

Relationships of Emotional Intelligence and Performance-Based Self-Esteem with Burnout Among Pastors

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Abstract

Burnout threatens the emotional and physical well-being of pastors as well as their ability to provide competent and compassionate leadership to their congregations. This study examined the roles of emotional intelligence and performance-based self-esteem in the experience of burnout among pastors. Significant relationships were identified.

Problem

Burnout among pastors threatens their ability to provide the sensitive spiritual guidance and caring support often sought by congregational members and the community during times of crises. Significant gaps in the literature include:

- Only one prior study was found that examined the relationship between emotional intelligence and burnout among pastors.
- No studies directly examining the relationships between emotional intelligence and role conflict, a known contributor to burnout were identified.
- No studies examining the moderating influence of emotional intelligence on the relationships between role conflict and role overload (organizational stressors) and burnout were found.
- Only one prior study examining the relationship between performance-based self-esteem and burnout among pastors was found.

Purpose

The purpose of this quantitative study was to **increase the understanding of burnout among pastors**. Examining the roles of **emotional intelligence** and **performance-based self-esteem** with burnout among pastors was also sought.

Relevant Literature

The overarching framework was drawn from the **person-within-context theory of burnout** (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001). The person-within-context theory views burnout as emanating from the interaction of organizational and individual factors.

- The **organizational stressors** examined were role conflict and role overload.
- The **individual factors** examined were emotional intelligence and performance-based self-esteem.

Other relevant literature includes:

- Maslach's conceptualization burnout (Maslach & Jackson, 1981)
- Role stress theory (Kahn et al., 1964) includes role conflict of and role overload
- Mayer and Salovey's (1997) theory of emotional intelligence
- Theory of performance-based self-esteem (Hallsten, Josephson, & Torgén, 2005)
- Pastoral vocation (Carroll, 2006; Holifield, 2007)
- Burnout among pastors (Buys & Rothman, 2010; Francis, Hills, & Kaldor, 2008)

Research Questions

RQ1: Does emotional intelligence affect the relationship between role conflict and burnout among pastors?

RQ2: Does emotional intelligence affect the relationship between role overload and burnout among pastors?

RQ3: Does emotional intelligence serve to reduce burnout by increasing a sense of personal accomplishment?

RQ4: Does performance-based self-esteem affect burnout among pastors?

Procedures

A **convenience sample** from 8 Protestant denominations in the U.S. was identified through interested denominational leadership.

Data were collected online from 263 of these pastors, representing a 15% response rate.

Instrumentation

- Modified version of the *Maslach Burnout Inventory*, adapted for clergy (Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1996; Rutledge & Francis, 2004)
- *Schutte Emotional Intelligence Scale* (Schutte et al., 1998)
- *Performance-Based Self-Esteem Scale* (Hallsten et al., 2005)
- *Role Conflict Subscale of the Role Conflict and Ambiguity Scale* (Rizzo, House, & Lirtzman, 1970)
- *Role Overload Scale* (Beehr, Walsh, and Tabor, 1976).

Data Analysis

Correlational and **hierarchal regression** analyses were used to examine the hypothesized relationships.

Findings

Relationships were found between emotional intelligence, performance-based self-esteem, and the experience of burnout.

- Emotional Intelligence was negatively correlated with role conflict to a small, but significant degree ($r = -0.15, p = .01$).
- Emotional intelligence was not correlated with role overload.
- Emotional intelligence did not moderate relationships between role conflict and burnout or between role overload and burnout.
- Emotional intelligence was positively correlated with personal accomplishment to a large degree ($r = -0.51, p = 0.000$).
- Performance-based self-esteem was positively correlated with emotional exhaustion to a moderate degree ($r = 0.43, p = 0.000$).

Limitations

Convenience sampling

Low response rates – 15%

Predominantly male pastors all from Protestant denominations located mainly in the Midwestern U.S.

Self-report instruments may be subject to distortion.

Correlation not indicative of causation

Conclusions

Enhancing emotional intelligence and reducing performance-based self-esteem are important to reducing burnout among pastors.

Pastors who tend to base their self-esteem on perceptions of success or failure in their ministry are at greater risk for burnout, according to this study.

Pastors who exhibited higher emotional intelligence also exhibited a higher sense of personal accomplishment in their work. A sense of personal accomplishment serves as a buffer against burnout for these pastors.

Pastors who exhibited higher emotional intelligence also perceived less role conflict and, therefore, will be expected to experience less stress.

Social Change Implications

Pastors who are engaged and not burned out are better able to attend to the emotional and spiritual needs of those who seek their assistance in times of crisis. Engaged and inspired, rather than burned out, pastors will be in a better frame of mind to create a climate that is positive and conducive to emotional, relational, and spiritual health of congregational members and to provide assistance to their communities.