

Clergy Well-Being Survey: Summary Report

Introduction

This report contains preliminary results from the first survey of a longitudinal research project of Clergy¹ that are leaders of congregations. This study is being conducted by Andrew Hart as part of a Doctoral research study at the Australian National University.

Purpose of the Research

There are real issues concerning the well-being of Clergy. This has been demonstrated in recent research, through feedback from denominations and informal discussions with Clergy. Across denominations the number of those commencing in vocational ministry has declined, there is a high rate of resignation, and the levels of burnout and other health problems are also high. This research is in response to these issues.

A survey was developed which focused on the demands of ministry work and the resources available to do ministry work. Although important, the individual personality or coping resources of Clergy were not examined in this research project. There is strong research evidence that job characteristics (demands and resources) have a direct contribution to health, regardless of individual characteristics.

The research aims to:

- assess the demands and resources in ministry work
- identify the demands that have the strongest contribution to health problems.
- identify the resources that have the strongest contribution to Clergy being engaged and productive in their work
- identify resources that assist Clergy to manage the demands of their work

The findings of this research will provide a sound basis for Clergy, churches, and denominations to consider appropriate strategies to promote the health and well-being of clergy. It is hoped that as Clergy benefit from these findings, these benefits will also be experienced in the congregations they lead.

In order to achieve these aims a one year, longitudinal study is being conducted. The advantage of this, compared to a single survey, is that the effects over time of demands on the health and well-being of Clergy can be examined. A survey was conducted from April – June 2010 and a second survey will be conducted in March-April 2011.

The first survey provided a comprehensive assessment of more than 14 different types of demands and 10 types of resources. Clergy also provided written information to complement the largely multiple-choice format of the survey. This summary report contains some of the key findings from the first survey. A comprehensive description of the findings of the research will be provided in the research thesis.

Participants

The majority of participants were contacted through their denomination or training organisation. The overall response rate for the survey was 22%. For an occupational survey of this length this is a reasonable response rate.

Participants were 283 Clergy, who were directly involved in leading a congregation. Table 1 provides the demographic information of the participants.

¹ The term clergy is a collective term to refer to leaders of congregations that are commonly referred to as Pastors, s, or Priests.

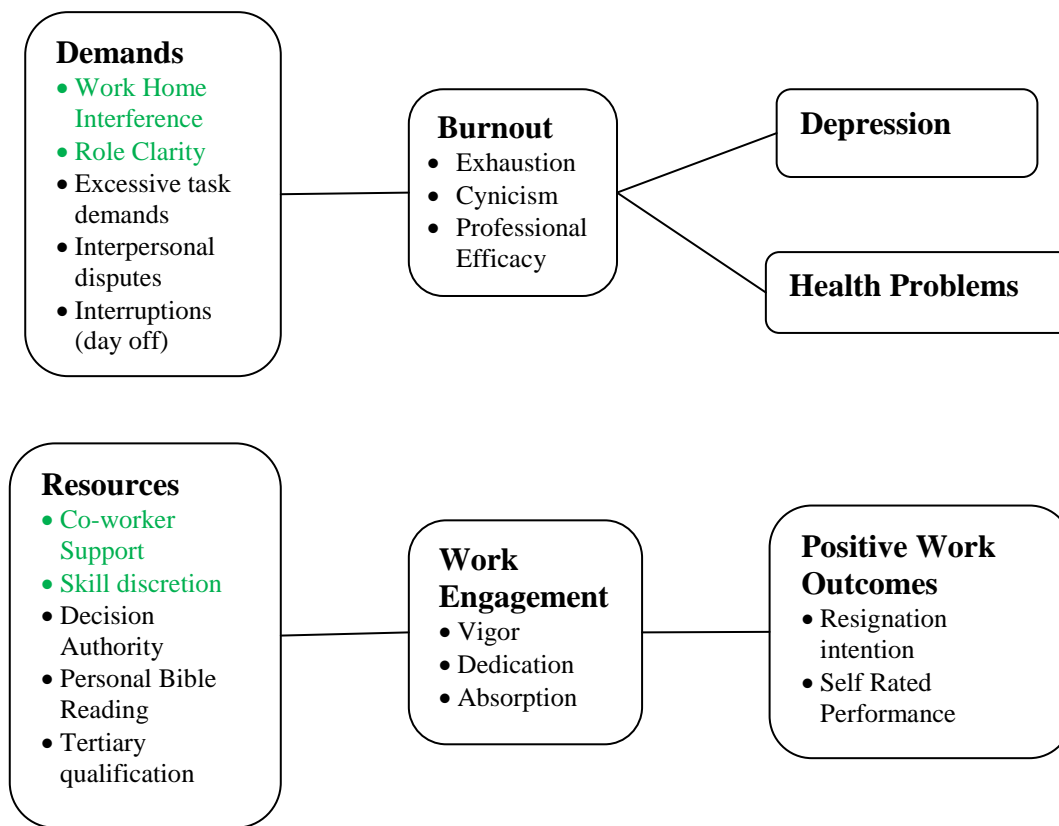
Clergy Well-Being Survey: Summary Report

Table 1. Demographic Information

Demographics									
Gender		Age (years)		Marital Status		Denomination		Location	
Female	17.9%	Median	47	Married	79.4%	Baptist	38%	Urban	55%
Male	82.1%	Range	22-75			Anglican	35%	Large Regional	19%
						Uniting	13%	Small Regional	23%
						Catholic	9%	Rural	3%
						Other	6%		

Preliminary Findings

Figure 1. Strong, independent associations identified in the first survey



Health and Well-Being

In order to examine the stress effects of ministry, Burnout was measured using the most well-accepted measure of this concept, the Maslach Burnout Inventory. Burnout is one measure of the short to medium-term effects of work. Burnout is the experience of Exhaustion (emotional and physical), Cynicism (loss of interest or enthusiasm for work), and reduced Professional Efficacy (doubt competence in work). The responses from Clergy indicated that in comparison to other occupations the level of Exhaustion was at a moderate to high level. The level of Cynicism (towards work), and Professional Efficacy were at a moderate level. These results confirm previous findings that indicate the relatively high level of Burnout amongst Clergy.

The psychological health of Clergy was also measured with regard to symptoms characteristic of Depression. There were 11.1(%) that were experiencing symptoms of Depression that were in the moderate or severe range

Clergy Well-Being Survey: Summary Report

according to the Australian norms. This is of concern, but this does compare with the levels found for other respondents from both commercial and public sector organizations.

The Clergy's perception of their general health was largely positive with a large majority (89%) responding that their health is good to excellent, and only 11% responding that their health was Fair to Poor.

Work Engagement was measured to examine the positive effects of Ministry Resources. In some respects this is the opposite of Burnout with components of Vigor (emotional and physical energy related to work), Dedication (enthusiasm and interest in work). In addition, the third component of Work Engagement is Absorption which refers to feeling immersed or like time is flying when working. The responses indicate that 74% had an Average level of Work Engagement, and 19% had a High or Very High level of Work Engagement.

Ministry Demands and Burnout

The survey requested information from Clergy on a range of work demands. These were examined to identify which demands had the strongest association with Burnout.

From the 14 different types of demands measured the one that had the strongest association with Burnout was Work-Home Interference. This describes the conflict that arises from lack of *time* and the *strain* of work on the home life of Clergy. For example, "Your work takes up time that you would have liked to spend with your spouse/family/friends?"(*time*) and "Your work obligations make it difficult for you to feel relaxed at home?"(*strain*).

The second work stressor with a strong association with Burnout was Role Clarity. This measures how clear your responsibilities, expectations, and objectives are in your work. This had a strong association with Cynicism and reduced Professional Efficacy.

There were three more ministry demands that had a strong association with Burnout. These were Interpersonal Disputes, the interruption of day(s) off by ministry activities, and an excessive amount of ministry work.

As the level of these increased:	The level of:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Work Home Interference• Role Clarity• Interpersonal Disputes• Interruptions during days off• Amount of ministry work	Burnout increased

Ministry Resources and Work Engagement

The survey considered the Ministry resources that assisted Clergy in their work. The resources measured related to organisational, psychological, social and spiritual resources for ministry. The positive impact of these resources on Clergy was measured by Work Engagement.

There were 10 different types of resources measured in the survey. The one with the strongest association with Work Engagement was support from co-workers, both emotional and practical assistance.

The second resource that was strongly associated with Work Engagement is called Skill Discretion. This refers to the opportunity in the work of Clergy to learn, develop skills, and do a variety of tasks.

Clergy Well-Being Survey: Summary Report

The analysis of the information from the survey also indicated three other Resources which have a strong association with Work Engagement. These were the ability to make decisions about how and what Clergy do in their work (Decision Authority), personal bible reading and tertiary training.

As the level of these increased:	The level of:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Support from co-workers• Skill discretion• Input and influence in decisions about work tasks• Personal bible reading• Tertiary training	Work Engagement increased

Burnout and Health

Burnout provides an indication of the short to medium-term effects of strain from work. It has been shown to be a pre-cursor to a range of health problems including depression. The data from this survey shows that there is a strong association between Burnout symptoms and symptoms characteristic of depression. Therefore, as Burnout increases then the severity of symptoms characteristic of depression increases.

Work Engagement and Positive Work Outcomes

Work Engagement has been linked in previous research to increased retention of workers, and improved work performance. Analysis of the data from this survey shows a strong association between Work Engagement with positive work outcomes. So, when Work Engagement was high the frequency of considering resignation was low, and the rating for performance was high.

Conclusion

This summary provides some preliminary findings from the first survey of the Clergy Well-Being research project being conducted by Andrew Hart from the Australian National University.

The findings from the survey show evidence of moderate to high Burnout levels. Analysis of the survey showed two key work stressors that had a strong association with Burnout: Work Home Interference and lack of Role Clarity. The survey also identified the key resources for Clergy that had a strong association with Work Engagement: Co-worker support and Skill Discretion. The importance of Burnout and Work Engagement is shown by their strong association with health and work outcomes.

The benefit of this research for Clergy and their churches is that it identifies the demands and resources that should be focussed on to gain the most benefit for the health and work outcomes for Clergy. The collaborative development of strategies to address these demands and resources is critical for the health and ongoing ministry of Clergy.

Useful resources

Brain, P (2006) *Going the Distance: How to stay fit for a lifetime of ministry*. Sydney: Matthias Media.

Kaldor, P. & Bullpitt (2001) *Burnout in Church Leaders*. Adelaide: Openbook Publishers.

Whetham, P & Whetham, L. (2000) *Hard to be Holy*. Adelaide, Openbook Publishers.

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