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Francis, Leslie J. ORCID logoORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2946-9980, Village, Andrew ORCID logoORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2174-8822 and Haley, John M. (2023) The Francis Burnout Inventory: Testing the balanced affect model among Methodist circuit ministers in Great Britain. Research in the Social Scientific Study of Religion, 33. pp. 90-101.

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The Francis Burnout Inventory: Testing the balanced affect model among Methodist circuit ministers in Great Britain

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Abstract

The Francis Burnout Inventory (FBI) conceptualised poor work-related psychological health in the terms of the classic model of balanced affect proposed by Bradburn. Operationalised specifically for application among clergy and religious professionals, in the FBI negative affect is assessed by the 11-item Scale of Emotional Exhaustion in Ministry (SEEM) and positive affect is assessed by the 11-item Satisfaction in Ministry Scale (SIMS). In the present study the FBI was completed by 803 Methodist ministers in Great Britain together with two independent measures hypothesised as reflecting the consequence of burnout, dissatisfaction with present appointment, and thoughts of leaving ministry. These data were employed to test the significance of the interaction between SEEM and SIMS in predicting these independent measures. In support of the theory of balanced affect, these data demonstrated that the mitigating impact of positive affect increased with increasing levels of negative affect.

Keywords: balanced affect, religious leaders, satisfaction in ministry, emotional exhaustion, burnout

Introduction

The Francis Burnout Inventory, designed specifically for assessing work-related psychological wellbeing among clergy and religious leaders, was first introduced by Francis, Kaldor, Robbins, and Castle (2005) drawing on data provided by 6,680 clergy from Australia, England, and New Zealand. What clearly differentiates the Francis Burnout Inventory from the longer-established Maslach Burnout Inventory (Maslach & Jackson, 1986) are the theoretical foundations on which it was constructed. The Maslach Burnout Inventory comprises three components that are sequentially related. According to this conceptualisation burnout begins with emotional exhaustion. High emotional exhaustion leads to depersonalisation, a state in which religious leaders begin to withdraw emotionally from the people among whom they minister. High depersonalisation leads to a lack of personal accomplishment as people cease to reward and to affirm their ministry (Maslach, 2003). The Francis Burnout Inventory comprises two components rooted in the classic theory of balanced affect proposed by Bradburn (1969).

According to Bradburn's theory 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, Kaldor, Robbins, and Castle (2005) operationalised 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, Kaldor, Shevlin, and Lewis (2004), and Satisfaction in Ministry Scale (SIMS).

Bradburn's theory of balanced affect proposes a model that can be tested empirically. As a consequence a small number of independent studies has set out to test, and thereby to validate the Francis Burnout Inventory among different groups of clergy and religious professionals. The theory proposes that high levels of positive affect can offset the deleterious consequences of high levels of negative affect. To test this theory empirically it is necessary to posit an outcome variable (or set of variables) against which the effect of scores recorded on the Scale of Emotional Exhaustion in Ministry and scores recorded on the Satisfaction in Ministry Scale can be regressed. In this strategy key attention is given to the additional effect of the interaction term created by the product of the two measures of negative affect (Scale of Emotional Exhaustion in Ministry) and positive affect (Satisfaction in Ministry Scale). This interaction term is testing the extent to which the mitigating effects of positive affect on the outcome variable increases with increasing levels of negative affect.

Currently seven studies have employed this statistical approach against a variety of outcome measures and among a variety of clergy and religious professionals. Among a sample of 744 clergy serving in The Presbyterian Church USA, Francis, Village, Robbins,

and Wulff (2011) employed two outcome measures concerned with 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. Among a sample of 658 Anglican clergy serving in the Church of England, Francis, Laycock, and Brewster (2017) employed three outcome measures, namely 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?'.

Among a sample of 155 Catholic priests serving in Italy, Francis, Laycock, and Crea (2017) employed as an outcome measure the Purpose in Life Scale developed by Robbins and Francis (2000). This is a 12-item instrument designed to assess a unidimensional construct related to meaning and purpose in life. Each item is rated on a five-point Likert scale: disagree strongly, disagree, not certain, agree, and agree strongly. This same outcome measure, the Purpose in Life Scale, was employed for a second time among a sample of 95 Catholic priests and 61 Catholic religious sisters in Italy by Francis, Crea, and Laycock (2017). Among a sample of 358 Anglican clergy serving in the Church in Wales, Village,

Payne, and Francis (2018) employed as an outcome measure a single item index of thoughts of leaving ministry since ordination (no, once or twice, several times, and frequently). Among a sample of 90 Anglican clergy serving in the Church of England, Francis, Laycock, and Ratter (2019) employed as an outcome measure the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (Tennant, et al., 2007). This is a 14-item instrument employing positively-worded items covering different aspects of eudaimonic and hedonic wellbeing. Each item is rated on a five-point Likert scale: none of the time, rarely, some of the time, often, and all of the time. Among a sample of 287 Catholic priests serving in Italy, Francis, Crea, and Laycock (2021) employed for the third time the Purpose in Life Scale, developed by Robbins and Francis (2000). All seven samples supported the theory that the mitigating impact of positive affect on the outcome variables increases with increasing levels of negative affect.

Research question

In the scientific spirit of replication (Fradera, 2015), the present study is designed to test the balanced affect model of clergy work-related psychology of wellbeing among a different group of clergy (Methodist Circuit Ministers) and employing two outcome measures concerned with satisfaction with present appointment and thoughts of leaving ministry.

Method

Procedure

The *Methodist Circuit Ministers' Survey 2008* was distributed by post during May to the ministers serving in circuit appointments, as published in the *Minutes of the Annual Conference and Directory* for the Methodist Church year 2007-2008. The survey was accompanied by a pre-paid reply envelope. Participants were assured of anonymity and confidentiality. Appropriate follow-up reminder letters resulted in the return of 951 thoroughly completed questionnaires, a response of 60%, among whom there were 803 ministers who self-identified as currently engaged in itinerant stipendiary ministry either as

superintendent or ordained minister, and who fully completed the instruments employed in the current analyses.

Measures

Work-related psychological wellbeing was assessed by the Francis Burnout Inventory (FBI: Francis, Kaldor, Robbins, & Castle, 2005). This instrument comprises two 11-item scales, the Scale of Satisfaction in Ministry (SIMS), designed to capture positive affect, and the Scale of Emotional Exhaustion in Ministry (SEEM), designed to capture negative affect. Each item is rated on a five-point Likert scale: disagree strongly (1), disagree (2), not certain (3), agree (4), and agree strongly (5). Example items concerned with satisfaction in ministry are: 'The ministry here gives real purpose and meaning to my life' and 'I gain a lot of personal satisfaction from working with people in my current ministry'. Example items concerned with emotional exhaustion are: 'I feel drained in fulfilling my ministry roles' and 'I am less patient with those among whom I minister than I used to be'. In their foundation paper for the FBI, drawing on a sample of 6,680 clergy from Australia, England, and New Zealand, Francis, Kaldor, Robbins, and Castle (2005) reported the following alpha coefficients: SEEM, $\alpha = .84$; SIMS, $\alpha = .84$.

Satisfaction with present appointment was assessed by the question, 'How satisfied are you with your present appointment?' rated on a five-point scale: very dissatisfied (1), dissatisfied (2), undecided (3), satisfied (4), and very satisfied (5).

Thoughts of leaving ministry were assessed by the question, 'Since probation/ordination have you ever considered leaving the ordained ministry?' rated on a four-point scale: no (1), once or twice (2), several times (3), and frequently (4).

Participants

Of the 803 participants included in the analyses, 558 were men and 245 were women. In terms of age, 23 ministers were between 26 and 35 years, 140 between 36 and 45 years,

306 between 46 and 55 years, 310 between 56 and 65 years, and 24 were over the age of 65 years. In terms of marital status, 681 were married, 121 not married, and one preferred not to say.

Data analysis

The data were analysed by means of the SPSSS statistical package, using the reliability, correlations, factor, and regression routines. For the multiple regression model, which included an interaction term for SIM and SEEMS, these variables were mean-centred before calculating the interaction term in order to avoid problems of multicollinearity.

Results

- insert table 1 about here -

The first step in data analysis explored the scale properties of the two measures proposed by the Francis Burnout Inventory. These data presented in table 1 align closely with the data provided by Brewster, Francis, and Robbins (2011) on 521 clergy serving in rural ministry in the Church of England. Brewster, Francis, and Robbins (2011) reported an alpha coefficient for both measures of .87, while in the present study for emotional exhaustion α = .86 and for satisfaction in ministry α = .87. For the Scale of Emotional Exhaustion in Ministry, Brewster, Francis, and Robbins (2011) reported a mean score of 29.6, compared with 29.4 in the present study. For the Satisfaction in Ministry Scale, Brewster, Francis, and Robbins (2011) reported a measure of 39.5, compared with 41.6 in the present study.

- insert table 2 about here -

The second step in data analysis explored the responses to the two outcome variables. These data show that 41% of the ministers had considered leaving ministry at least once, while 80% were currently satisfied or very satisfied with their present appointment.

- insert table 3 about here -

Table 3 presents the bivariate correlations between the core variables. These correlations indicate that the only significant correlation with sex is age. Women ministers in the sample are younger than male ministers. Age is significantly positively correlated with satisfaction in present appointment and negatively with emotional exhaustion and thoughts of leaving ministry. This is consistent with previous research (Francis, 2018). It remains unclear, however, whether these correlations suggest that older ministers handle the stresses of ministry more effectively or whether those more susceptible to emotional exhaustion in ministry have exited ministry before reaching the older age group. There is a strong negative correlation between the Scale of Emotional Exhaustion in Ministry and the Satisfaction in Ministry Scale. There is also a significant correlation between the two-outcome measure. Those most satisfied in their current appointment are also least likely to have had thoughts of leaving ministry.

- insert table 4 and figure 1 about here -

The final step in data analysis tested the notion of balanced affect by allowing positive affect and negative affect to interact. The data presented in table 4 demonstrate that for both measures of burnout there was a significant interaction effect. Satisfaction in ministry made little difference to ministers' satisfaction with their particular appointment if they had low levels of emotional exhaustion. However, at high levels of exhaustion, those with higher satisfaction with their ministry showed significantly higher levels of satisfaction with their appointment than those with lower satisfaction with their ministry (Figure 1a). Among those with high satisfaction in ministry there was little or no effect of emotional exhaustion on how frequently they had thoughts about leaving. If anything, they were less likely to think about leaving the more exhausted they were. However, for those with low satisfaction in ministry, increases in emotional exhaustion significantly increased the likelihood that they would have thoughts about leaving ministry (Figure 1b).

Conclusion

In the spirit of scientific replication (Fradera, 2015), the aim of the present study was to test the validity of the balanced affect conceptualisation of poor work-related psychological health and burnout as operationalised by the Francis Burnout Inventory (FBI), a measure designed specifically for use among clergy and religious professionals. In this instrument positive affect was assessed by the Satisfaction in Ministry Scale (SIMS) and negative affect was assessed by the Scale of Emotional Exhaustion in Ministry (SEEM). Building on a series of earlier studies, the present study added to existing knowledge in two ways: by testing the FBI among Methodist circuit ministers, a group not previously explored; and by employing two independent measures hypothesised as reflecting the consequence of burnout, dissatisfaction with present appointment and thoughts of leaving ministry. Specifically, data from the present study demonstrated that ministers who recorded high scores on the SEEM together with high scores on the SIMS showed significantly higher levels of satisfaction with their appointment, compared with ministers who recorded high scores on the SEEM together with low scores on the SIMS. Among ministers who recorded high scores on SIMS, there was little or no effect of scores recorded on the SEEM on how frequently they had entertained thoughts of leaving ministry. On the other hand, among those who recorded low scores on SIMS, increases in scores recorded in SEEM significantly increased the frequency with which they had entertained thoughts of leaving ministry.

Taken together, these eight studies among 744 clergy serving in The Presbyterian Church USA (Francis, Village, Robbins, & Wulff, 2011), among 658 Anglican clergy serving in England (Francis, Laycock, & Brewster, 2017), among 156 Catholic priests and religious serving in Italy (Francis, Crea, & Laycock, 2017), among 155 Catholic priests serving in Italy (Francis, Laycock, & Crea, 2017), among 358 Anglican clergy serving in Wales (Village, Payne, & Francis, 2018), among 90 Anglican clergy serving in England (Francis, Laycock, &

Ratter, 2019), among 287 Catholic priests serving in Italy (Francis, Crea, & Laycock, 2021), and among 803 Methodist ministers serving in Great Britain (the present study), employing a variety of outcome measures, suggest that the balanced affect model of professional burnout among clergy is not only conceptually coherent, but also empirically verifiable. The security of this finding has been enhanced by the scientific discipline of replication studies.

These findings are not merely of theoretical and scientific interest, but also of practical value for supporting the work-related psychological health of clergy. The balanced affect approach suggests that those mandated with the professional and personal oversight of clergy may have a proper duty of care to monitor those two affect systems and to be alert to opportunities to reduce levels of emotional exhaustion in ministry and to enhance levels of satisfaction in ministry. While lessening the factors that lead to emotional exhaustion may be very difficult, the good news is that the effects of high levels of emotional exhaustion may be ameliorated by enhancing levels of satisfaction in ministry. It is in this area that success may be more easily achieved.

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Table 1

Scale properties of the Francis Burnout Inventory

	Alpha	N items	Mean	SD
Scale of Emotional Exhaustion in Ministry	.86	11	29.39	6.87
Satisfaction in Ministry Scale	.87	11	41.56	5.28

Table 2

Two independent measures of burnout

	%
Satisfaction with present appointment	
Very satisfied	37
Satisfied	43
Undecided	12
Dissatisfied	6
Very dissatisfied	2
Thoughts of leaving ministry	
No	59
Once or twice	26
Several times	11
Frequently	4

Table 3

Correlations

	Sex	Age	SIMS	SEEM	TL
Present satisfaction (PS)	-.02	.13***	.55***	-.53***	-.30***
Thoughts of leaving (TL)	-.05	-.15***	-.38***	.41***	
Emotional exhaustion (SEEM)	-.00	-.16***	-.66***		
Satisfaction in Ministry (SIMS)	-.02	.06			
Age	-.10**				

Note: ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Table 4.

Multiple regression of two measures of burnout

a) Satisfaction with Appointment			
	B	SE	*P*
Constant	3.847	0.164	<.001
Sex	-0.009	0.059	.883
Age	0.066	0.032	.038
SEEM	-0.040	0.005	<.001
SIMS	0.063	0.007	<.001
SEEM x SIMS	0.002	0.001	.001
R^2 (adjusted)	.363		

b) Thoughts of leaving			
	B	SE	*P*
Constant	2.088	0.159	<.001
Sex	-0.115	0.057	.045
Age	-0.097	0.031	.002
SEEM	0.034	0.005	<.001
SIMS	-0.026	0.007	<.001
SEEM x SIMS	-0.003	0.001	<.001
R^2 (adjusted)	.220		

Note. Values for SEEM and SIMS have been mean centred.
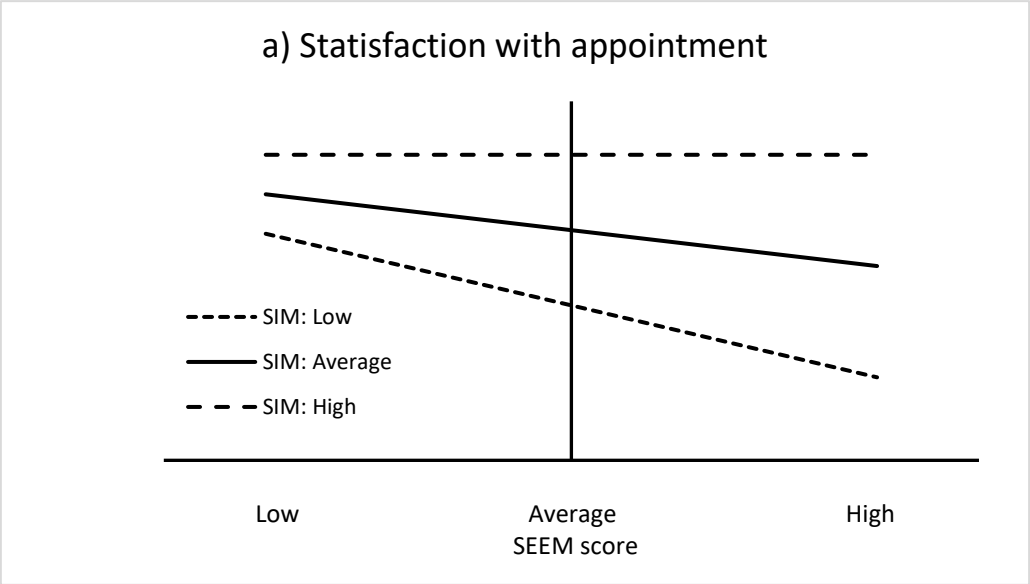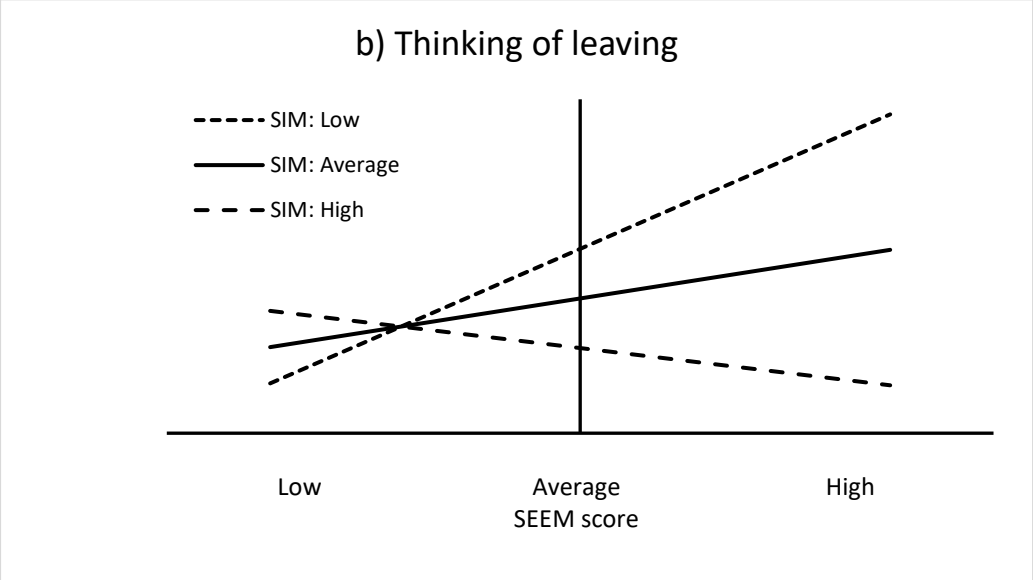
Figure 1 Interaction of SIM and SEEM on measures of burnout (based on models in table 4)