



Assessment of Levels of Stress and Burnout among Redeemed Christian Church of God Pastors in Ilorin, Nigeria

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Abstract

The mission and vision of the Redeemed Christian Church of God to have a member of the church in every family of all nations and to plant a church within five minutes walking distance in every city and town puts a lot of pressure on pastors of the church. The church is increasing in number by the day but the “labourers,” that is pastors, are not enough. Apart from the fact that majority of the pastors are on part time basis, they become overstretched and end up being stressed and burn out while serving the church. The purpose of this study, therefore, was to investigate the impact of stress and burnout on the pastoral work of the ministers of the gospel. The descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. A sample of 82 out of a population of 649 Pastors was used for the study using simple random sampling method. A researcher-designed questionnaire was used for data collection. Data analysis was done using descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation. Results of the study showed that the pastors experienced stress as a result of lack of financial resources, doing so many things at the same time, and church politics. It was also revealed that the pastors experienced considerable fatigue and burnout. The study therefore, recommended that the pastors should be encouraged to take time off, go on vacation and seek support when and where necessary.

Keywords: Province, Redeemed Christian Church of God, Stress, Burnout, Pastors



Introduction

People all over the world have increasingly been confronted with stress and burnout, particularly in the course of their work. The clergy, like any other individual, experience various psychosocial stressors in their line of work. The “Clergy”, according to Novieto (2013), are Christian men and women ordained as religious ministers like Pastors, Reverend, Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Bishops and General Overseer. Pastors stress today is enormous, the expectations that people put on their pastors and that pastors put on themselves can be debilitating. Everywhere pastors go, they are expected to be “on”, ready to give clear leadership, unending compassion, an inspiring message, anointed prayer and words of encouragement.

Some major responsibilities of the Redeemed Christian Church of God Pastors' include church baptisms, maintenance of church discipline, church property, hospital visitation, prisons, members, evangelism, home cells, do worship services, organise church weddings, burials, child dedications. They are also involved in ministry to the destitute, orphans and widows, homes for the elderly, encourage those that are disheartened and promote church activities. They are role models, community leaders, counselors, fostering world-wide mission and sit on civic committees and developmental committees and many more. Pastors may become overstressed, depressed or caught in compulsive and sinful behaviour. Many a time, they find themselves feeling spiritually dry, tired of ministry, struck in their spiritual life or burn out. Thus, the pastoral work may be depicted to be stressful unless resilience mechanisms are put in place.

Stress is a natural response that enables one to deal with challenging or dangerous situations. The stress response begins in the brain. Beneficial stress enables one to act or react quickly. A certain amount of stress can also help one to reach a goal or to perform better, perhaps during an examination, a job interview or a sporting event. However, prolonged or chronic stress can harm one. When the body is repeatedly or consistently on high alert, one may be in to suffer physically, emotionally and mentally. Chronic stress can also lead to substance abuse and other unhealthy means of coping. It may even lead into depression, burnout or thoughts of suicide.



According to Zolli (2013), ever since mankind realised that they had to work hard, toil or even exert their energies in order to earn their daily bread and butter, they have been under the scourge of stress. Bloon (2007) adds that whereas several studies have focused on stress and individual performance, researchers have also gone further and delved into the link between stress and work performance. This view, he argues, has emerged out of the realisation that stress is a threat to the health of individuals and organisations.

Pastors in Nigeria are overloaded with church responsibilities, leaving no time to nurture their own spiritual growth or take good care of their families. Congregation expect them to be: “Almighty” and to solve all problems (Yang, 2013). Furthermore, church members perceive pastors as representing the “ideal spiritual man”, not believing or allowing them to be weak. As a result, pastors are afraid of sharing personal difficulties and thus suffer from loneliness (Chen, 2013). The high expectation from their Christian brothers or sisters caused stress to the pastors, which endangers their physical, emotional and spiritual health (Cheg, 2013) Some church members expect their pastors to be competent in everything. Churches seldom support pastors in terms of time and resources for personal growth and development. (Wu, 2014). As a result, they may experience spiritual dryness or even burnout. Feeling drained and unable to cope with job related stress is the main reasons for making the pastors to be frustrated

Studies carried out on the management of stress among church leaders have often indicated that if occupational stress is properly managed, it can help reduce the pressure exerted on the church leaders. Joiner (2020) found out that pastors are overburdened with their tasks, duties and responsibilities in their day-to-day life. This denies them the much-needed privacy and commitment to family. Time and again, they are away from home and are expected to be on call at any eventuality to preach or teach and perform, visit the sick and pay visits to the morgues during death of a member. Joiner (2020) further argues that when they are on vacation, they do not fully relax and may not take their families with them due to exigencies.

Meanwhile, London and Wiseman (2013), in their study dubbed "Help for pastors and hope for the church" focused on more than 1700 pastors



in USA. They came up with conclusions that pastors are far at greater risk for depression and anxiety mostly due to stress than those with other occupations. The import from the views expressed is that the clergy go through varied stressors which have the tendency to affect their lives. What is significant to note is that extended and long periods of stress and exhaustion can lead to burnout.

Burnout is considered to be a psychological response to chronic work stress, a state of mental weariness and, most commonly, characterised by emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation, and lack of personal accomplishment Maslach and Leiter (2008). Energy draining stress resulting in burnout is significant because it not only impedes Christian witness and work by debilitating the leadership of church communities. Research has shown that there is a strong and consistent relationship among stress and burnout and job demands (Schaufferli & Bakker, 2004). The daily pressures of carrying out vast amounts of responsibility with inadequate resources often leave pastors feeling exhausted.

Research studies have shown that pastors continue to struggle with stress and burnout due to the nature of their work (Gee et al., 2006). A study reports that globally, 1,700 pastors leave the ministry each month, citing depression, burnout, or being overworked as the primary reasons. In terms of workload, Fickel (2019) indicated that 90% of pastors report working 55 to 70 hours a week with 50% of them unable to meet the demands of the job. According to Wong (2015), global estimates of the prevalence of burnout vary widely, ranging from 10% to 47% of pastors according to either subjective ratings of burnout or Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) criteria. Based on all these, it is evident that stress and burnout are common for most pastors.

In spite of this, global research on stress and burnout among pastors has been minimal. Most of the existing research has focused almost exclusively on individual and job-related variables in the experience of stress and burnout (Jackson, 2013). How stress and burnout affect the quality of life of pastors has been largely ignored, especially in Africa. Fugar (2007) opined that the limited studies conducted in African countries have mostly found that pastors suffer stress and burnout to a high degree. The situation in Nigeria is not very different as the extent to which stress and burnout affect Nigerian pastors have not gained



much research interest. Most studies on stress and burnout have usually focused on bankers, teachers, nurses, police, and students, exploring how stress and subsequent burnout affected their lives and families.

London and Wiseman (2013) gave some worrying statistics concerning stress and burnout. According to them, 45% of pastors have experienced depression or burnout to the extent that they needed to take leave of absence from ministry. 75% of pastors report severe stress causing anguish, worry, bewilderment, anger, depression, fear and alienation. 80% believe that pastoral ministry negatively affects their family. There have been some few studies which focused on the stressful experiences of pastors. No study has specifically focused on how stress and burnout affected Pentecostal pastors in Ilorin. This creates a gap in the literature. On the basis of this, this study is considered necessary.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to assess the levels of stress and burnout among Redeemed Christian Church of God pastors in Ilorin, Nigeria.

Research Questions

The study sought to answer these research questions:

1. What is the level of stress among pastors in Redeemed Christian Church of God in Kwara State?
2. What is the level of burnout among pastors in Redeemed Christian Church of God in Kwara State?

Methodology

This particular study was carried out in Redeemed Christian Church of God, Kwara Province 6, Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria, which serves as one of the Provinces in Kwara State. The Church was selected as it is among the established Pentecostal churches in the country and in Kwara in particular. The study employed a descriptive survey design. Zigmond (2003) notes that surveys provide quick and accurate means of assessing information if properly conducted. Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) explain further that, a survey attempts to quantify social phenomena on particular issues, conditions or problems that are prevalent in a society. This in essence means asking members of a population questions about issues in order to determine the current status of that population. Thus, it assists the researcher to establish whether vital associations among



variables exist at one point in time depending on the resources available at the target population. Information is obtained from a sample rather than the entire population.

This research design was selected for the study because: It was able to offer the researcher the opportunity to find out the stress level of pastors in the discharge of their duties. It helped the researcher establish the influence of work environment and individual pastoral work of pastors in Redeemed Christian Church of God in Kwara State. Furthermore, it also ensured the unbiased representation of the population of interest; consequently, the researcher had no control of the variables in the sense of being able to manipulate them and reported only the results of the research.

The population of the study consisted of all the 649 Pentecostal Pastors in Kwara State, while the target population of the study were pastors of the Redeemed Christian Church of God, Kwara State. Province 6 constitutes the target population. 82 pastors from the Redeemed Christian Church of God, Province 6 Kwara State were purposively sampled through simple sampling for this study. These pastors were targeted for the survey because of similar characteristics which separate them from pastors of other churches. A researcher-designed questionnaire was used to collect data from the pastors. The questionnaire was on a 4 points Likert scale rating of Always (4), frequently (3), rarely (2), and never (1). The questionnaire was divided into three sections. Section A contained the demographic data of the pastors, section B contained 12 items which has to do with the stress level of the pastors while section C has 10 items on the level of burn out of pastors. The data was analysed using mean and standard deviation. On the basis of the scale, the mean score of 2.5 and above were deemed to be high implying that respondents often had that experience. Mean scores less than 3.0 implied that respondents rarely had that experience. The questionnaire was given to two experts in the department of Social Science Education, University of Ilorin for face and validity while the reliability of the instrument was established using Cronbach Alpha method and a reliability index of 0.84 was established. Data was analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistics of mean and standard deviation.



Results

The following presents the demographic characteristics of respondents in terms of status, working experience pastoral and church category.

Table 1: Demographic Distribution of Respondents

Variables	Classification	Frequency	Percentage
Status	Married	73	89.02
	Single	9	10.98
Working Experience	1-5	13	15.85
	6-10	58	70.73
	11 and above	11	13.42
Pastoral category	Full Time	19	23.17
	Part Time	63	76.83
Church category	Zonal Pastor	6	7.32
	Area Pastor	23	28.05
	Parish Pastor	53	64.63

Table 1 presents the analysis of the demographic characteristics of respondents of the study. It can be seen that 73 (89.02%) of the respondents are married, while 9 (10.98%) are single. Also, the analysis based on pastoral years of working experience revealed that 13 (15.85%) had between 1-5 years of pastoral experience, 58 (70.73%) were between 6-10 years of experience and 11 (13.41%) were between 11 years and above. Furthermore, 19 (23.17%) were full time pastors and 63 (76.83%) were full time pastors. It was also revealed that 6(7.32%) were Zonal pastors, 23 (28.05%) were Area Pastors and 53 (64.63%) were Parish Pastors.

Research Question One: *What is the level of stress among pastors in Redeemed Christian Church of God in Kwara State?*

In order to determine the level of stress among pastors in the Redeemed Christian Church of God, Kwara State, the response of each of the respondents on each of the twelve items four point Likert scale response format, which was a continuous data, and summed up to a total minimum of 12 and a total maximum of 48 with a range of 36 was categorised into two categorical forms of stress levels which are, low and high. Based on the twelve items that measured stress level the



respondents’ total point between 13-30 and 31-48 were categorised as low and high level of stress. Hence the result is presented in table 1.

Level	Range	F	Percentage	Remark
Low	13-30	27	33.3	High
High	31-48	55	66.7	
Total		82	100	

It was revealed in Table 1 that 27 (33.3%) of the total responses showed low level of stress among pastors the while 55 (67.7%) of the responses high level of stress. This revealed that the pastors showed high level of stress in the discharge of their pastoral work.

Research Question Two: *What is the level of burnout among pastors in Redeemed Christian Church of God in Kwara State?*

In order to determine the level of stress among pastors in the Redeemed Christian Church of God, Kwara State, the response of each of the respondents in each of the ten items four point Likert scale response format, which was a continuous data, were summed up to a total minimum of 10 and a total maximum of 40 with a range of 30 was categorised into two categorical forms of stress levels which are, low and high. Based on the twelve items that measured stress level the respondents’ total point between 11-25 and 26-40 were categorized as low and high level of stress. Hence the result is presented in table 2.

Table 2 Level of Burnout among Pastors

Level	Range	F	Percentage	Remark
Low	11-25	33	40	High
High	26-40	49	60	
Total		82	100	

It was revealed in Table 2 that 33 (40%) of the total responses showed low level of stress among pastors the while 49 (60%) of the responses high level of stress. This revealed that the pastors showed high level of burn out in the discharge of their pastoral work.



Discussion

The result of the data analysis revealed that majority (66.7%) of the pastors in Kwara State have high level of stress in their pastoral duties. This can be explained that Redeemed Christian Church of God pastors pass through some issues that bring about stressful experiences. Financial strains as a result of personal and congregation demands put a lot of stress on them. Overwork leading to health challenges and politics as practised in the church is another factor. The result was in agreement with that of Anyetey (2018) who found out that pastors mostly experienced stress due to inadequacy of financial resources and being over worked lead to health challenges. In addition to health challenges, combining a lot of task like mid-week services, attending naming ceremonies and ministering at night vigils leads to stressful moments in the life of the pastors. Liang (2009) concluded that high ministry demands an increase stress among pastors.

Moreover, this study found out that Redeemed Christian Church of God pastors in Kwara state experienced high level of burnout (60%) as a result of their being overwhelmed with pastoral work and duties. This implies that they felt frustrated with juggling between self, family, and congregation. It was also noted that most of the pastors in Redeemed Christian Church of God are part time pastors who are gainfully engaged in secular or private jobs . In a bid to balance their activities between the church and the contending issues, they experience burnout

Conclusion

The study revealed that pastors in the RCCG Province 6 in Kwara State experience stress due to enormous task before them in the process of leading people to Christ and the mandate of propagating the gospel to the end of the earth. The study also indicated that pastor experience burnout in terms of fatigue and emotional drain in a bid to fulfil their pastoral mandate. The stress and burnout experienced by the pastors affect them negatively in the discharge of the duties. There is therefore the need for the authorities of the church to find a way out for the pastors by ensuring that the personal, financial and social needs of the pastors are met at all times.



Recommendations

1. Encourage the pastors to always take full days off each week to allow them restore energy and refresh their soul.
2. Pastors should be taking their full holiday and financial entitlement and be considered for aid recovery plan following periods of extra work stress
3. Assistants and helping personnel should be recruited to fill or take significant roles to relieve pastors from stressors
4. Appropriate structures should be established that focus on direction and duties of Pastors and co-workers in the church in terms of decision making and evaluation procedures.
5. Pastors should talk to somebody and seek support so that together they can generate changes to alter the feeling of stress and burnout
6. The church hierarchy should organise seminars to educate pastors on stressors such as time management, financial obligation, team work and healthy living standards for effective pastoral work

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