

# The Unseen Struggles: Theoretical Perspectives on Pastors' Private Harsh Experiences in Ministry

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Received: December 12, 2024

Accepted: December 26, 2024

Published: December 30, 2024

## Abstract

Pastors often face unique and profound challenges in their ministries that can lead to significant emotional and spiritual strain. Pastors cry too. This paper builds a theoretical model which incorporates stress and coping theory, role theory and spiritual well-being frameworks towards understanding pastors' private harsh encounters. Constructs such as emotional labor, spiritual discord and pastoral burnout are illustrated to explain the relationship between the constructs. Using this framework, the author hypothesizes that with the result of spiritual role, spiritual burnout results from the emotional labor inherent to pastoral work and influences well-being. This paper was aimed at making conceptualization of challenging experiences in pastoral ministry and outlined broad categories of the experiences that can be described as 'emotional', 'spiritual', 'relational' and 'physical'; an attempt was also made to create a conceptual model of how these dimensions may be interconnected. The theoretical and practical considerations that arise from this framework are considerable; the framework enriches the understanding of the complexity of pastoral burnout and has real-world implications for occupancy with resilience programs and variable support structures. Moreover, the framework highlights the encouragement of future empirical research which might compare and further develop these concepts regarding the gender differences in pastoral experiences and to understand the correlation between enhanced pastoral well-being and congregational consequences. Finally, the issues look into the private life of pastors establish the means by which religious organizations need to look after the pastors' physical and mental state for the sake of their work and the community.

## INTRODUCTION

Understanding the private harsh experiences of pastors is essential for sustaining their personal well-being and the long-term effectiveness of their ministry. While people often perceive pastoral ministry as a rewarding vocation filled with spiritual meaning and purpose, it conceals many emotional, psychological, and social challenges that remain largely unacknowledged. Research indicates that pastors are frequently expected to provide unrelenting emotional, spiritual, and mental support to their congregants without themselves having access to adequate support mechanisms (Francis, 2020). This imbalance creates a situation where the caregiver becomes the neglected, a theme that needs greater exploration.

### Emotional and Psychological Strain

Pastors operate under constant pressure to be emotionally available and spiritually grounded for others. The nature of their work, which involves counseling, decision-making and offering spiritual guidance, leaves little room for them to attend to their own emotional needs. Many pastors experience chronic stress, depression and anxiety, stemming from their inability to seek professional mental health support or express vulnerability due to fear of judgment (Johnson and Stevens, 2021). This emotional strain is often exacerbated by the perception that pastoral figures should embody perfection in their spiritual walk, further alienating them from seeking help.

Burnout is a significant issue within ministry, with many pastors reporting feeling emotionally and spiritually drained due to the continuous demands placed on them (Francis, 2020). The result is often not only emotional exhaustion but also spiritual depletion, as pastors are unable to recharge or maintain their own faith journeys. This leads to a cycle of fatigue that negatively affects their ability to lead effectively, creating a crisis of both faith and functionality in their roles. The effects of burnout can be felt on the individual and at the same time on the organization (Demerouti et. al. 2021).

## **Expectations and Perfectionism**

Congregational expectations play a significant role in contributing to pastors' hidden struggles. Some pastors feel the pressure to meet unrealistic expectations placed upon them by their congregations, leadership and even the community. These expectations include being morally perfect, always available, and unerringly wise. Clinebell (2022) points out that pastors are often viewed as role models whose lives should be beyond reproach, which leaves little room for them to show vulnerability or weakness. This constant striving for perfection creates a barrier between pastors and the emotional and psychological support they need.

The pressure to perform at an elevated level can also lead to perfectionism, where pastors feel that any personal failure or perceived weakness would not only reflect poorly on them but also on their ministry. This leads many pastors to suffer in silence, fearing that if their struggles are revealed, their leadership would be questioned or undermined (Johnson & Stevens, 2021). Understanding these internalized expectations is critical for developing strategies to help pastors manage their roles in a healthier manner.

## **Relational and Social Isolation**

Pastors often experience profound social isolation despite being surrounded by people. Their roles and function make it difficult for them to form close, personal relationships with members of their congregations. Schweitzer and Kinnaman (2023) highlight how the pastoral role and function create inherent power dynamics, making it challenging for pastors to confide in those within their immediate community. The risk of broken confidentiality or judgment often leads pastors to withhold their struggles from others, which intensifies feelings of loneliness and isolation.

Pastors' professional lives also discourage forming friendships outside the church, as they may feel that their role should take precedence over personal relationships. Over time, this can lead to emotional and social withdrawal, increasing their sense of isolation (Clinebell, 2022). Moreso, the public visibility of their role means that they are often scrutinized, leaving them little room to exhibit vulnerability. This constant observation adds another layer of difficulty to managing personal struggles in a public setting.

## **Impact on Family Life**

Ministry is often a calling that involves not just the pastor but their entire family. Pastors' spouses and children frequently face immense pressures due to the demands placed on the pastor's time, energy and emotional resources. Studies have shown that the expectations placed on pastoral families, such as the need for them to be morally upright and highly involved in the church, can create strain and tension within the household (Schweitzer & Kinnaman, 2023). The lack of privacy, frequent intrusions into family life and financial instability contribute to challenges faced by pastors and their families. Many pastors' families often sacrifice their own emotional needs to support the pastor's ministry leading to relational breakdowns, with family members feeling neglected or emotionally distant (Rowland and McAdams, 2020). For pastors, the guilt of not being able to meet both their congregational and family obligations compound their stress, leaving them feeling torn between two competing worlds. These relational strains are critical to understanding the full scope of pastors' private struggles.

## **Theological and Spiritual Conflicts**

A less-discussed aspect of pastors' private experiences is their internal theological and spiritual struggles. Pastors are often seen as spiritual authorities who must embody doctrinal certainty. However, some pastors privately wrestle with theological doubts and personal crises of faith that they cannot share openly (Rowland & McAdams, 2020). The pressure to maintain a public facade of unwavering belief, even in the face of personal doubt, adds to the hidden struggles pastors go through.

## **Lack of Safe Spaces for Vulnerability**

The stigma surrounding mental health issues in religious settings is a significant barrier preventing pastors from seeking help. Many religious communities equate mental health struggles with spiritual failure or a lack of faith, leading pastors to suppress their emotional struggles out of fear of judgment (Smith, 2021). This creates a cycle of silence and suffering, where pastors are unable to access the support they need without risking their reputation or position within the church.

Smith (2021) argues that the lack of safe spaces for vulnerability within religious communities exacerbates the struggles pastors face. Without avenues for confidential counseling or peer support, many pastors feel they have no choice but to carry their burdens alone. Developing safe, non-judgmental spaces for pastors to share their experiences is essential for addressing the mental health challenges that often go unnoticed.

## **Problem Statement**

Despite the growing recognition of the emotional, psychological and relational challenges pastors face, there remains a significant gap in literature regarding their private, harsh experiences. Existing research largely focuses on the public aspects of ministry, such as leadership effectiveness and congregational dynamics, without adequately addressing the personal toll ministry takes on pastors' well-being. Though theological doubt, relational isolation and emotional burnout are critical areas that manifest in pastors studies them with little representation thus providing pastors with limited ways to think through their problems.

Additionally, there seems to be a shortage of useful recommendations and resources concerning the success of shepherd-like services required in the pastors' case. Lack of knowledge about the unspoken challenges pastors face leaves the church hierarchy, and the congregation ineffective at extending the support and care needed. However, this study aims at helping to close this gap by investigating the private lives of pastors and using the theoretical analysis that conceptualizes their battles not seen by others.

## **OBJECTIVES**

1. To develop a theoretical framework that explains the emotional, psychological, and spiritual struggles pastors face in their private lives.
2. To examine the role of congregational expectations and perfectionism in contributing to pastors' hidden struggles.
3. To explore the relational isolation pastors experience and how it affects their mental health and ministry effectiveness.
4. To identify practical strategies for creating safe spaces for vulnerability and support within communities of faith.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

People also expect help from the ministry as people believe that pastors are their shepherds and emotional comforts. However, the respondents also report on a number of hidden challenges that pastors face, such as high job stress, emotional fatigue and burnout. Indeed, there is a lot that pastors gain, and gain so much joy from serving in their pastoral positions; nonetheless, such positions come with spills that wear out their mental, emotional, and spiritual warrant. These difficulties are often augmented by what society and faith puts into the person, the spirituality at play, and the strenuousness involved in the ecclesiastical work since it involves setting boundaries in order to meet congregation needs. While the external strains of the working context have been investigated, scholarship remains somewhat limited concerning the actual internal worlds of the pastors and their strategies regarding the unforgiving side of the profession. This literature review will look at existing literature on occupational stress, burnout and coping in the use of professional and theological concepts specific to pastors alongside compiling a list of research questions and hypotheses about the unnamed stress pastors encounter in ministry.

## **Theoretical Perspectives on Pastoral Stress and Burnout**

### ***Occupational Stress Theory***

Karasek developed Occupational Stress Theory in 1979 that lends the best view of stress at work that is characteristic of service pastoral work. The theory postulates that job strain is a result of high job demands that cannot be met with a fair degree of control which is equivalent to decision-making power. Many duties appointed to pastors are complicated, and this list does not even limit the list of their responsibilities within a church but also contains administrative, counseling and decision-making roles among others. The pressures from followers are constant and in addition, people expect their pastors to always be available and easily accessible, this leads to much pressure. A recent study by Dewe and Cooper (2021) found that pastors experience stress levels comparable to professionals in high-pressure occupations, particularly due to the emotional labor involved in pastoral care. Emotional labor, in this context, refers to the requirement for pastors to manage their emotions and present a compassionate, calm exterior, even when internally they may be struggling with their own emotional and spiritual issues.

The limitations in control over work schedules, coupled with unpredictable crises such as funerals, emergencies and congregational conflicts, further exacerbate occupational stress. Pastors often face the challenge of “role overload,” where the sheer volume of tasks exceeds their capacity to handle them effectively. Under Karasek’s model, it is revealed that job demands can be effectively buffered by job resources such as social support and job control. In ministry, however, there exists limited or no proper support mechanisms since pastors and other clergy are expected to uphold healthy images and to assist others despite their needs (Niemelä, 2022). Consequently, their coping resources are depleted, leading to heightened levels of stress and emotional exhaustion.

### ***Burnout Theory***

Clergy burnout is unimaginably familiar among pastors due to the incessant service delivery mandate in the ministry as well as the emotional call required in ministry work. Burnout according to Freudenberger’s Burnout Theory (1974) is a condition whereby one gets physically, mentally and emotionally drained due to stressors. In the case of pastors, burnout shows up as emotional exhaustion, where the pastor is unable to supply the expected emotional support. We also have depersonalisation where pastors get to a point of developing a ‘thick skin’ to all the stressors to avoid being affected. This can lead to a number of negative feelings and attitudes including apathy and detachment from the congregation, and the actual ministry itself (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). When it occurs to pastors, burnout may be extremely hazardous because it harms not only the pastor’s health but also the capacity to spiritually and emotionally guide others.

A study of burnout in ministries shows how significantly this contributes to the problems present in religious vocations. When pastors experience burnout, they are less able to engage with their congregants, provide counseling, or offer spiritual guidance, which in turn affects the overall health of the church community. Burnout also increases the risk of pastoral attrition, with many pastors leaving the ministry due to emotional fatigue and feelings of inadequacy (Francis, Village, & Robbins, 2020). Some will not leave employment but become stagnant in ministry. The high emotional demands, combined with the expectation of perfection, create an environment where burnout is almost inevitable unless adequate support systems are in place.

### **Role Conflict and Emotional Fatigue**

#### ***Dual Role Conflict Theory***

Kahn et al.’s Dual Role Conflict Theory (1964) is particularly relevant when exploring the complexities of pastoral roles. Ministers often find themselves in role conflict since their roles include being both spiritual mentors and executive secretary. This conflict is particularly acute for pastors who perform both the socio-emotional tasks of their church as religious leaders, and the administrative, management-focused tasks including the coordination of the church’s financial management, direction of employees, and maintenance of the church building. The two roles can at times be in conflict with each other and demand on the pastors can at time be very demanding and deeming hence the emotional exhaustion. A study (Zahn, 2020) notes that it is difficult for many pastors to divide how much time and effort they can devote to pastoral activities, and how much they can dedicate to organizational work. This role conflict is further compounded by the need to adhere high ethical standard in this society leaving the pastors to subdue these needs and emotions for the sake of the congregation. The outcome many pastors will struggle alone because they cannot tell people about them because they will be judged and some of them are, unknown.

### **Coping Mechanisms and Resource Depletion**

#### ***Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory***

Hobfoll’s (1989) Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory offers some useful understanding of the ways in which pastors cope with stress and prevented burnout. Suggesting then that people behave in ways that protect and reinforce their individual assets such as time, energy and psychological capital. That is when stress is, when the aforementioned resources are threatened or become scarce. Resources are defined here more narrowly, and again, for pastors, these demands of ministry exceed sometimes the resources available such that one ends up losing the resource. The process of developing the relationships which allow one to provide appropriate pastoral care demands the commitment of one’s emotions, and the lack of time to rest will result in one’s chronic stress and, eventually, burnout.

Managers according to the said discourse are honored in the following ways; Scholarly assets: Pastors are usually managed and provided for yet they cannot replenish them because these are among the constant demands of the

honor. According to Wells (2021), the pastors also self-sacrifice by giving their focus to other people, which fastens the consumption of resources. The blurring of the boundary between the personal and professional lives of pastors also denies pastors quality time that they need to relax. Therefore, working stress of pastors has increased emotional exhaustion, decreased job satisfaction, and perceived decreased personal accomplishment.

### **Spiritual Well-being and Pastoral Identity**

Pastoral care and spiritual health are critically important and significantly neglected elements of the spiritual existence found in the leadership of the church. The study shows that pastors' psychological needs satisfaction of religious identity is vital for their psychological health. However, when pastors have been rendered vulnerable to these states of spirituality—these can be manifested as doubts and coping failures, feelings of God's absence and doubts in Him's existence—work becomes impossible for them. This spiritual tension can give rise to much suffering since the pastor controlling such a ministry is mandated to portray immense faith for others, even when they are struggling with faith, not only to parishioners but also family, friends, and colleagues.

Ellison and Fan (2021) note that pastors who encounter spiritual metaphysical conditions are usually inclined to suffer in silence since they display minimal willingness to discuss their ordeals. A lot of them do not seek help as they might be afraid of the congregation judging them or not trusting them again. This isolation increases the pressure of ministry, increases cases of loneliness, depression, and anxiety among ministers. In addition, when pastors are spiritually unhealthy, global-meaning-identity può stress because pastors may doubt their ability to meet the role of spiritual leaders.

### **Identified Research Gaps**

As much as occupation stress, burnout, and role conflict have been well explored in ministry, the literature investigating pastors' private experience is very scant. Comparatively, there is significant literature on organizational contextual forces like congregation and public accountability on ministry and little literature on the intra personal conflict that a pastor goes through. This is inclusive of their psychological, emotional, spiritual as well as their beliefs and faith systems.

The author also notes that there is very few work done on studying the strategies that pastors employ in the private realm of dealing with issues of ministry. Although "prayer" and "social support" have been identified and explored as some of the overall coping mechanisms, much more can be done to try and determine how these men of God, these shepherds, deal with the emotional and spiritual wrenching that comes with pastoring behind the curtains. Furthermore, not much has been said about the experience of these struggles in the long run of pastors' health and wellbeing, and their ministry career continuation or withdrawal. Filling all of these gaps is important in order to come up with even better ways of supporting pastors in order to support them to be healthy, whole, and productive people who can meet the spiritual needs of their congregation.

### **Conclusion**

Optimally, pastors are confronted with numerous challenges in their assignments, covering from occupational stress and burn out to spiritual breakdown and role stress. Occupational Stress Theory, Burnout Theory along with Conservation of Resources Theory gives theoretical underpinning for understanding the stressors in the pastors' work environment and the protective factors they use. Nevertheless, the personal lives of pastors especially those personal areas involving spirituality are under-researched in the literature. Further studies should be also conducted to describe internal processes of realizing emotion and spiritual demands in pastors and to define interventions focusing on their health when they are on the pulpit and after. It is critical to help resolve these invisible battles because pastors need to recover for the spiritual maintenance and leadership of countless communities.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Commissioned is a profession that poses numerous spiritual, emotionally and professionally related challenges. The leaders of the church are supposed to be shepherds and are expected to lead worship, counsel their flock and even provide for their practical needs as well as carrying out day to day logistics for the churches. This complexity generates significant, concealed personal processes termed here 'harsh' experiences at work among the nurses. In order to apply these challenges, the theoretical framework of stress and coping theory, role theory, and spiritual well-being frameworks are explored. It relates to establish theory on why pastors have private harsh experiences in ministry and effects on mental, emotional and spiritual wellbeing.

## **Key Constructs**

Emotional Labor, originally conceptualized by Hochschild (1983), refers to the effort required to manage one's emotions to align with occupational expectations. In pastoral ministry, emotional labor involves the need to maintain a compassionate, supportive, and calm demeanor, regardless of the internal emotional turmoil the pastor may be experiencing. Pastors are often expected to be emotionally available to congregants while suppressing their own emotional struggles, creating a significant internal burden. Recent research highlights the emotional toll of maintaining such composure, noting that the pressure to embody spiritual strength can lead to deep emotional fatigue (Wells, 2021). The performance of emotional labor in pastoral work is particularly challenging due to the ongoing nature of ministry, where there are few opportunities for rest and recovery.

Spiritual Dissonance is a construct that describes the internal conflict pastors may experience when their personal spiritual beliefs or feelings are at odds with their public persona as a spiritual leader. This dissonance can arise from doubts about faith, struggles with prayer, or feelings of distance from God. Preachers are supposed to be the epitome of believers, and when one is not entirely that, the crisis starts from within. Spiritual alignment or, in this case, the lack of it influences emotional and spiritual health more than mental health, according to Ellison and Fan (2021); pastors can feel obligated to portray faith as a spiritual leader, although they personally have challenged days or spiritual burnout. Stress between religious identities developed at work and off duty can also lead to emotional exhaustion and eventual burnout. Those that are experiencing pastoral burnout are emotionally, physically and mentally tired resulting from their exposure to stress. In the role of pastoral ministry, one can surmise that burnout is caused by high levels of emotional work, role demands and incongruity. Secondary stress and burnout in pastors involve spiritual, emotional and physical fatigue disconnection from the community and bargaining with diminishment of accomplishments (Francis, Village and Robbins, 2020). One finds it particularly pernicious in ministry because the pastor's emotional and spiritual state become critical for the health of the congregation. When burnout occurs, pastors may become emotionally withdrawn, unable to provide the level of care and guidance their congregants need, leading to a decline in both personal and congregational well-being.

## **Relationships and Mechanisms**

The hypothesized relationships among these constructs indicate that emotional labor causes spiritual distress, and that the cumulative effect of this stress is associated with pastoral burnout. Many times, a pastor is compelled to perform emotional work, and that means they constantly learn to stifle what they feel because their congregation needs them to be emotionally available. Using the above-discussed analysis, the following explains how the employees endure the emotional labor that eventually leads to spiritual dissonance: Spiritual conflict, therefore, intensifies stress and burnout, and might leave pastors feeling other than spiritual or with spiritual identity crisis. After a long time, the overall depleting cumulative effects of emotional labor plus spiritual dissonance cause burn out which is a state of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment.

Emotional Labor → Spiritual Dissonance: The first connection in the model proposed in the paper is therefore the direct association between emotional labor and spiritual dissonance. If pastors for one week after another bend their emotional self in a bid to fit the church members emotions then it means they are slowly losing touch with their spiritual selves. This disconnection, or interpretive schism, happens when the pastors prove incapable of synchronizing the performative characteristics of their public role occupied with their personal spiritual requirements. According to Wells (2021), pastors for instance do not sufficiently have time for self – spiritual renewal hence their spiritual capital gradually depletes. Spiritual Dissonance → Burnout: The second relationship in the model is the linkage between spiritual dissonance and burn out. When pastors develop spiritual discordance, they may start feeling both emotionally as well as spiritually fatigued. This multicollinearity, authentic facade often leads to feelings of artificiality and burnout in most of them. These feelings continue to build up over time thus leading to emotional fatigue, a key feature of burnout. Francis et al., (2020) provide evidence suggesting that spiritual dissonance is a considerable source of burnout in clergy because erodes their call experience and emotional resources.

Emotional Labor → Burnout Emotional labor also has a direct bearing in cases of staff burnout. The perpetual management of emotions in order to speak words of comfort, encouragement and spiritual uplift, as is expected in systems of pastoral care will definitely lead to substantial levels of emotional stress. In this situation, pastors cannot cry or get support and become most vulnerable to burnout. Emotional labor is draining the pastor and since the pastor is mainly expected to

care then the level of care is compromised because the pastor's resources have been depleted. Dewe and Cooper (2021) pointed out that burnout can arise out of emotional demands that pastors endure in service to financial and emotional isolation from support structures that would replenish their emotional pool.

## Conceptual Analysis

### Defining Harsh Experiences in Pastoral Ministry

In the context of pastoral ministry, harsh experiences refer to the combination of internal and external pressures that place significant emotional, spiritual and mental strain on pastors. These experiences often remain private, as pastors may feel pressure to maintain a facade of spiritual strength and emotional resilience. Harsh experiences include not only the emotional labor involved in providing pastoral care but also the personal spiritual struggles and relational challenges pastors face in their ministry. Internal conflicts refer to the personal emotional and spiritual struggles pastors experience as they navigate their roles. These conflicts may include doubts about faith, feelings of inadequacy, or struggles with personal prayer and spiritual connection. Internal conflicts are often compounded by the high expectations placed on pastors to embody spiritual strength and unwavering faith, leading to a sense of isolation and emotional exhaustion (Ellison & Fan, 2021).

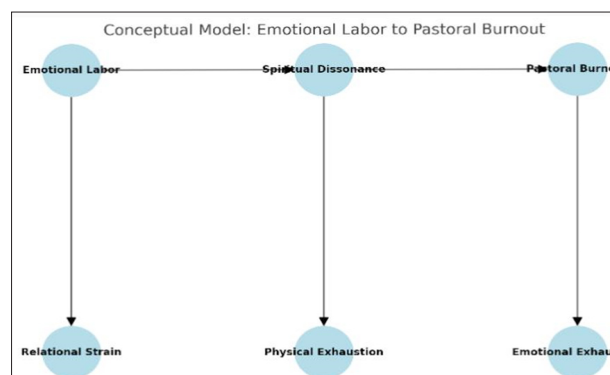
External pressures include the demands of congregational care, administrative responsibilities and community involvement. Pastors are often expected to be available 24/7 to meet the needs of their congregants, while also managing the day-to-day operations of the church. These pressures can lead to role overload, where the volume of tasks exceeds the pastor's capacity to handle them effectively (Zahn, 2020). Existential crises involve deep, personal questions about purpose, meaning and spiritual vocation. Pastors may struggle with questions about their calling, the effectiveness of their ministry, or the meaning of suffering and hardship in their congregants' lives. These existential crises can create significant emotional and spiritual distress, particularly when pastors feel disconnected from their own faith or sense of purpose (Francis et al., 2020).

### Dimensions of Harsh Experiences

Harsh experiences in pastoral ministry can be understood through several dimensions, each contributing to the overall strain on the pastor's well-being. These dimensions include emotional, spiritual, relational, and physical aspects. Pastors often carry the emotional burdens of their congregants, leading to significant emotional fatigue and eventual burnout (Wells, 2021, Ellison & Fan, 2021). Pastors also face challenges in managing relationships with congregants, fellow pastors and family members. They are expected to maintain strong, supportive relationships with their congregants, while also managing the interpersonal dynamics within the church. These relational pressures can create significant stress and emotional strain (Zahn, 2020). Over time, this can lead to physical burnout and a decline in overall health (Francis et al., 2020).

### Conceptual Model

The conceptual model below represents the interconnections between the key dimensions of harsh experiences in pastoral ministry. It illustrates how emotional labor, spiritual dissonance, relational and physical stressors contribute to overall pastoral burnout. The model also highlights the cyclical nature of these experiences, where burnout can exacerbate emotional, spiritual and relational challenges, creating a feedback loop that perpetuates the pastor's struggles.



**Figure 1.** *Conceptual Model*

This model suggests that addressing pastoral burnout requires interventions at multiple levels, including emotional, spiritual, relational, and physical support systems. Without adequate support, pastors are likely to remain trapped in this cycle of emotional labor, spiritual dissonance, and burnout, leading to long-term negative consequences for both their personal well-being and their ministry.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Implications for Theory**

The proposed theoretical framework, which integrates stress and coping theory, role theory, and spiritual well-being frameworks, advances the understanding of pastors' unique experiences by addressing both the emotional and spiritual dimensions of their roles. Traditional burnout models, such as those discussed by Dewe and Cooper (2021), typically emphasize the emotional labor required in caregiving professions. However, they often neglect the spiritual dissonance that pastors experience when their internal struggles conflict with their public roles as spiritual leaders (Ellison & Fan, 2021). This dissonance occurs when pastors grapple with spiritual doubts and feelings of inadequacy, which are compounded by the expectation that they provide continuous spiritual guidance to others.

The integration of spiritual dissonance into burnout theory is a critical development. As highlighted by Francis, Village, and Robbins (2020), most burnout models focus on the physical and emotional exhaustion aspects but fail to adequately address the spiritual dimension, which is central to pastoral work. Pastoral ministry requires not only emotional labor but also spiritual labor, wherein pastors must manage their personal spiritual health while supporting the faith journeys of their congregants. The proposed framework enriches extant knowledge by revealing the role that those spiritual tensions play in burnout differently from other caring professions.

In addition, the model analyzes how emotional labor contributes to spiritual disconnect, indicating that it is the physical effort of perpetually moderating the outward presentation—that what Hochschild (1983) calls 'surface acting'—causes inner tension. In this case over time this creates conflict which can lead to what is known as pastoral burn out which is a result of the interaction of emotional exhaustion with spiritual crises (Zahn, 2020). This dynamic undercut previous theories of burnout by positing it as an essentially physical or emotional problem, and the faith-based pressure that pastors undergo requires a more holistic approach than currently in circulation.

This theoretical frame also gives a cyclical view of pastoral burnout. As noted by Wells (2021), burnout is understood and analyzed in society as a one-step process where the first step is overworking, and the last step is emotional exhaustion of a worker. However, as for the new proposed model, those three factors are viewed as linked and reciprocally causal – emotional labor creates spiritual dissonance which causes relational strain, at the same time perpetuating the emotional labor. For instance, engagement in spiritual leadership tasks is likely to exacerbate feelings of spiritual loneliness and increase relational pressure in the pastor's personal and professional contextuality. They can then feed into emotional exhaustion and give a feedback loop that complicates the recovery from burnout.

The use of these dimensions that are integrated showed the theoretical framework provides a valuable addition to the scarce literature on occupational stress and burnout in ministry. It extends those models while at the same time acknowledging the specific spiritual pressures that are at the very heart of what it means to be a pastor. Besides, it forms a framework for suggesting new intervention that speaks to the health of pastors emotively along with their spiritual asset strength.

### **Implications for Practice**

Highlighted are nine important practice implications of the proposed framework, primarily for pastoral care, training, and support. First, knowing burnout prevention for high-risk workers depends on spiritual dissonance presents new resilience training plans. In Wells's (2021) insight, pastors' resilience solution cannot be a mere endeavor of coping with emotional strains but acknowledging and addressing mechanisms of protecting pastors' spirit. It might be possible to come up with courses that pastors could take to enable them identify developing signs of spiritual conflict so that they are equipped with ways of handling their spiritual issues without compromising their ministries.

In addition, applying the concept of emotional labor particular to pastors, it is possible to consider that interventions directing at regulating emotions can be effective. Model interventions like emotional intelligence staff development and mindfulness-based stress diseaseing could be included into the training of clergy in an effort to control or reduce



the negative emotional impact that clergy receives at work (Dewe & Cooper, 2021). These intercessions could limit the effects of emotional work experience on pastors' general health since this may decrease the burnout hazard.

The last implication, which is distinctly practical is the necessity of greater attention to the support networks that are offered at the grassroots level within religious settings. Churches and religious institutions could approach creation of such networks as program that responds to need for both pastors' emotional and spiritual health since these two are inseparable. Group therapy, religious semester, and availability of professional counselor could help alleviate the effects of EM and SD on pastors. In light of the Francis et al. (2020) recommendation, organizations that offer significant structure to the leadership processes are more likely to develop quantity-based support for their leaders.

## **FUTURE RESEARCH**

Although the present framework provides a strong abstraction for the design space, it is essential to conduct further work to advance the empirical exploring of these concepts in future works. For instance, it is possible to conduct longitudinal research to explore changes in emotional labor, spiritual attrition and burnouts in the pastors. Cohort studies could be conducted to determine if pastors that undergo certain resilience training are more defensive of their faith, and if they suffer from less burnout. Furthermore, interviews broader than quantitative questionnaires with pastors could reveal more significant embodied experience of emotional labor and spiritual bifurcation in ministry.

Another avenue for future research is male and female pastors' burnout. Wells (2021) found that female and male pastors may experience the emotional labor and spiritual conflict not the same way due to the sociocultural and missiological perceptions of clergy roles. Such differences could be used to create a benchmark for addressing different categories of pastors.

However, future research may try to find correlation between aspects of pastoral burnout and the congregation. In particular, how does one's ego affect the performance of a pastor in ministry? Exploring these links might reveal more about the external effects burnout holds for these religious societies and turn further arguments for the improvement of pastors' quality of life.

## **CONCLUSION**

In this paper, the authors have presented private painful experiences of pastors as conceptualized from the viewpoint of the theoretical works of stress and coping theory, role theory and theoretical constructs of spiritual well-being. The heart of this framework is the construct of spiritual tension, which reflects the intrapsychic distress occurring when personal spiritual turmoil contrasts with pastoral responsibilities. The framework herein introduces a fresh perspective on existing theories on burnout by acknowledging that burnout is precipitated by emotional labor, spirit lessness, and relational stress.

## **Significance**

It remains important to treat pastors' private harsh experiences as both, a self-identity and a remedy for ministry effectiveness issue. Burning out pastors are not in a healthy state to be able to care and support their congregation as is required. Thus, more effort should be directed to sponsoring the support systems and training focused on the improvement of both emotional and spiritual coping. In this way, it will be possible to support pastors and aid in avoiding their burnout and further unconstructive work for communities. Additionally, this paper points to some directions for future research that may help to improve upon the present theoretical framework and continue the debate over the well-being of pastors.

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**Citation:** Last Bonde. *The Unseen Struggles: Theoretical Perspectives on Pastors' Private Harsh Experiences in Ministry*. *Int J Innov Stud Sociol Humanities*. 2024;9(2): 31-40. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.20431/2456-4931.090204>

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