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Emotional Labour and Psychosocial Well-Being among the Clergy in Ghana

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Abstract

This study was conducted among the clergy in Accra, Ghana, to examine the level of emotional labour and how that impacts psychological well-being, satisfaction with job and life among pastors/'men of God'. The study recruited 111 participants from various Christian religious denominations (Orthodox, Charismatic and Pentecostal) in Accra. Quantitative data were obtained using standardised scales with acceptable psychometric properties to measure emotional labour and psychosocial well-being (satisfaction with life, job satisfaction and psychological well-being). The results of the study are that the clergy experience above-average emotional labour, which is significantly and positively correlated with psychological distress. Emotional labour is, however, not significantly correlated with satisfaction with life and job satisfaction among the clergy. Our findings have implications for pastoral mental health promotion, education and research.

Keywords: charismatic, clergy, emotional labour, ghana, orthodox, pentecostal psychosocial well-being.

1. Introduction

The psychological well-being of the 'man or woman of God' in Ghana has been ignored for a long with the perception that the Almighty God spiritually insulates them they are serving. However, the 'man or woman of God' may be emotionally labouring, leading to psychological problems in their lives. Research in Ghana is almost non-existent, making it challenging to inform crucial interventions for this group of citizens. Meanwhile, religion is an important part of Ghana, with the clergy playing an instrumental part. The clergy is also globally most trusted in society (Weaver et al., 2002).

Emotional labour has been well considered in the industrial/organisational setting where its original underpinnings are met; face-to-face or voice-to-voice contact with clients (de Castro et al., 2004). In Ghana's Christian community, there is an emerging pattern requiring religious leaders to present the best appearances and emotions to instil joy, hope and confidence among the membership. The work of the 'Man or woman of God' (Pastor, Priest, Elder, deacons, etc.) requires regular meetings and conversation with people, usually in their congregation, including vulnerable ones, thereby becoming the support base for many people (Weaver et al., 2002). They are expected to promise and deliver hope, joy and wellness (Rudolfsson, Milstein, 2019). In this regard, the pastor is expected to be sensitive to many people (emotional, spiritual, and practical needs) (Carroll, 2006). This makes it clear that pastors must endure considerable emotional dissonance.

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The effect of this will reflect in their satisfaction with life (Gopalan et al., 2013), well-being (Karim, Weisz, 2010) and job (Psilopanagioti et al., 2012).

By extension, the pastor's challenges affect their family and friends. What is even scary is that the members who seek help will also be affected. Unfortunately, the pastor has to assist the people, a situation that can render the pastor helpless in the face of challenges. Ash (1984) maintained that talking to the pastor's wife is the best way of getting what is happening to the pastor's home/family. This suggests that they (the pastors) endure a lot of challenges but have to always put up a good front. In current times where membership is a big concern for churches in Ghana, the congregational leaders are expected to maintain a certain level of 'goodness' towards the congregation. They must thus bury their emotions and hurts to save the 'flock'. The act of the pastor covering up his emotions to serve his duty is very well defined by the term 'emotional labour'.

By definition, Hochschild (1983), the one who coined the term, defined emotional labour to be 'the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display.' Emotions are feelings that people experience, interpret, reflect on, express, and manage (Mills, Kleinman, 1988). These emotions arise through social interaction and are influenced by social, cultural, interpersonal, and situational conditions (Martin, 1999). In many daily life situations, people suppress feelings and display more socially acceptable emotions that are deemed more appropriate. The regulation of one's emotions to comply with social norms is called 'emotion work' (Hochschild, 1990). This is particularly when a job requires displaying particular emotions and suppressing others to make a wage.

Theoretically, Grandey (2000) used the emotional regulatory theory [which explains a process by which an individual can personally influence or regulate which emotions to express, when and how (Gross, 1998)] to explain emotional labour. Grandey's model emphasises surface and deep-acting factors influencing emotional labour (situational, personal and organisational) as well as consequences for individuals (job satisfaction, burnout) and organisations (absenteeism and turnover intentions). A perspective by Morris and Feldman (1996) on emotional labour based on the interactionist model of emotion indicates that people's emotional expressions are externally/socially constructed, basically in line with the understanding they gain from their interaction with their environment.

Emotional labour is corroborated by the 'Person-Environment Fit' theory, which emphasises the joint effect of the environment and the person, viewing emotional labour as a product of the compatibility between a person's characteristics and those of a specific job (Caplan, 1987). Thus, a mismatch between the characteristics of the individual and the job (especially regarding behavioural requirements) will more likely result in stress and labour. Unfortunately, research on emotional labour among the clergy has not received much attention, especially in Ghana and Africa. This is particularly important because there are incidences of suicide, rape and fraud occasionally recorded among this population in different parts of Ghana and elsewhere. Their psychological experiences must be studied to provide the needed support they may need.

Though the clergy is considered the mouthpiece of God and so should be protected by God, research indicates that they experience work-related challenges such as trouble separating themselves from their job (Beebe, 2007; Hill et al., 2003), job dissatisfaction (Mueller, McDuff, 2004). The number of engagements pastors have could also be exhausting, leading to stress and related distress (Evers, Tomic, 2003; Carroll, 2006). This was supported by Knox et al. (2002), who found that the clergy experience higher levels of anxiety and depression compared to the general population. Consequently, if the 'Man or woman of God' experiences emotional labour, they will experience negative psychological health, namely depression and anxiety (Michie, Williams, 2003) as well as somatic complaints (Buys, Rothman, 2010). This will effectively be to the disadvantage of the people they try to help.

Therefore, this present study seeks to explore the prevalence of emotional labour and its impact on the clergy's psychological distress and satisfaction with life and their job. Specifically, the study aims to a) examine the level of the emotional labour of pastors in Charismatic and orthodox churches in Ghana, b) examine how emotional labour is associated with psychological distress among pastors, c) examine how emotional labour is related to life and job satisfaction among the clergy in Ghana.

2. Materials and methods

Study Design

Using standardised questionnaires, this study used the cross-sectional survey design to collect data across a diverse section of the population under study. This allowed for the consideration of several groups within the Christian community in Ghana.

Population and Sample

The population of this study was the clergy (Pastors and Priests) in Accra, Ghana. This includes the Pentecostal, Charismatic and Orthodox churches/denominations. Pastors who qualified for the study were those identifiable with a particular mission or church. We conveniently selected a sample of 111 for the study (Sarfo et al., 2022). This consists of 94 males and 17 females, representing 84.7 % and 15.3 %, respectively. The sample is also made up of 23 (20.7 %) Orthodox, 39 (35.1 %) Pentecostal, and 49 (44.1 %) Charismatic. In terms of rank in the respective churches, there are 40 (36 %) senior ranks, 54 (48.6) junior ranks and 17 (15.3) other ranks. The mean age of the sample is 45.25 (standard deviation = 10.83), with a mean duration in the ministry of 13.49 (standard deviation = 9.29) (see Table 1).

Measures

The study used four questionnaires; the Emotional Labour Questionnaire, the Brief Symptom Inventory (BSI), the Satisfaction with Life Scale and Job Satisfaction Scale.

Emotional Labour Scale: this was assessed using Brotheridge and Lee's (1998) Emotional Labor Scale. This is a 14-item, 5-point Likert scale that measures five domains of emotional labour: frequency, intensity, variety, deep acting and surface acting. Responses on this scale range from 1 = Never to 5 = always, where a higher score represents higher emotional labour. The scale is reported to have good reliability of Cronbach's alpha = .86.

Brief Symptom Inventory (BSI): This is a 53-item, four-point Likert scale with nine domains of psychological distress, namely somatisation, obsessive-compulsive, interpersonal sensitivity, depression, anxiety, hostility, phobic anxiety, paranoid ideation, and psychoticism. It has a Global Severity Index (GSI), the average score of all 53 items. The scale shows a good internal consistency of Cronbach's alpha ranging from 0.71 to 0.85 for the nine subtests. It also has test-retest reliability from 0.68 to 0.91 (Derogatis, Melisaratos, 1983). It correlates strongly with the Symptom Checklist (SCL-90) (the full version of the BSI), ranging from 0.90 to 0.99 (Derogatis, 1993).

Satisfaction with Life Scale: The satisfaction with life scale is a five (5)-item 7-point Likert scale developed by Diener et al. (1985) to assess an individual's overall satisfaction with life. The scale is scored by adding all the scores on each item. It has a Cronbach's alpha reliability = .74 (López-Ortega et al., 2016).

The Generic Job Satisfaction Scale: This is a 10-item five-point Likert questionnaire that measures an individual's general satisfaction with a job. The scale was developed by Macdonald and MacIntyre (1997). It has a reliability of Cronbach's alpha = 0.77. It is scored by adding up all the responses to obtain a total score.

Data Collection Procedure

Formal permission was sought from the respective churches recruited for the study. In each church, the head pastor(s) was contacted, and the study purpose was duly explained to them. Apart from the head pastors, consent was sought from the individual pastors who agreed to participate in the study, with confidentiality assured them. They were given two days to respond to the questionnaires for subsequent retrieval.

Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance was obtained from the Ethics Committee for Humanities at the University of Ghana, Legon (Clearance number ECH 017/16-17). The aim of the study was clearly explained in a consent form to research participants, and their consent was also sought for their participation in the study. There was no form of coercion or inducement for participation in the study. Confidentiality was also promised and strictly adhered to in this study.

3. Results

The SPSS version 16 was used to analyse the data collected to meet the aims of the study. Table 1 presents the demographic features of participants in the study as well as mean scores of emotional labour, psychological distress, and life and job satisfaction at the various demographic levels of participants. It must be noted that these mean differences were not statistically significant. However, the aim was to inspect which group surpassed the measured variables.

Table 1. Demographics and mean scores on study variables

Demographic	Frequency	Percentage	EL [M (SD)]	GSI [M (SD)]	LS [M (SD)]	JS [M (SD)]
Sex						
Male	94	84.7	38.8 (7.2)	.5 (.4)	23.3 (6.2)	128.5 (24.7)
Female	17	15.3	41.0 (6.5)	.4 (.2)	23.4 (6.9)	132.4 (31.3)
Church type						
Orthodox	23	20.7	37.5 (7.6)	.4 (.38)	23.6 (6.9)	128.8 (30.4)
Pentecostal	39	35.1	39.2 (7.8)	.5 (.5)	24.3 (5.1)	132.5 (20.1)
Charismatic	49	44.1	39.9(8.1)	.5 (.4)	22.4 (6.1)	126.57 (27.4)
Rank						
Senior pastor	40	36.0	38.2(6.4)	.4 (.3)	22.5 (6.4)	126.1 (27.3)
Junior pastor	54	48.6	40.2(7.3)	.6 (.5)	24.6 (5.7)	130.9 (22.9)
Other rank	17	15.3	40.0(8.9)	.5 (.4)	23.0 (7.0)	134.9 (27.2)
Age [M (SD)]	45.25 (10.83)					
Duration in ministry [M(SD)]	13.49 (9.29)					
EL [M(SD)]	39.2 (7.1)					

Notes: M = Mean, SD = Standard Deviation; EL=Emotional Labour, GSI = Global Severity Index, LS = Satisfaction with Life, JS = Job Satisfaction

The results indicate that the mean score for the study sample is 39.2 (SD = 7.1). This is slightly above the mid-score on the emotional labour scale. From this, female ministers of God experience higher levels of emotional labour (mean = 41.0) than males (38.8). However, these women reported slightly lower levels of psychological distress (0.4) than the men (0.5) and slightly higher levels of job satisfaction than the men (see Table 1).

The results also show that Pentecostal and Charismatic ministers experience the same emotional labour and psychological distress levels as the orthodox. However, the Pentecostal ministers experience slightly higher satisfaction levels with life and job satisfaction, followed by the Charismatic. Senior pastors reported slightly lower emotional labour and psychological distress levels than the junior and other ranks. However, senior pastors experience lower satisfaction with life and job satisfaction than the junior and other ranks. Table 2 presents the association between emotional labour, psychological distress, job satisfaction and life satisfaction among the clergy.

Table 2. Correlation matrix showing the relationship between study variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
1. Duration															
2. Age	.52*														
3. EL	-.05	.03													
4. SOM	-.09	-.12	.21*												
5. OC	-.01	-.07	.22*	.69*											
6. IS	-	-.12	.25*	.59*	.61**										
	.22*														

7. DE	- .22*	-.12	.25*	.59*	.61**	1.0*								
8. ANX	-.15	-.16	.24*	.73*	.67*	.68*	.68*							
9. HOS	- .20*	-.18	.25*	.68*	.65*	.71**	.71**	.72*						
10. PA	-.07	-.18	.16	.68*	.70*	.58*	.58*	.77**	.71**					
11. PAR	- .24*	-.14	.34*	.54*	.54*	.67*	.67*	.59*	.70*	.50*				
12. PSY	-.16	-.14	.30*	.70*	.68*	.63*	.63*	.81*	.71**	.77**	.51**			
13. GSI	-.18	-.16	.30*	.83*	.82*	.85*	.85*	.88*	.87*	.83*	.77**	.85*		
14. LS	.17	.09	.13	-.14	-.13	-.09	-.09	-.04	-.11	.01	-.07	.00	-.09	
15. JS	.07	-.02	.05	-.08	-.02	-.02	-.02	-.11	.02	-.01	-.03	-.03	-.04	.31**

Notes: EL = Emotional Labour, DE = Depression, ANX = Anxiety, HOS = Hostility, Som = Somatisation, OC = Obsessive Compulsion, IS = Interpersonal Sensitivity, PA = Phobic Anxiety, PAR = Paranoia, PSY = Psychoticism, GSI = Global Severity Index, LS = Satisfaction with Life, JS = Job Satisfaction

From the correlation results in Table 2, emotional labour is found to correlate positively and significantly with psychological distress (GSI) (0.30) and with all its domains except phobic anxiety [somatisation, $r = 0.21$, $p < 0.05$; obsessive compulsion, $r = 0.22$, $p < 0.05$; interpersonal sensitivity, $r = 0.25$, $p < .01$; depression, $r = 0.25$, $p < .01$; anxiety, $r = 0.24$, $p < 0.05$; hostility, $r = 0.25$, $p < 0.01$; paranoia, $r = 0.34$, $p < 0.01$; psychoticism, $r = 0.30$, $p < 0.01$]. Emotional labour is, however, not significantly correlated with satisfaction with life and job satisfaction.

4. Discussion

The emotional labour encountered by the clergy is essential, especially in Ghana, because many people turn to the clergy for spiritual and related spiritual support. Unfortunately, not many expect the ‘man or woman of God’ to experience personal struggles, probably affecting their job. As seen from the results of this study, the clergy experience as much as above half of the scores on emotional labour. This indicates that the clergy also tries to manage their emotions as they attend to the needs of others (Carroll, 2006). This pertains to face-to-face occupations (de Castro et al., 2004).

The ‘man or woman of God’ has their own lives. They may have a family, financial needs, and emotional needs as well as health concerns. Followers of these people may wish to see them consistently stable and ready to support. Eventually, there is the tendency for followers to assume that the ‘man or woman of God’ does not need it since they are insulated spiritually by the Almighty God. Therefore, their needs are always provided for since they work for God. However, it is the case that most pastors are not paid salaries for their pastoral job. They have to juggle their jobs and the ministry work. They have families to feed. They experience health challenges. Some followers have even become their dependents. These may place a sufficient toll on them and cause them to be emotionally drained. However, pastors enter into a state of emotional labour as their congregations expect them to show no worries.

The findings show that female ministers experience a little higher emotional labour than males. In as much as the difference may not be huge, it is worth considering that women are generally more emotional than men (Chaplin, 2015; Deng et al., 2016) and so must be supported on a task that requires setting aside such emotions. Women may experience more emotional labour, perhaps due to their nature predisposing them to care for others (Queller, 1997). Thus, they may try to endure more and show less of their feelings/emotions. Pastoral work is an emotion-laden job; women are good at caring for and bearing their own emotions. It is revealed from the results that though females are higher on emotional labour, they scored relatively lower on psychological distress and higher on job satisfaction, with no difference in satisfaction with life compared to males. Consequently, the female minister may be able to endure enough emotions through her care for followers and yet feel better about it and enjoy her pastoral role (Weaver et al., 2002).

Another study finding is that emotional labour is higher among Pentecostal and Charismatic minister compared to the orthodox minister, with the latter scoring lower on psychological distress. In the current state of the church in Ghana, there are more attendees at Pentecostal and Charismatic churches than the orthodox ones. There are more one-on-one engagements through counselling and prayers in Pentecostals and Charismatics. This provides more avenues for emotional experiences for ministers in these churches. They may tend to deal with their emotions regularly since they have more meetings with their followers. However, the Pentecostals tend to report relatively higher life and job satisfaction, followed by the orthodox. The demand and rewards from the job of ministers are essential for job satisfaction. In addition, intrinsic motivation is important. These factors must be explored further among ministers to aid the support they may require in caring for their followers.

In terms of emotional labour and psychological distress, junior pastors and those of other senior and junior ranks score more. Perhaps they tend to have more engagements with the congregation, but they may also have less experience with the job and feel a little stretched on it. However, these two groups feel slightly more satisfied with their lives and job than the seniors.

Emotional labour relates positively and significantly with general psychological distress and all its dimensions except phobic anxiety. The literature has shown that emotional labour is very much associated with psychological distress (Carroll, 2006; Evers, Tomic, 2003; Michie, Williams, 2003). Indeed, laying aside one's emotions and challenges to satisfy another person's needs should be demanding. This may result in depression and anxiety, as shown by the study results, as well as other somatic symptoms (Buys, Rothman, 2010). This should be an important concern for churches since spiritual leaders tend to be affected by the nature of their work. They may be spiritually insulated but be labouring emotionally. This, in effect, will affect the followers and the entire congregation.

It is, however, found that emotional labour does not significantly relate to job satisfaction and satisfaction with life among the ministers. The mean scores on both life and job satisfaction for all categories of pastors surpassed half of the total scores. This may inspire some hope that ministers at least enjoy their role in the house of God and how their lives turn out. They must be supported with the requisite resources to enhance their caring job.

5. Limitations

Some limitations regarding this study have been noted. The sample size is small, mainly due to the nature of the population. Many church leaders are pretty closeted in Ghana, making it difficult to have a lot of them participate in the study. Recruiting a bigger sample size in future studies will provide an avenue to include more of the older section of the population. Also, since this population stands strongly for spirituality, it would have been insightful to measure and relate spirituality with the key study variables.

6. Conclusion

The aim of this study is to identify the presence and level of the emotional labour of the clergy and how this relates to psychological distress, job satisfaction and satisfaction with life among them. Overall, the emotional labour recorded among the clergy is a little above the average. This score relates significantly and positively to psychological distress among the clergy. It, however, does not significantly correlate with job satisfaction and satisfaction with life among the clergy.

Indeed, the clergy are at risk of experiencing emotional labour due to the nature of their work. They carry the challenges of their congregants at the expense of their own emotions and problems. This tends to trigger psychological challenges such as depression, anxiety, interpersonal sensitivity and obsessive compulsions. This makes it imperative for the ministers and congregants to be mindful of their own states and how much they can take in their duty. Nevertheless, it is heartwarming that the level of life and job satisfaction is adequate among the clergy.

7. Recommendations

Regardless of the limited sample size used in the study, the findings draw attention to the state of affairs among the clergy in Ghana, thereby signalling extensive research efforts for further understanding. It must be recommended that the 'men of God' beware of their work's inherent psychological implications and adopt appropriate strategies to deal with them accordingly. It is also

necessary for church management to institute measuring for ministers to be cared for, wind down and delegate emotionally draining tasks. Ministers must endeavour to access psychological and social support from professionals, friends and families for their well-being.

8. Acknowledgement

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9. Conflict of Interest Statement

We declare no conflict of interest

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