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Sources of Stress and Management Strategies among Ministers in the Cape Coast Metropolis: Implications for Counselling and Gospel Ministry

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Abstract

Stress can be destructive if not well managed. It also has a direct bearing on the individual's performance at work and productivity. The main purpose of the study was to investigate the sources of stress and management strategies that are common to ministers of the gospel. A descriptive research design was used for this study. A total of 250 ministers of the gospel serving in the Orthodox, Pentecostal and Charismatic churches in the Cape Coast Metropolis in the Central Region of Ghana were sampled for the study. Mean scores, standard deviations and rank order were used to analyse the data collected from the study. The most predominant source of stress among ministers of the gospel was "Inadequate financial support from the congregation." The second was "Organising church programmes." In the 3rd place was "Not getting support from church leaders." The most important stress management strategy was "Delegating duties to others". It was recommended that the general working conditions of ministers of the gospel should be improved by church governing councils. The implications of the findings for counselling and the church were also highlighted.

Key words: Counselling, stress, stress management, ministers of the gospel, pastors, churches.

Introduction

Stress, with its exacting influence on modern man in all spheres of life, is no respecter of persons. According to Melgosa (2013), very

few people escape from stress; it is part of our daily routine. Time and work pressures, relationship problems, noise, pollution, finances and insecurity have been identified as some of the sources of stress.

Stress has been defined in several ways. It is derived from the Latin word “*stringere*”, which was used in the 17th century to describe hardships or afflictions and up to the present, its meaning remains as “forces, pressure, strain or strong effort” (Cartwright & Cooper, 1997).

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) viewed stress from a psychological perspective and asserted that the stress process is “a particular relationship between the person and the environment that is appraised by the person as taking or exceeding his or her resources and endangering his or her well-being”. Keil (2004) built on this definition, asserting that “stress involves a set of circumstances with which the individual is attempting to cope”.

Stress is the emotional and physical strain caused by people’s response to pressure from the outside world. Common stress reactions include tension, irritability, inability to concentrate, frustration and a variety of physical symptoms that include headache and a fast heartbeat. According to Ho (2009), the types of stress are eustress, distress, and hyper stress, while the signs of stress include sickness or absence, accident or incident, disciplinary action or compliance, seeking help from fellow employees or counselling, low attitude and esteem for the job, frustration, irritability, and anger.

Selye (1956), an expert on stress, explained that stress is not inherently deleterious. Each individual’s cognitive appraisal, their perceptions and interpretations, give meaning to events and determine whether events are viewed as threatening or positive. Personality traits also influence the stress equation because what may be overtaxing to one person may be exhilarating to another. Nevertheless, stress has been regarded as an occupational hazard since the mid-1950s. In fact, occupational stress has been cited as a significant health problem.

Freudenberger (1974) coined the term “burnout” to describe workers’ reactions to the chronic stress common in occupations involving numerous direct interactions with people. Burnout is typically conceptualized as a syndrome characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. Work life, however, is not independent from family life: these domains may even be in conflict. Stress may result from the combined responsibilities of work, marriage, and children.

Ministers of the gospel are faced with a variety of demands laid upon them by their churches. Many ministers grow bone-weary satisfying the requirements of others, with no compensating chance to meet personal demands. Ministerial work is characterized by helping people in crises at all times. The question that comes to mind as one begins to think about the stress condition ministers face is, “where do pastors turn when they need help”? Where does a pastor go when he or she is discouraged, burned out, or when faced with challenges in the congregation? If he/she turns to the church leaders he/she risks sharing information that is very personal and perhaps hurtful. If he or she tells people in the congregation, it may be misunderstood or even used as a weapon against him/her. As a result, many ministers have become victims to stress-related diseases such as hypertension, stroke, and ulcers (WGBH Educational Foundation and Vulcan Productions, Inc., (2009). Some, however, become victims of dying prematurely. Pastors have a huge task before them while ministering, not only to the spiritual and psychological needs of their congregants, but also to the external needs of members, both socially and economically. This, in most cases, poses a conflicting role as far as their pastoral work is concerned, which leads to more stress.

Although stress is an inevitable feature of work and personal life, it still can be managed. In order to manage stress, one needs to start with identifying the source of stress in one’s life. It is not as easy as it sounds because one’s true source of stress is not always obvious, and it is all too easy to overlook one’s own stress – including thoughts, feelings and behaviours. Definitely, people may know that they are constantly worried about work deadlines, but maybe it is their procrastination, rather than the actual job demands that leads to deadline stress (Smith & Segal, 2012).

Whetten and Cameron (1998) have posited that eliminating or minimizing stressors at the beginning is important. They believe also that this is the best way to manage stress. This may be called proactive stress management. According to Whetten and Cameron, the second important thing is to increase individuals’ capacity to remove stress by increasing their resiliency. Although stress management is an organizational philosophy, individual resiliencies are also important to cope with stress. Effective coping with stress requires first an appraisal of the event, then a mobilization of the “personal and social coping

resources” and eventually the use of actual coping strategies (Shipton, 2002). Ineffective coping methods may lead to prolonged stress, feeling of powerlessness and eventual burnout and attrition.

Purpose of the study

On the basis of the above, this study investigated the sources of stress and stress management strategies among ministers of the gospel in Orthodox, Pentecostal and Charismatic churches in the Cape Coast metropolis.

Research Questions

Two research questions that guided the conduct of this research were:

1. What are the sources of stress among ministers of the gospel in Orthodox, Pentecostal and Charismatic churches in the Cape Coast metropolis?
2. What are the stress management strategies used by ministers of the gospel in Orthodox, Pentecostal and Charismatic churches in the Cape Coast metropolis?

Method

Research Design

The research design adopted for this study was the descriptive survey method. According to Creswell (2012), descriptive design provides a quantitative or numeric description of trends, attitudes, or opinions of a population by studying a sample of the population. The design was considered appropriate because the purpose of this study was to solicit opinions from ministers of the gospel on the sources and management strategies of stress without influencing their thoughts in any way.

Population

According to Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2011), population is a group of elements or cases, whether individuals, objects or events that conform to specific criteria and to whom the researcher intends to generalize the study. In simple terms and for this study, population refers to a group of humans for a study (Creswell, 2012). The target population for this study comprised all ministers of the gospel in the Cape Coast Metropolis. Efforts to get their exact number failed, but a

rough estimate given by some ministers in the metropolis puts their number at between 700 and 800 ministers of all shades of Christian denominations. These include those from mainline churches of Orthodox, Pentecostal and Charismatic breeds. Included also are denominations such as the Seventh-day Adventists, Jehovah Witnesses, Mormons, Roman Catholic, etc. The accessible population for this study was 500 pastors serving in the Orthodox, Pentecostal and Charismatic churches in the Cape Coast Metropolis in the Central Region of Ghana.

Sample and Sampling Procedure

According to Cohen, Swerdlick and Sturman (2013), a sample is a portion of universe of people deemed to be representative of the whole population. The size of the sample, according to them, could be as small as one person, through samples that approach the size of the population to reduce the possible sources of error arising from insufficient sample size. On account of this fact, a sample size of 250 was considered to be adequate for the study, since it is 50% of the accessible population.

In selecting the sample for this study, the multi-stage sampling technique was used. Firstly, stratified sampling technique was employed to ensure that pastors from the three strata of church type – Orthodox, Pentecostal and Charismatic were earmarked for inclusion with equal proportion of approximately 33.3% each.

Secondly, purposive sampling was used to select only pastors who attend the monthly meetings of their various denominations, viz: Orthodox pastors attending Ghana Evangelism Committee meetings, Pentecostal pastors attending Pentecostal Council Conferences, as well as Charismatic pastors in independent Charismatic churches in their localities.

Thirdly, and lastly, incidental or convenience sampling was used at each of the location of the meeting places just mentioned to select the numbers of ministers available and ready to participate in the study. At the end of these exercises 72 of the Orthodox pastors, 62 of the Pentecostal ministers, and 83 of the Charismatic ministers returned usable copies of the questionnaire, making a total of 217 out of the 250 giving a return rate of 86.8% (Table 1).

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents Based on Ministerial Type (n=217)

Ministerial Type	Frequency	Percentage
Orthodox	72	33.2
Pentecostal	68	28.6
Charismatic	83	38.2
Total	217	100.0

Source: Field Data, 2016.

Instrument

A questionnaire titled “Sources of Stress and Management Strategies Questionnaire” (SOSMASQ) was used to collect the data. The SOSMASQ, designed by the researchers, was given to two experts in guidance and counselling from the University of Cape Coast for vetting. Section A was used to collect respondents’ demographic data on gender, age, and denomination. Sections B, with 22 items, was on sources of stress, while Section C, with 16 items elicited responses on management strategies for stress. Sections B and C were structured in the four-point, Likert-type scale format. Options on the scale ranged from 1= Strongly Disagree (SD), 2=Disagree (D), 3=Agree (A) to 4=Strongly Agree (SA).

According to Cohen, Swerdlick and Sturman (2013), in the language of psychometrics, reliability refers to consistency in measurement. It is a synonym for dependability of the instrument. To obtain the reliability of the instrument (SOSMASG), copies of it were administered to 40 pastors once in the Greater Accra Region. Data from these were collated and used to compute the internal consistency reliability of SOSMASG, using the Cronbach alpha, developed by Cronbach (1951). The coefficient alpha obtained was 0.76, which falls above the 7.0 level and this means, therefore, that the instrument is quite reliable, according to Kline (1999).

Method of data analysis

The research questions were analysed using standard deviations, means and rank order.

Results

Research Question One: What are the sources of stress among Ministers of the Gospel in the Cape Coast Metropolis?

The results of Table 2 revealed that the most predominant source of stress among ministers of the gospel was “*Inadequate financial support from the congregation*” (Mean = 3.101, SD= 2.123). This result is in line with that of Croucher’s (1982) study on stress and burnout in ministers. In his study, he identified “*anxiety over financial problems*” as a major source of stress among ministers of the gospel. The result also agrees with the research finding of Price (2001) which stated that clergy salaries are a significant source of emotional and somatic (bodily) stress. He added that, as at the time of the study, pastors’ salaries had been relatively flat for two decades. Low salaries, as we all know, represent a large decrease in purchasing power.

The special reference made to support from the congregation suggests that most of the pastors’ salaries and other remunerations are determined by the congregation. This may mean that the same resource that is supposed to be used for running the administration and the church project is used to pay salaries and the other benefits of the minister. Beebe (2007) identifies the professional engagement theory as the main cause of burnout; the imbalance between what individuals give to their job and what they receive in return. If ministerial career is characterized by a 24-hour engagement, then one may expect them to receive a return that matches their input in ministering, and if that is not forth-coming it could result in very serious stress.

Table 2: Rank order of sources of stress among Ministers (n=217)

Item No.	Sources of Stress	Mean	SD	Rank
16	Inadequate financial support from the congregation	3.101	2.123	1st
2	Organizing church programmes	3.097	0.802	2nd
4	Not getting required Support from church Leaders	2.975	0.985	3rd
9	Insufficient resources	2.947	0.910	4th
11	Meeting expectations of the congregation	2.903	0.829	5th
7	Managing church projects	2.894	0.878	6th
12	Congregation not growing	2.889	0.843	7th

15	Financial demand from the head office	2.880	0.969	8th
3	Meetings schedules	2.830	0.683	9th
8	Conflict between home and work demands	2.803	0.954	10th
1	Preparing for sermons	2.733	0.992	11th
5	Having only little support from congregation	2.730	0.909	12th
13	Inflexible work schedule of the church	2.677	0.880	13th
10	Little or no performance feedback	2.659	0.889	14th
14	Size of the congregation	2.622	0.998	15th
21	Life crises puts stress on me	2.618	0.946	16th
18	Inappropriate workload	2.604	0.876	17th
6	Managing church finances	2.599	0.958	18th
19	Unclear job expectations by superiors	2.535	0.918	19th
17	Ill-health	2.410	1.033	20th
22	Problems with spouse	2.217	1.103	21st
20	My gender puts stress on me	1.949	0.987	22nd

Source: Field data, 2016.

Furthermore, in the current study, “*Inadequate financial support from the congregation*” was closely followed by “*Organizing church programmes*” (Mean =3.097, SD =0.802). This finding is consistent with that of Roberts, Flannelly, Weaver and Figley (2003) which revealed that one major source of pastors’ stress was “*be-at-the-church syndrome*”. Pastors who over-burdened themselves with organizing numerous church programmes experienced a lot of stress. Why pastors will have to overburden themselves with numerous church programmes without resorting to delegating some of their duties to church officers raises a lot of questions in the mind of the current researchers. Not only would such arrangement have resulted in relieving ministers from too much stress, it would have also afforded the church officers opportunities for acquiring leadership skills in church management. Such delegation of duties may also mean a strategy to stem the tide of their members’ flocking to various prayer programmes organized by other so-called prophets across the length and the breath of the country, a situation that becomes an unwarranted source of stress for pastors.

The source of stress ranked third was “*Not getting required support from church leaders*” (Mean =2.975, SD=0.985). This finding is consistent with that of Morelli (2005) who stated that an aspect of the work environment that may pose stress is a lack of support from

supervisors or immediate line managers. The result also confirmed that of Le Blanc, Hox, Schaufeli and Taris (2000) which found that lack of social relations at work accounted for job related stressors. These researchers further opined that low social support and low participation could be stressful. Furthermore, in the current study respondents indicated that “*insufficient resources*” (Mean = 2.947, SD = 0.910) was another major sources of stress. This result is the probable reason why Halbeslesben (2006) contended that major environmental resources can reduce stress and burnout as well as enhancing positive well-being.

The least ranked sources of stress among ministers of the gospel included the following: “*My gender puts stress on me*” (Mean 1.949, SD=0.987), which ranked last or 22nd. “*Problems with my spouse*” (Mean =2.217, SD=1.103), ranked 21st and, “*My ill-health*” (Mean=2.410, SD=1.033), ranked 20th. That “*My gender puts stress on me*” was the least source of stress for ministers of the gospel suggests that gender is not a significant source of stress for ministers in the Cape Coast metropolis. In other words, it is heartening to find that for ministers of the gospel in the Cape Coast metropolis, being male or female is not a serious source of stress. The current researchers feel further investigation would be needed to settle the question of whether there will be any significant differences in the sources of stress encountered by male and female ministers of the gospel in Cape Coast metropolis.

Research Question Two: *What are the stress management strategies among Ministers of the gospel in the Cape Coast Metropolis?*

The results in Table 3 revealed that the most used stress management strategy among ministers of the gospel in the Cape Coast metropolis was “*Delegating duties to others*” (Mean= 3.188, SD= .749 ranked 1st). This may probably mean that the ministry can be less burdensome when many people accept the challenge to help. No wonder the Lord Jesus sent His disciples to go in twos. This stress management strategy was closely followed by “*Employing good time management strategies*” (Mean= 3.147, SD=0.711) which ranked 2nd. With regard to time management skills, Turkel and Leblebici (2001) demonstrated that time management is the most efficient method to balance activities.

Table 3: Stress Management Strategies among Ministers of the Gospel (n=217)

Item No.	Stress Management Strategy	Mean	SD	Rank
5	Delegating duties to others	3.189	0.749	1st
14	Employing good time management strategies	3.147	0.711	2nd
6	Reading the Bible	3.142	0.796	3rd
3	Having quality sleep everyday	3.092	0.739	4th
4	Exercising Regularly	3.069	0.732	5th
11	Good Leadership skills	3.027	0.827	6th
9	Praying	3.009	0.855	7th
15	Seeking counselling from professional counsellors	3.009	0.822	7th
1	Taking annual leave	2.959	1.006	9th
7	Singing songs of praise	2.926	0.830	10th
13	Stress Management Seminars	2.922	0.870	11th
2	Reducing daily schedules of work	2.908	0.845	12th
12	Adequate resources available	2.908	0.733	13th
16	Confiding in spouse	2.820	0.913	14th
8	Dancing	2.668	0.887	15th
10	Confiding in friends	2.309	0.834	16th

Source: Field data, 2016.

Time management skills can help employees make the most effective and efficient use of time. According to Morelli (2005), learning to say “No” or “Wait” are valuable ways to manage time, and this can go a long way in reducing stress. The third ranked management strategy, was “*Reading the Bible*” (Mean=3.142, SD=796). Tan (2007) illustrated how prayer and scripture reading can explicitly be used in Christian cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) in reducing stress which agrees with the findings of this study. Although in Tan’s study prayer ranked 7th it still gives a strong indication that it is a very effective means by which individuals who lean on its support can have a real relief from stress. This finding agrees with the position of Ackumey (2003) who stressed that intercessory prayer and scripture reading have the strongest effects on the cognitive symptoms of depression. Increased intimacy with God is also one of the major stress

management strategies. “*Having quality sleep everyday*” ranked 4th (Mean = 3.09, SD=.0.74). This finding is also in line with the findings of Ackumme (2003), which identified sleep and relaxation as very effective way to reduce stress. “*Exercising regularly*” ranked 5th (M= 3.07, SD=.0.73). Exercise has been indicated by many research findings as providing a way of discharging tension, resulting in heightened feeling of well-being (Ackumme, 2003). Croucher (1982) also pointed out that three-to-four-times-a-week exercising by walking, swimming, playing tennis, preparing and regularly breathing deeply, will prevent acute stress. Exercise and sleep help reduce adrenal arousal.

The management strategy that was ranked last among ministers of the gospel was “*Confiding in friends*” (Mean = 2.319, SD=.834). This implies that ministers of the gospel resort least to confiding in friends for the purpose of managing their stress. This finding somehow contradicts the position of Kowalski (2000) which focuses more on social resiliency, especially for seeking input from others. He believes that a trusted person may see new ways to deal with situations because, in his view, no one can deal with all life’s stresses alone. He emphasised more on the establishment of unions and social support groups to help decrease stress levels.

“*Confiding in friends*” was ranked last (16th) among the stress management strategies used by Ministers. This finding seems to be out of tune with the popular belief that confiding in friends is one of the most frequently used strategies people resort to when they are facing stress. The current finding suggests that the Ministers may not have built or developed enough friendship with either the members of their congregation, people in the community or their colleagues because of unfamiliarity with people around them. It also points to the rather strange possibility that the ministers do not practice what they teach and encourage their church members to do, viz: to make friends and share their challenges with them in order to pray over such challenges.

Implications for Counselling and Gospel Ministry

The findings of this study hold the following implications for counselling:

1. Churches should engage the services of professional counsellors who can help ministers to manage their occupational stress.

2. Counsellors in churches should be able to furnish their ministers with comprehensive counselling on effective time management skills geared towards helping the pastors in particular and the congregation in general.
3. Church counsellors can adopt counselling techniques such as cognitive restructuring to disabuse the minds of ministers of wrong thought patterns which result in the prevalence of stress.
4. Counsellors in churches should reach out to both young and old ministers of the gospel to offer them effective ways of managing stress.

Recommendations

Based on the findings drawn from the study, the following recommendations are made to key stakeholders:

1. The general working conditions of ministers of the gospel should be improved by church governing councils.
2. Seminars, conferences, workshops and symposia should be organised by church leaders, to expose ministers of the gospel to the sources of stress and also to sharpen their management skills for stress.

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