The Relationship of Clergy Burnout to Self-Compassion and Other Personality Dimensions

Laura K. Barnard · John F. Curry

Abstract Religious leaders often experience burnout, which is characterized by emotional exhaustion and/or low satisfaction. Clergy with high emotional exhaustion feel drained and discouraged. Clergy with high satisfaction report that the ministry gives purpose and meaning to their lives. Hierarchichal regression was used to examine if current clergy's desire to please others, guilt or shame orientation, ability to be self-compassionate, and ability to differentiate self from role uniquely predicted variation in burnout. Although all personality dimensions explained significant variation in emotional satisfaction when examined individually, due to inter-correlations among predictors only self-compassion was significant in the full model. Higher self-compassion was also related to increased satisfaction in ministry. Increasing self-compassion may prevent clergy burnout.

Keywords Clergy · Burnout · Personality · Self-compassion · Shame

The phenomenon of clergy burnout

Many clergy enter the ministry because they believe that they have been called to use their gifts to lead churches, relying upon the grace of God to cover their inadequacies. They aim for no less than leading their congregants to compassionate mission, committed evangelism, and holy living. However, many clergy experience burnout. Burnout refers to a decline in energy, motivation, and commitment and occurs when high expectations for achievements do not come to fruition despite devotion to a cause or way of life, especially in contexts of low pay and poor recognition for efforts (Freudenberger 1974; Freudenberger and Richelson 1981).

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Pastors experience burnout when their expectations and sense of calling erode into disillusionment as they feel that their work is never done and doubt if their efforts have any results (Doolittle 2008). When struggling with burnout, clergy report feelings of self-doubt, inadequacy, and exhaustion (Stanton-Rich and Iso-Ahola 1998). Fifty percent of clergy have thought about leaving the ministry, and 70% report decreased self-esteem since beginning ministry (Beebe 2007). However, many clergy attempt to disguise these feelings and maintain a positive public persona, perhaps because they believe that God has called them to ministry and therefore they should be able to cope with stressors (Charlton et al. 2008). Pastors' families often see beyond the persona and report that the pastor has become fatigued, withdrawn, and discouraged (Miner 2007). Many clergy report that their congregants have high expectations and show little appreciation (Francis et al. 2010). It is therefore unsurprising that increasing numbers of clergy are leaving the ministry before retirement (Beebe 2007), contributing to a shortage of pastors. Overall, clergy burnout is a widespread experience that the church is interested in addressing to support and retain its leaders (Grosch and Olsen 2000).

Defining and measuring clergy burnout

The development of a burnout scale, the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI), stimulated research on burnout across professions (Maslach and Jackson 1981). The MBI remains the most widely used measure of burnout in human services professionals (Francis et al. 2004), but there is not consensus on its core dimensions and it is not appropriate for use with all groups (Francis et al. 2009). Therefore, derivative scales have been constructed that are suitable for specific professions, e.g., aircraft maintenance technicians (Leiter and Robichaud 1997), computing staff (Evans and Fischer 1993), and clergy (Hills et al. 2004; Oswald 1991). Researchers studying clergy burnout have turned to such derivative scales to capture unique aspects of clergy burnout (Francis et al. 2004).

These researchers have found that the experience of clergy burnout is not one-dimensional (Charlton et al. 2008; Francis et al. 2009; Hills et al. 2004; Maslach et al. 2001; Miner and Downson 2010; Rutledge and Francis 2004) but is defined by both high emotional exhaustion in ministry and low satisfaction in ministry. Emotional exhaustion is characterized by fatigue and loss of enthusiasm. Several recent studies evidence that significant numbers of clergy experience emotional exhaustion. For instance, in one sample of Presbyterian clergy, 44% could not affirm that they had enthusiasm for their work, 39% felt drained by their ministry roles, and 39% felt frustrated in task accomplishment (Francis et al. 2008). In addition, 27% of clergy from various denominations in Australia, England, and New Zealand reported daily experiences of fatigue and irritation, and 16% agreed that they are impatient with congregants (Francis et al. 2005). Moreover, 26% of Catholic priests in England and Wales report that they are working too hard in their parish ministry, 31% feel blamed by parishioners for the parishioners' problems, and 26% find it hard to listen to parishioners (Francis et al. 2004).

Despite high rates of emotional exhaustion, recent studies have also revealed rather high satisfaction in ministry. For instance, Francis et al. (2005) found that 89% of clergy were glad that they entered ministry, 88% believed that their work had a positive influence on others, and 80% believed that they had accomplished many worthwhile things in ministry. Moreover, the same sample of Catholic priests that reported high emotional exhaustion also reported high personal satisfaction from their role (90%). Eighty-one percent would still go into parish ministry if they had the choice, and 70% feel that they are positively influencing others

through their ministry (Francis et al. 2004). Finally, 91% of Anglican clergy in England reported high personal satisfaction from their ministry (Rutledge and Francis 2004).

The fact that some pastors experience emotional exhaustion *and* satisfaction suggests that burnout contains two independent constructs that should be assessed separately.

Correlates of clergy burnout: previous work and present study

Since Sanford (1992) first studied clergy burnout, researchers have investigated various personality factors and institutional factors that correlate with or predict burnout. Age has been shown to be negatively correlated with burnout (Doolittle 2008; Stanton-Rich and Iso-Ahola 1998; Turton and Francis 2007; Francis et al. 2008). Other negative correlates include extraversion (Miner 2007; Turton and Francis 2007; Francis et al. 2008; Francis et al. 2004; Rogerson and Piedmont 1998; Hills et al. 2004), higher levels of and higher satisfaction with activities outside of one's vocation such as leisure and exercise (Doolittle 2008; Stanton-Rich and Iso-Ahola 1998), positive attitude toward prayer (Turton and Francis 2007), higher differentiation of self from role and a collaborative conflict management style (Beebe 2007), seeking mentors (Doolittle 2008), more positive self-esteem as a child (Francis et al. 2010), and congregation size (Francis et al. 2008). Positive correlates of burnout include neuroticism (Miner 2007; Turton and Francis 2007; Rogerson and Piedmont 1998; Francis and Rodger 1994; Francis et al. 2004; Hills et al. 2004), psychoticism (Francis and Rodger 1994; Francis et al. 2004; Hills et al. 2004), anxiety and depression (Doolittle 2008; Miner 2007), openness to change in beliefs (Miner 2007), dissatisfaction with spiritual life and difficult transitions to new church placements (Doolittle 2008), and hours worked (Francis et al. 2008).

Some of the above correlates may be more amendable to change than others. Although there is a great deal of stability in some personality traits (such as extraversion), people are able to change many personal characteristics (such as amount of time spent in leisure activities) through education or intervention (Roberts et al. 2006). Identifying modifiable correlates could lead to preventive measures, such as assessment and mentoring of clergy candidates and interventions for pastors. Therefore, this study sought to investigate potentially modifiable personality dimensions and their relation to clergy burnout.

Four personality dimensions hypothesized to predict variation in clergy burnout

Desire to please others Fear of letting parishioners down or not living up to their expectations can leave clergy depleted. Although the desire to please others is cited as a problematic trait in clergy (Ryan 2006), it has not yet been measured in this population. We hypothesized that desire to please, when elevated in clergy, may correlate with burnout. To assess this construct, we designed a scale measuring a clergy member's desire to please others within their pastoral role. Clergy high in desire to please neglect their hobbies, families, and spirituality, fear letting down congregants, and have a hard time saying no to requests. Clergy low in desire to please reserve time for their personal lives without feeling selfish or anxious about disappointing others. The construct of desire to please should be distinct from but associated with differentiation of self from clergy role, a construct discussed below.

Guilt or shame proneness Guilt and shame are distinct emotions (Tangney et al. 2007; Lewis 1971). The difference is not the eliciting event, for events (e.g., lying) can elicit shame in one

person and guilt in another. Nor is the difference in whether the emotion is experienced in solitude or in public (Tangney et al. 2007). Instead, the difference between guilt and shame is the degree to which a person construes their *behavior* as bad (guilt) or *themselves* as bad (shame), and these different interpretations have relative advantages and disadvantages. Overall, "shame is considered the more painful emotion because one's core self—not simply one's behavior—is at stake" (Tangney et al. 2007, p. 349). A guilt-oriented person tends to be concerned with how they can make amends, so the emotion often motivates action tendencies. A shame-oriented person tends to be concerned with how they can hide their failures because they feel worthless and exposed. Overall, guilt has been shown to be positively correlated with other-oriented empathy, reparative actions, and self-esteem while shame is positively correlated with anger, propensity to blame others, depression, anxiety, eating disorders, elevated cortisol levels, cardiovascular reactivity, and suicidal ideation (Tangney et al. 2007).

We hypothesized that guilt would positively predict satisfaction and negatively predict emotional exhaustion, whereas shame would negatively predict satisfaction and positively predict emotional exhaustion.

Self-compassion Self-compassion arises from Eastern philosophical thought and is comprised of three main components (Neff 2003a). First, it entails offering kindness, patience, and understanding to oneself during times of failure or disappointment. Second, individuals high in self-compassion recognize that others go through similar experiences and feel connected rather than isolated during times of pain. Third, individuals who are high in self-compassion neither ignore nor ruminate about their own shortcomings. Self-compassion has been shown to be negatively associated with depression, self-criticism, rumination, thought suppression, and anxiety and positively associated with well-being (Neff 2003b; Neff et al. 2007). We hypothesized that self-compassion should be positively correlated with satisfaction and negatively correlated with emotional exhaustion.

Differentiation of self from role Beebe (2007) applied the construct of differentiation of self from role to clergy and found that clergy who are able to differentiate who they are and what they value from their role as a clergy member and their effectiveness in that role tend to experience lower levels of burnout. One of the particular difficulties of those in ministry is to maintain a healthy differentiation between self and role, especially when those they encounter *always* see them as "the pastor," resulting in the clergy member being more likely to merge their self-concept with their role concept (Grosch and Olsen 2000). According to Kaldor and Bullpit (2001), 55% of pastors agreed that they "lack time for recreation" and 77% worked over 40 hours a week. These findings portray a group of clergy who focus so much on their responsibilities as a pastor that they neglect leisure, family, friends, and self-care. We hypothesized that greater differentiation of self from role would be positively associated with satisfaction and negatively associated with emotional exhaustion.

Method

Participants

United Methodist Church (UMC) clergy from the southeastern United States were invited to participate via email; 435 were invited and 75 participated, for an overall response rate of 17%. The study consisted of a demographic questionnaire, a measure of burnout, and

measures of hypothesized correlates of burnout. Participants were allowed to skip items and to drop out at any time. Four clergy dropped out, two skipped a questionnaire, and several skipped individual items. The six clergy with one or more missing questionnaires were dropped from analysis, making the final $N=69$, but clergy who missed two or fewer items on any given questionnaire were included with their average for that scale imputed for the missing item(s).

Measures

Francis Burnout Inventory (FBI) The FBI (Francis et al. 2008) is a 22-item measure designed to assess burnout in religious leaders. This measure consists of two subscales, each comprised of 11 items rated on five-point Likert scales: agree strongly (5), agree (4), not certain (3), disagree (2), and disagree strongly (1). The two scales that make up this measure are the Scale of Emotional Exhaustion in Ministry (SEEM) and the Satisfaction in Ministry Scale (SIMS). The SEEM subscale includes such items as "I feel drained by fulfilling my ministry roles" and "I am feeling negative or cynical about the people I work with." The SIMS includes such items as "The ministry here gives real purpose and meaning to my life" and "I feel very positive about my ministry here." The 11 items from the SEEM are alternated in presentation with the 11 items from the SIMS and are typically prefaced by the statement, "The following questions are about how you feel working *in your present congregation*." However, the survey was sent to retired as well as active clergy and to people ordained but not serving at a local church, so it instead read, "*in your current or most recent place of ministry*." The high reliability of these two subscales has been demonstrated by Francis et al. (2008), who found Cronbach's alpha values of .82 and .80 for the SIMS and SEEM, respectively.

Desire to Please Others (DPO) The DPO is a measure designed for this study that assesses religious leaders' desire to please parishioners. This scale was developed by eliciting items from seminary students and current clergy. An initial pool of 32 suggested items was reduced to 16 when redundant items or items tapping different constructs were removed. Items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "Almost never" (1) to "Almost always" (5), and higher scores indicate a greater desire to please (item 13 is reversed). Items include, "When parishioners ask me to come in on my day off, I agree to come in anyway" and "Letting others down is a fear of mine." Participants are instructed to indicate how often they behave in the stated manner. The scale items are included in Table 1.

Test of Self-Conscious Affect-3 (TOSCA-3) The TOSCA-3 (Tangney et al. 2007) is a measure of guilt or shame proneness consisting of 11 negative scenarios, drawn from written accounts of experiences of college students and other adults. The scenarios included in this scale are meant to be common situations that people are likely to encounter that may provoke feelings of shame or guilt. Each scenario is followed by 4 to 5 possible responses to the situation. Participants rate how likely they would be to react in each of the ways described on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "not likely" (1) to "very likely" (5). Participants are instructed to rate each response because "people may feel or react more than one way to the same situation, or they may react different ways at different times." An example from the TOSCA-3 is "You make plans to meet a friend for lunch. At 5 o'clock, you realize you stood him up." The shame response to this scenario is "You would think: 'I'm inconsiderate,'" while the guilt response is "You'd think you should make it up to him as soon as possible." The TOSCA-3 yields indices of other emotions as well, but only measures of guilt and shame were

Table 1 Item-total score correlations and alpha coefficients for desire to please others scale

Item	16-item scale	14-item scale without items 5 and 8
	r	r
1. When parishioners ask me to come in on my day off, I agree to come in anyway.	.49	.49
2. Letting others down is a fear of mine.	.31	.36
3. I have difficulty setting boundaries.	.52	.54
4. Self-care takes a backseat to care for others.	.60	.60
5. I make myself available when parishioners have an emergency, even if I had plans I was really looking forward to.	.25	—
6. I don't want/like to disappoint anyone.	.36	.37
7. I do not reserve time in my work schedule for personal prayer and contemplation.	.50	.51
8. People I respect think I work too hard.	.11	—
9. The pastoral demands of my congregation(s) make a healthy work/life balance difficult.	.34	.33
10. I feel selfish when I take time for myself when there is a something for parishioners that I could be doing.	.50	.50
11. Other people ask me for assistance because they know I will say yes.	.51	.45
12. I have a hard time keeping up with everything I've agreed to do.	.45	.47
13. I intentionally schedule one day off from church work every week.	.36	.34
14. During time off, I check my email for messages related to my church work.	.34	.34
15. I don't like it when I have to disagree with someone.	.33	.35
16. I want all of my parishioners to like me.	.31	.91
Cronbach's Alpha	.80	.81

$N=69$

investigated in the present study. The reliability of these scales is evidenced by three studies using the TOSCA-3 that report the Cronbach's alpha for the shame scale to be between .76 to .88 and for the guilt scale between .70 to .83 (Tangney et al. 2007).

Self-Compassion Scale (SCS) Self compassion was assessed by the Self Compassion Scale (Neff 2003a). This scale asks participants to rate 26 items on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "Almost never" (1) to "Almost always" (5). The items are prefaced by the statement, "How I typically act towards myself *in difficult times,*" and the instructions are, "Indicate how often you behave in the stated manner." Self-compassion is assessed by items such as "I'm disapproving and judgmental about my own flaws and inadequacies" and "When I fail at something important to me I try to keep things in perspective." Neff (2003a) has found high inter-correlations between each of the six subscales, and a confirmatory factor analysis indicated that these were explained by the single higher-order factor of self-compassion. The SCS has good internal consistency reliability (.92) and good test-retest reliability (.93) (Neff 2003a).

Differentiation of Self from Role—clergy version (DSRC) The DSRC (Beebe 2007) is a 47-item measure designed to assess the level of differentiation between a clergy member's self-

identity and role identification. Participants are asked to determine how well each statement generally describes them on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from "not very characteristic of me" (1) to "very characteristic of me" (6). Representative DSRC items include, "I find it difficult to separate my sense of pastoral calling from my personal life" and "If I were not a clergyperson, I would still have a good sense of who I am." To calculate the overall DSRC score, 37 items are reversed. All items are totaled and divided by the total number so that the score ranges from 1 (less differentiation) to 6 (more differentiation). Beebe (2007) established the scale's construct validity by its .83 correlation with the Differentiation of Self Inventory and its reliability by its 4-week test-retest coefficient of .88 and its internal consistency (.90).

Procedure

Views Flash was used to generate online versions of the questionnaires. The study was then explained to five District Superintendents (DS) of the United Methodist Church (UMC). These DS's were asked to email clergy an invitation to participate in the current study. This email had a hyperlink in it and asked clergy to click on it and take the surveys if they were interested in participating. Participation was anonymous, and no incentives were offered. Two researchers independently calculated participant's scores and compiled the data with perfect agreement.

Data analysis

First, the data were analyzed for frequency of burnout symptoms in this sample. Second, the properties of the new instrument, DPO, were examined using intercorrelations and coefficient alpha. Third, the simple correlations of the personality characteristics and burnout dimensions were examined. Then, two multiple regression models were employed to test the relationship of the demographics of gender and age and the predictors of interest on satisfaction and emotional exhaustion. Partial regression coefficients and R-square change tests were used to look at the unique contribution of each variable above and beyond all other variables in the model.

Results

Preliminary analysis

Sample description The ages of clergy in this sample were normally distributed and ranged from 28 to 78 (Table 2). Sixty-four percent of those who responded were male (Table 2). Although the number of hours worked was not incorporated into the model, it is interesting to note that 89% of the clergy reported working over 40 hours a week.

Percent endorsement ("agree" or "strongly agree") of SIMS and SEEM items was calculated to investigate how pervasive symptoms of burnout are in this sample (Table 3). The percent endorsement of clergy in this sample is compared to the percent of clergy who endorsed these items in a recent sample of Presbyterian clergy in the United States (Francis et al. 2008). Z-tests, with Bonferroni correction for multiple comparisons, indicated that endorsement differed on only item 8, suggesting that these two samples are remarkably

Table 2 Respondent characteristics

Item	%
Male gender	64
Age	
Twenties	3
Thirties	16
Forties	24
Fifties	34
Sixties	20
Seventies	3
Current position	
Elder	63
Local pastor	23
Deacon	8
Other	5
Hours worked per week	
Under 40	11
40–59	54
60+	35

Percentages based on *N*=74 respondents who completed the demographic questionnaire

similar in the extent to which they experience satisfaction and emotional exhaustion. This study replicates previous work finding a high percentage of both SIMS (the lowest endorsement rate being 59%) and SEEM item endorsement.

Examining the new instrument Table 1 presents the full set of DPO items along with their correlations with the sum total of remaining items. This scale was originally a 16-item measure. However, due to low item-total correlations for items 5 and 8, these items were dropped and new item-total correlations were calculated (see Table 1). The item-total correlations for the improved 14-item scale (which range from .33 to .60) confirm the overall internal reliability of this new instrument. Cronbach's coefficient alpha for the 14-item scale was .81. Moreover, scale intercorrelations indicate its construct validity (Table 4). As hypothesized, DPO was significantly and most strongly correlated with DSRC such that clergy who reported a greater desire to please also showed lower differentiation of self from role. Desire to please was also significantly correlated with self-compassion and shame yet shown to be conceptually distinct from these constructs (Table 4).

Descriptive statistics Table 4 presents means, standard deviations, and bivariate correlations of each variable with all other variables. The SIMS and SEEM had a negative correlation of −.61, indicating that they are measuring related but not identical constructs. These data demonstrate that lower shame, higher self-compassion, and higher differentiation of self from role were significantly associated with more satisfaction and with less emotional exhaustion. In addition, higher desire to please was significantly correlated with higher emotional exhaustion. However, guilt was not significantly correlated with either satisfaction or emotional exhaustion and was therefore not included in the subsequent hierarchical multiple regression models. Table 4 shows that older clergy tended to be less emotionally exhausted whereas gender had no significant correlations with the components of burnout. Nevertheless, we retained both age and gender in the multiple regression

Table 3 SIMS and SEEM item endorsement

Satisfaction in Ministry Scale (SIMS)	% Endorsed Current Study[a]	% Endorsed Francis et al. 2008[b]
I have accomplished many worthwhile things in my current ministry.	93	86
I gain a lot of personal satisfaction from working with people in my current ministry.	86	84
I deal very effectively with the problems of the people in my current ministry.	66	68
I can easily understand how the people here feel about things.	59*	74*
I feel very positive about my ministry here.	77	72
I feel that my pastoral ministry has a positive influence on people's lives.	97	91
I feel that my teaching ministry has a positive influence on people's faith.	91	83
I feel that my ministry is really appreciated by people.	88	81
I am really glad that I entered the ministry.	88	84
The ministry here gives real purpose and meaning to my life.	84	78
I gain a lot of personal satisfaction from fulfilling my functions here.	86	83
Scale of Emotional Exhaustion in Ministry (SEEM)		
I feel drained by fulfilling my ministry roles.	31	39
Fatigue and irritation are part of my daily experience.	32	33
I am invaded by sadness I can't explain.	10	13
I am feeling negative or cynical about the people with whom I work.	19	17
I always have enthusiasm for my work.	58	56
My humor has a cynical and biting tone.	18	14
I find myself spending less and less time with those among whom I minister.	11	21
I have been discouraged by the lack of personal support for me here.	15	21
I find myself frustrated in my attempts to accomplish tasks important to me.	35	39
I am less patient with those among whom I minister than I used to be.	20	20
I am becoming less flexible in my dealings with those among whom I minister	11	13

[a] $N=69$

[b] $N=748$

*$p<.0022$

models to show whether the personality factors predict uniquely above and beyond these demographics. Several of the personality factors were significantly related to one another. Thus we examined multicollinearity prior to analyzing multiple regression models to ensure assumptions were met.

Multicollinearity Diagnostics revealed problematic multicollinearity (Cohen et al. 2003, p. 424). Correlations indicated that DSRC was significantly correlated with all other predictors at the $p=0.001$ level. To eliminate the instability this introduced into the models, DSRC was dropped from further analysis. Regression diagnostics for both models were rerun and indicated that all assumptions were met.

Table 4 Means and correlations for all predictors and criteria

	Age	Gender	DPO	Guilt	Shame	SCS	DSRC	SIMS	SEEM
Gender	.12								
DPO	−.28*	.24							
Guilt	.01	−.24*	.08						
Shame	−.27*	−.04	.45***	.28*					
SCS	.31**	−.12	−.43***	.00	−.55***				
DSRC	.28*	−.12	−.59***	.12	−.54***	.64***			
SIMS	.15	.00	−.07	.08	−.24*	.42***	.35**		
SEEM	−.35**	.03	.42***	.01	.44***	−.60***	−.61***	−.61***	
Mean	50.20	.64	3.34	3.99	2.49	3.45	4.18	4.04	2.32
SD	10.84	.48	.608	.390	.589	.655	.567	.495	.660

DPO Desire to Please Others; *SCS* Self-Compassion Scale; *SIMS* Satisfaction in Ministry Scale; *SEEM* Scale of Emotional Exhaustion in Ministry

$N=69$ *$p<.05$. **$p<.01$. ***$p<.001$

Testing the hypotheses

The demographics were entered first in each regression model and then the personality characteristics were entered sequentially and F-tests were employed to examine their ability to explain a significant increase in the proportion of variation (R^2) in satisfaction or emotional exhaustion after the prediction of prior steps was partialled out (Table 5). Once all factors were included in the model, each one's ability to predict satisfaction or emotional exhaustion above and beyond all other factors included in the full model was also analyzed with partial regression coefficients (*b*) (Table 5).

Satisfaction in ministry Demographic variables did not explain a significant proportion of variance in SIM (Table 5). Nor was there a significant increase in variance explained when DPO or shame were added sequentially to the model. However, when self-compassion was added, there was a significant increase in explained variance in satisfaction. While the previous factors accounted for only 6% of variance, once self-compassion was added 18% of the variation in satisfaction was accounted for. Partial regression coefficients from the full model reveal that for every one unit increase in the SCS Likert score (holding all other variables constant), clergy exhibited a .336 increase in the five-point SIMS score (Table 5).

Emotional exhaustion in ministry Demographic variables did explain a significant proportion of variance in emotional exhaustion. Older clergy reported less emotional exhaustion (Table 5). There was no gender effect. After accounting for the demographic effects, there were significant increases in proportion of variance explained in emotional exhaustion when desire to please was added to the regression model, again when shame was added, and also when self-compassion was added. Together, all factors in the model explained 41% of the variation in emotional exhaustion (12% by demographics and 30% by personality factors).

However, once self-compassion was added to the emotional exhaustion regression model, the unique contributions of desire to please and shame were reduced below a significant level. In the full model, self-compassion was the sole predictor of variation in

Table 5 Multiple regression model

Step: Predictors	R^2	Increase			Full Model		
		$R^2\Delta$	F	p	b	t	p
Satisfaction in Ministry							
1. Demographics	.022	.022	.74	ns			
Gender					.018	.14	.14	ns
Age					.001	.22	.22	ns
2. DPO	.022	.001	.03	ns	.115	1.02	ns
3. Shame	.059	.036	2.46	ns	−.034	−.27	ns
4. SCS	.181	.122	2.78*	.025	.336	3.06**	.003
Emotional Exhaustion in Ministry							
1. Demographics	.119	.119	4.46*	.015			
Gender					−.054	−.39	−.39	ns
Age					−.007	−1.03	−1.03	ns
2. DPO	.226	.107	9.02**	.004	.178	1.41	ns
3. Shame	.287	.060	5.42*	.023	.113	.81	ns
4. SCS	.415	.128	13.79***	<.001	−.457	−3.71***	<.001

$N=69$ *$p<.05$. **$p<.01$. ***$p<.001$
ns Non-Significant ($p>.05$)

emotional exhaustion. The partial regression coefficients in Table 5 show that for every one unit increase in the SCS Likert score (holding all other variables constant) clergy exhibited a .457 decrease in the 5-point SEEM Likert score.

Discussion

The main finding from this study is that clergy who were higher in self-compassion experienced higher levels of satisfaction in ministry and lower levels of emotional exhaustion in ministry. The other personality factors we tested, although individually significantly in relation to emotional exhaustion, were not significant correlates of satisfaction or uniquely significant correlates of emotional exhaustion. These results suggest that clergy who are high in self-compassion, i.e., kind towards themselves during times of stress or failure, see themselves as connected with others, and are able to hold their worries in mindful awareness without ruminating, are less likely to experience burnout. This suggests that efforts to enhance self-compassion among seminarians and active clergy may have a preventive effect on clergy burnout.

In addition to examining the relationship between the personality dimensions and burnout, we also examined three other questions of interest: 1) frequency of burnout symptoms in a new sample; 2) psychometric characteristics of a new scale to measure differentiation of self from role for clergy; and 3) interrelationships among hypothesized correlates of burnout.

First, the results of this study are consistent with previous work that shows that clergy tend to exhibit both high levels of satisfaction and emotional exhaustion (Francis et al.

2008). Along with the significant moderately high negative correlation between these two constructs, this finding supports the importance of analyzing these two dimensions of burnout separately. Examples of frequently endorsed SIMS items included beliefs that they had accomplished many worthwhile things in their ministry (93%) and that their ministry has a positive influence on others (97%) (Table 3). On the other hand, one in four clergy respondents could not say that they feel positively about their ministry, one in three could not say that they deal effectively with problems, and two in five said that they did not understand congregants' feelings. Similar to a previous sample (Francis et al. 2008), our data show that while the majority of clergy experience satisfaction, there is also a significant number of clergy who do not endorse these basic items.

Of concern is the finding that clergy exhibited high levels of emotional exhaustion and endorsed these items at rates comparable to another sample (Francis et al. 2008) (Table 3). For instance, two in five do not always have enthusiasm for their work, one in five find they are less patient with congregants, and one in three feel drained, say that fatigue and irritation are a part of their daily experience, and are frustrated with their attempts to accomplish meaningful tasks.

Second, this study also employed a new scale, DPO, which was shown to have high reliability. Initial construct validity of this instrument is suggested by its significant correlation with DSRC and inverse correlation with SCS. We expected desire to please to be strongly associated with differentiation of self from role because some items in the latter scale tap desire to live up to others' expectations and willingness to sacrifice self-care to please others. However, desire to please is conceptually distinct from differentiation of self from role in that it does not involve clergy's self-identity and how much they are able to see themselves as more than pastor.

Third, the descriptive statistics reveal strong relationships among the predictors, a fact that is both a limitation when attempting to identify unique predictors (as in multiple regression) and a possible advantage in future research that could focus on identification of broader constructs for intervention (by using structural equation modeling). For instance, clergy who are high in shame are significantly less self-compassionate and less able to differentiate self from role. Guilt was not significantly correlated with these variables. These findings support the conceptual difference between guilt and shame. These data suggest that clergy who have low self-compassion and are at risk for burnout are also likely to feel ashamed of themselves and likely to lose themselves in their role, dismissing their worth outside the role.

Overall, this study suggests that clergy burnout is correlated with personality dimensions, specifically self-compassion, that prevention efforts and interventions may potentially address.

Limitations

Aside from the limitations inherent in self-report studies, a few other limitations exist in this study. First, the response rate was only 17%, including participants with incomplete data. Limiting the sample to those with complete data, the overall response rate was only 16% . So it could be that the clergy who took this survey were not representative of the whole population. Although clergy endorsed burnout items similarly to clergy in a previous study (Francis et al. 2008), Table 3 must be interpreted with caution remembering, for instance, that 97% *of the clergy who responded* feel that their pastoral ministry has a positive influence.

The second limitation in this study is that all of the participants were United Methodist clergy in the southeastern United States. It is encouraging that the percentage of participants

endorsing burnout items was remarkably similar to another study (see Table 3) which sampled more clergy from another denomination with a greater geographical spread. However, caution needs to be exercised when generalizing beyond the population from which this sample was drawn. Future work will need to ask if these findings are upheld with religious leaders from other denominations, countries, or faith traditions.

A third limitation is that all measures were completed at the same time. Thus, this study measures correlates of current burnout but cannot address whether the variables that served as significant 'predictors' in multiple regression would actually predict burnout longitudinally. Studies in which 'predictors' are measured during seminary or early in ministerial practice are needed in order to determine whether they are associated with future satisfaction or emotional exhaustion.

Future directions

This study suggests several future directions. First, the DPO scale is in need of further development and testing. This scale needs to be administered to a larger sample so that exploratory factor analysis can be conducted. Furthermore, this scale should be evaluated much more extensively for construct validity. Secondly, it has recently been suggested that shame may be domain specific (Tangney et al. 2007, p. 355). A reasonable topic for inquiry then is whether clergy's guilt or shame orientation would be different for the common, secular situations in the current scale (e.g., breaking something or doing poorly on an exam) than for situations specific to their calling (e.g., inadequate preparation for a sermon or offering poor counsel to a parishioner). Third, additional statistical methods, such as structural equation modeling, could be used for further investigation of the correlates and predictors of clergy burnout in larger samples.

Conclusion

Overall, this study attempted to determine which variables may be predictive of variance in clergy satisfaction and emotional exhaustion, two distinct parts of clergy burnout. The multiple regression models revealed that only self-compassion significantly predicted variation satisfaction. In contrast, each addition to the emotional exhaustion regression model predicted a significant increase in proportion of variation explained, but when analyzed simultaneously, only self-compassion uniquely predicted emotional exhaustion in the full model. These findings suggest that more work should be done on the relation of self-compassion to clergy burnout. If cross-validated, then efforts could be initiated to enhance self-compassion among seminarians and active clergy, in an effort to reduce burnout.

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