SPIRITUALITY AND BURNOUT:
AN INCREMENTAL VALIDITY STUDY

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Burnout is often seen as a combination of personality and work environment factors. Like other professions in burnout research, clergy have been treated with little consideration for what might be unique about or vital to the vocation or its adherents. The present study examined the incremental validity of spirituality in predicting burnout in United Methodist clergy over and above both personality and work environment variables. Burnout was measured using a composite index consisting of the Maslach Burnout Inventory-General Survey (Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1996), the Situational Shift Scale (Rodgerson & Piedmont, 1998), and the Satisfaction With Life Scale (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985). Hierarchical multiple regression analysis indicated that spirituality showed incremental significance in predicting burnout even when controlling for personality and work environment, although the contribution was small.

As a result of the increasing recognition of the demands of the pastorate, there has been a growing interest in work-related stressors for clergy (Malony, 1988; Morris & Blanton, 1994). The burnout syndrome found among human service professionals has been associated with the pastorate as well (Daniel & Rogers, 1982; Sanford, 1982; Hall, 1997). Identified problem areas for clergy include lack of time, stress, frustration, loneliness, social isolation, and diminished marital adjustment (Ellison & Mattila, 1983; Warner & Carter, 1984). In his review of the literature, Hall (1997) explored the research on emotional well-being, marital/divorce adjustment, stress and coping, family adjustment, and burnout among the

clergy. He noted, however, that what is lacking in the current research is an assessment of pastors' spirituality as it related to personal and interpersonal functioning.

With a few exceptions (Prout, 1996; Rodgerson & Piedmont, 1998), little attempt has been made to study spirituality and its relationship to burnout. Burnout among the clergy may well touch upon the heart of one's spiritual life and identity (Oswald, 1991). Maslach and Leiter (1997) wrote that "Burnout is the index of the dislocation between what people are and what they have to do. It represents an erosion in values, dignity, spirit, and will, an erosion of the human soul" (p. 17). Burnout among the clergy may represent a threat not only to one's vocation, but to one's sense of life calling and identity as a pastor. Pastors struggling with burnout often face a growing sense of cynicism and disillusionment (Oswald, 1991; Sanford, 1982) that threaten to undermine the very convictions which define their calling. Oswald (1991) called burnout "a deeply religious issue" (p. 71) in that it calls the pastor to confront the issue of personal commitment.

Bulka (1984) argued that the answer to burnout may be found in self-transcendence. It is here that one of the fundamental attributes of clergy, their spirituality, might serve as an important variable in buffering the negative effects of burnout. According to Emmons (1999), "The core component of spirituality is reflected in the notion of 'transcendence'" (p. 101). Self-transcendence involves the ability to step beyond oneself, to take a larger view of present circumstances. Piedmont (1999) defined spiritual transcendence as the capacity of individuals to stand outside of their immediate sense of time and place to view life from a larger, more objective perspective. Spiritual transcendence involves the ability to move beyond oneself and make connections with an Ultimate that is per-

suggested that certain personality types will predispose individuals to respond to stress with more negative appraisals, and higher levels of such response styles will lead to higher reported burnout.

Research has also indicated that both personality and situation independently explain the variance in burnout. Piedmont (1993) used a longitudinal analysis to explore personality (as measured by the five-factor model) as a predictor of burnout while controlling for situational factors. Using a relatively small sample of occupational therapists, he demonstrated that Neuroticism was a significant predictor of both Emotional Exhaustion (EE) and Depersonalization (DP), both concurrently and predictively. Even when controlling for the effects of the work environment, personality continued to significantly predict burnout over a seven month period. These results point to the importance of personality factors in predicting burnout, even when controlling for situational factors. Further, no significant interaction between personality and work environment in predicting burnout was found.

Among the clergy, burnout has been linked with a number of individual-difference constructs, including role conflict and role ambiguity (Schwanz, 1996), leisure attitudes and behavior (Stanton-Rich & Iso-Ahola, 1998), loneliness and marital adjustment (Warner & Carter, 1984), loneliness, years of service, and spiritual well-being (Prout, 1996), and styles of religious problem-solving (Rodgerson & Piedmont, 1998). All of these constructs evidenced significant relations to burnout and underscore the importance of person variables for understanding stress, coping, and burnout.

ISSUES OF ASSESSMENT AND MEASUREMENT

Burnout

The possible influence of personality (especially neuroticism) on the assessment of burnout has raised questions about how best to measure this construct. Maslach's three-fold definition of burnout and its operationalization in the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) has become the most frequently used for research purposes (Schaufeli & Enzmann, 1998). Yet this scale is not without problems (Garden, 1987; Schaufeli, Enzmann, & Girault, 1993; Schaufeli & Enzmann, 1998).

The bulk of the criticism of the MBI has revolved around factorial structure (Garden, 1987) and discrimi-

nant validity (Schaufeli & Enzmann, 1998). However, the consistently strong correlation between neuroticism and burnout as measured by the MBI suggests possible item contamination (Schroeder & Costa, 1984). It may be possible that the MBI is a measure of traits rather than of the situational components contributing to burnout. Schroeder and Costa (1984) explored item contamination among stress measures and their outcomes measure and found many incidences of content overlap. A similar problem may exist with the measurement of burnout. For example, an examination of the Cynicism subscale of the Maslach Burnout Inventory–General Survey (MBI-GS) and the Neuroticism subscale of the Bipolar Adjective Rating Scale (BARS) found several possible overlapping items.

Behavioral component. In addition to standard self-report measures such as the MBI, Schaufeli et al. (1993) have called for behaviorally anchored rating scales to augment assessment of burnout. To date few attempts have been made to assess the behavioral component of burnout. The Situational Shift Scale (SSS; Rodgerson, 1994; Rodgerson & Piedmont, 1998) offers one possibility for behavioral assessment, especially among clergy. This scale measures changes in behavior and attitude in response to shifting work situations. The use of this scale is important in assessing situational factors in burnout rather than simply trait influenced responses. The scale was shown to be correlated in expected ways with burnout as measured by the MBI (Rodgerson, 1994). A modified version of this scale will be included in this study.

Cognitive component. In addition to the affective and behavioral components of burnout, a cognitive or attitudinal component of burnout has also been identified (Schaufeli & Van Dierendonck, 1993; Schaufeli & Enzmann, 1998). The MBI-GS has attempted to capture the cognitive component of burnout through the Cynicism (Cy) and Professional Efficacy (PE) subscales. Item overlap between the Cy subscale and the Neuroticism subscale of the BARS presents problems, however, creating spurious associations between the two measures. As an additional cognitive assessment of burnout, the present study also employed the Satisfaction With Life Scale (Diener et al., 1985) as an assessment of global life satisfaction.

For the purpose of the present study, therefore, burnout was measured by a summated assessment from three sources: (a) the MBI-GS; (b) the Satisfaction With Life Scale; and (c) the Situational Shift Scale. Use of these three sources was intended to capture the affective, cognitive, and behavioral com-

Table 1
Situational Shift Scale

The following questions are answered on a 7-point Likert scale from *Greatly Decreased* to *Greatly Increased*.

Original items:

1. In the past six months, my prayer and devotional life has . . .

2. In the past six months, my feelings of closeness to God have . . .

3. In the past six months, my enthusiasm for worship has . . .

4. In the past six months, the number of hours that I have worked has . . .

5. In the past six months, my job responsibilities have . . .

6. In the past six months, my thoughts of a job change have . . .

7. In the past six months, my commitment to the ministry has . . .

Additional items:

8. In the past six months, my study of the scripture has . . .

9. In the past six months, my weekly days off have . . .

10. In the past six months, my time with family and friends has . . .

11. In the past six months, my enthusiasm for church work has . . .

12. In the past six months, my time spent each week in sermon preparation has . . .

augmented by five additional scale items in order to assess behavioral and attitudinal shifts among clergy. Alpha reliability for the expanded SSS was .78. Table 1 presents the original items of Rodgerson's scale along with the five additional items.

Satisfaction With Life Scale. The Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS) is a 5-item scale developed by Diener, Emmons, Larsen, and Griffin (1985) to measure the global life satisfaction component of subjective well-being. Items in the SWLS are measured on a 7-point Likert scale from *Strongly disagree* to *Strongly agree*. Included are such items as "In most ways my life is close to ideal," and "So far I have gotten the important things I want in life."

Scores from the MBI-GS, the SSS, and the SWLS were transformed into z-scores and combined to form a single burnout score, the zBurnout score. A formula of $zEx + zCy + zSSS$ B zPE B $zSWLS$ was used to calculate the resulting zBurnout scores. Higher scores on the zBurnout scale reflected a greater degree of overall burnout.

Spiritual Transcendence Scale. The Spiritual Transcendence Scale (STS) (Piedmont, 1999) is a 24-item scale measuring three dimensions of Spiritual Transcendence. These include Prayer Fulfillment (9 items), Universality (9 items), and Connectedness (6 items). Responses are measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from *Strongly Agree* to *Strongly Disagree*. Alpha reliabilities of the three subscales were .65, .85, and .85 for Connectedness, Universality, and Prayer Fulfillment respectively. Correlations between the STS and the dimensions of the five-factor personality model were all below .20, suggesting that the STS measured a construct independent of the five-factor model (Piedmont, 1999). In a second construct validity study, Piedmont (2001) scores on the STS correlated with a wide range of salient psychosocial constructs, including Prosocial Behavior, Self-Actualization, and Purpose in Life.

Bipolar Adjective Rating Scale. The Bipolar Adjective Rating Scale (BARS) is an 80-item set of adjective pairs devised by McCrae and Costa (1985) and based on the 40-item adjective pairs of Goldberg (1983). The scale measures the five-factor model of personality (neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, and conscientiousness). The BARS assesses adjective pairs based on a 7-point Likert scale of similarity from *Very Much Like Me* to *Neutral*. Scale validity was assessed both by self- and observer-ratings as well as by comparison of the 80-item pairs with the NEO (assessing neuroticism, extraversion, and openness to experience). Conver-

Table 2

Correlation matrix and alpha reliabilities for key variables

Variables	α	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
BARS															
1. Neuro.	.82		-.08	.07	-.47**	-.46**	.30**	.28**	.35**	.34**	.19**	-.05	-.17**	-.05	.48**
2. Extra.	.74		C	.29**	.41**	.18*	-.06	-.28**	-.24**	-.09	-.05	.20**	.20**	.24**	-.29**
3. Open.	.79			C	-.11	-.07	.11*	.04	.03	.15*	.07	.09	.10	.11*	-.03
4. Agree.	.82				C	.40**	-.14*	-.34**	-.29**	-.17**	-.09	.17**	.11	.23**	-.31**
5. Consc.	.86					C	-.07	-.29**	-.41**	-.24**	.04	.14*	.17**	.19**	-.32**
ORQ															
6. RO	.81						C	.19**	.37**	.58**	.59**	.01	.09	-.01	.46**
7. RI	.84							C	.44**	.43**	.08	-.17**	-.20**	-.13*	.63**
8. RA	.76								C	.58**	.20**	-.15*	-.11	-.20**	.55**
9. RB	.77									C	.44**	-.03	.04	-.11	.60**
10. R	.75										C	.01	.04	.01	.35**
STS															
11. Univ.	.79											C	.42**	.50**	-.16**
12. Prayer	.61												C	.24**	-.26**
13. Conn.	.57													C	-.17**
Burnout															
14. zBurn	.68														C
Descriptives															
Mean		46	51	52	56	51	28	21	22	23	31	37	32	23	0
SD		8.4	8.5	9.2	8.2	8.6	6.9	6.8	5.8	6.6	5.7	4.5	4.1	3.1	3.8

Note: $N = 321$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .005$. All two-tailed tests.

Note: Neuro. = Neuroticism; Extra. = Extraversion; Open. = Openness to Experience; Agree. = Agreeableness; Consc. = Conscientiousness; RO = Role Overload; RI = Role Insufficiency; RA = Role Ambiguity; RB = Role Boundary; R = Responsibility; Univ. = Universality; Prayer = Prayer Fulfillment; Conn. = Connectedness; zBurn. = zBurnout

and work environment, the two factors most commonly linked to burnout. The significant component of spirituality involved the individual's perceived relationship with God (Prayer Fulfillment); those dimensions of spirituality that related the individual to others in service and community (Connectedness and Universality) were not significant. It would seem that spirituality, and especially that quality which connects one with the Transcendent, does indeed tell us something about burnout among clergy that personality and work environment do not tell us. The less one feels oneself in intimate relationship with the Divine, the greater the likelihood of burnout. The implication of this is that when it comes to dealing with the work-related distress of burnout, the ability to lose oneself in prayer or meditation is different than the ability to lose oneself in other areas of life such as in a hobby or in service.

These findings are consistent with those of Rodgerson and Piedmont (1998) in terms of effect size. They found that the contributions of the Religious Problem Solving scale did significantly predict two dimensions of burnout (Depersonalization and Personal Accomplishment), although the magnitude of the correlation was small (2-5% incremental validity). The current research found a similar effect size for spirituality even when using a composite burnout scale. Similar effect sizes have been found when spirituality has been linked to subjective well-being (Ellison, 1991; Ellison, Gay, & Glass, 1989; Poloma & Pendleton, 1990).

It must be kept in mind that the modest findings in the present study represent the incremental validity of spirituality. A mere 2% of the variance of zBurnout, while statistically significant, may not appear clinically significant. Four points of comparison need to be made. First, these results were found even after partialing personality and work environment, thus this reflects the truly unique predictiveness of spirituality. Second, it is interesting to note that the five personality dimensions themselves only uniquely added about 4%. Thus, the single dimension of spirituality adds 50% as much as the five dimensions of personality. Third, it must be kept in mind that the overall significance of spirituality was closer to 8%. Finally, the goal in multiple regression analysis is to find the contributions of all relevant variables, not simply the strongest variables, in order to provide the most comprehensive explanatory model possible.

Implications for research

Present research in burnout must take into account both situational factors and personality factors. The argument offered by Maslach and Leiter (1997) that burnout is a problem of the work environment rather than the people themselves cannot be supported by the research. Both situational factors and personality factors contribute to burnout. The magnitude of the contributions will depend on how work environment, personality, and burnout are assessed. The present research suggested that work environment and personality are additive. Future research is needed to explore the possible interaction between work environment and personality.

The use of the composite zBurnout scale in the present research introduced a new way of understanding burnout. Burnout was defined here as a composite of cognitive, affective, and behavioral work related distress. The behavioral dimension of burnout, captured in the Situational Shift Scale, has been previously unexplored in burnout research. Use of a single composite burnout measure, the zBurnout score, provided for better validity and reliability in assessing overall burnout. It must be noted, however, that burnout has been referred to as a multidimensional construct (Maslach, 1993; Schaufeli, Maslach, & Marek, 1993). While a single composite score increases the ability to predict overall burnout by capitalizing on information across the domains measured, it does so at the cost of interpretive specificity. In other words, while a zBurnout score will more clearly and reliably predict the presence of burnout in an individual, the composite nature of the score means that it is impossible to know in what dimensions (cognitive, affective, or behavioral) the individual is most distressed. Future research will need to explore ways to provide both a powerful aggregate burnout score as well as to identify specific dimensions of distress.

The present research also confirms the incremental validity of spirituality, as defined by the STS, as a predictor of distress even when controlling for personality and work environment. Spirituality was a robust variable, explaining an additional 2% of the variance in burnout even after both situation and personality, the main contributors to burnout, were partialed out. The use of all three variables (work environment, personality, and spirituality) makes for a strong overall model in assessing clergy burnout.

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