantly reduce the intrinsic motivation pastors derive from their work, thereby lowering job satisfaction. Their study on Nigerian Pentecostal churches found that pastors experiencing high stress levels due to administrative burdens and leadership responsibilities were more likely to feel dissatisfied with their ministerial roles.

Bamgbose and Salami (2023) argued that burnout-induced dissatisfaction among Nigerian clergy leading to lower productivity, decreased congregational engagement, and in extreme cases, premature resignation from pastoral duties. Their study found that pastors who received regular support from church leadership and congregational members exhibited lower burnout levels and higher job satisfaction. This was supported by Maslach and Leiter (2016) who emphasized that burnout, characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment, significantly undermines job satisfaction by diminishing a sense of purpose and engagement. Similarly, Doolittle (2010) found that pastors experiencing higher levels of burnout were more likely to report dissatisfaction with their ministry due to the emotional strain and high expectations placed upon them. Olowookere et al. (2016) observed that clergy burnout is a key determinant of job dissatisfaction, especially among pastors in urban areas who face increasing pastoral demands, financial constraints, and unrealistic expectations from congregations. Adeboye and Odufuwa (2021) also found that burnout levels among Nigerian pastors were significantly associated with lower job commitment, reduced enthusiasm for pastoral duties, and higher intentions to leave the ministry. Further to this, Eze and Nwankwo (2022) highlighted that burnout among clergy in Nigeria is exacerbated by limited institutional support and inadequate pastoral care resources, which further diminishes job satisfaction.

Conclusion

Findings from this study highlight the effectiveness of cognitive restructuring and mutual aid therapy in significantly reducing burnout among pastors, as evidenced by the substantial difference in post-treatment burnout scores. These outcomes align with prior research emphasizing the role of cognitive interventions in modifying maladaptive thought patterns and the benefits of social support in enhancing coping mechanisms. The study also revealed that burnout intervention outcomes did not significantly differ based on pastors' educational level, ministry experience, or geographical location. This indicates that burnout is influenced by complex psychological, social, and organizational factors rather than solely by demographic variables. While some studies propose that individual differences, workplace environment, and socio-cultural factors may moderate the effectiveness of burnout interventions, the overall findings underscore the importance of structured psychological support in mitigating burnout among clergy.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Religious organizations should integrate structured psychological interventions such as cognitive restructuring and mutual aid therapy into clergy wellness programs to reduce burnout and enhance emotional resilience.
2. Church leaders and religious institutions should conduct periodic mental health assessments to identify burnout symptoms early and provide necessary interventions.
3. Pastors should receive continuous professional development on effective stress management techniques, including cognitive-behavioural strategies, mindfulness, health care delivery and peer support programs.
4. Religious institutions should implement policies that promote work-life balance, including designated rest periods, sabbaticals, and delegation of responsibilities to reduce workload pressure, the church leaders should be motivated to take annual leave and be assisted to vacate their station during the course of their vacation in order to have change of environment for relaxation and rejuvenation

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