

Original citation:

Francis, Leslie J., Brewster, Christine E. and Laycock, Patrick (2015) The burdens of rural ministry : identifying and exploring the correlates of five Causes of stress among rural Anglican clergy serving in multi-parish benefices. In: Village, Andrew and Hood, Jr, Ralph W., (eds.) Research in the Social Scientific Study of Religion. Research in the Social Scientific Study of Religion, 26 (26). Leiden: Koninklijke Brill, pp. 218-236. ISBN Research in the Social Scientific Study of Religion

Permanent WRAP URL:

<http://wrap.warwick.ac.uk/81688>

Copyright and reuse:

The Warwick Research Archive Portal (WRAP) makes this work by researchers of the University of Warwick available open access under the following conditions. Copyright © and all moral rights to the version of the paper presented here belong to the individual author(s) and/or other copyright owners. To the extent reasonable and practicable the material made available in WRAP has been checked for eligibility before being made available.

Copies of full items can be used for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge. Provided that the authors, title and full bibliographic details are credited, a hyperlink and/or URL is given for the original metadata page and the content is not changed in any way.

A note on versions:

The version presented here may differ from the published version or, version of record, if you wish to cite this item you are advised to consult the publisher's version. Please see the 'permanent WRAP URL' above for details on accessing the published version and note that access may require a subscription.

For more information, please contact the WRAP Team at: wrap@warwick.ac.uk

The burdens of rural ministry: Identifying and exploring the correlates of five causes of stress among rural Anglican clergy serving in multi-parish benefices

*Leslie J. Francis, Patrick Laycock, Christine E. Brewster**

Abstract

The aim of the present study was to employ factor analysis to clarify and to distinguish between the main sources of stress experienced by rural Anglican clergy serving in multi-parish benefices. Data that were provided by 613 clergy (151 women and 462 men) who rated 84 potential sources of stress generated five distinct factors best characterized as the burden of administration, the burden of presence, the burden of isolation, the burden of distance, and the burden of visibility. Personality and age were stronger predictors of the levels of stress caused by these burdens than were sex, contextual factors or theological factors. Of these five burdens, the most damaging to the overall work-related psychological health of rural clergy was the burden of isolation and the least damaging was the burden of distance. It is argued that clearer knowledge about the differential effects of different sources of stress on the work-related psychological health of rural clergy may lead to more targeted and more effective intervention.

Keywords

Rural – clergy – burnout – stress – England

**Authors Note:* Leslie J. Francis, University of Warwick; Patrick Laycock, Manchester University; Christine E. Brewster, Glyndŵr University.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Leslie J. Francis, Warwick Religions & Education Research Unit, Centre for Education Studies, The University of Warwick, Coventry CV4 7AL United Kingdom. Telephone: +44 (0)24 7652 2539; Fax: +44 (0)24 7657 2638; Email: leslie.francis@warwick.ac.uk

Rural ministry in the Church of England has undergone considerable change from the 1950s onwards. The general process of secularization, the decline in vocations to full-time ordained ministry, and financial constraints have all led to the need to amalgamate rural parishes into multi-church benefices. The effects of these changes were chronicled in the mid-1980s by Francis (1985) in *Rural Anglicanism* in terms of the implications for rural churches, rural congregations, rural communities, and rural clergy. The effects have become even more profound three decades on.

From the mid-1980s onwards, commentators on rural ministry in the Church of England have speculated about the additional pressures that may impact the experiences of clergy working in rural environments. For example, the Archbishops' Commission on Rural Areas (1990) described how life in a country parish may restrict employment opportunities for clergy spouses, may generate demands from growing children to be transported to school and leisure activities, and may incur the need to finance a second car. In their respective studies of rural ministry, Russell (1993) and Bowden (1994) pointed to the additional pressures that come from responsibilities for

multi-parish benefices. Work in a country benefice may involve a weight of administration relating to each parish. Each community supports a church building and faces recurrent financial pressures. The Sunday pattern of services involves moving from church to church, often for small congregations. Each rural community has its own expectations of the parish priest, often supported by a recent history of being a sole cure. Work with children, youth and young families is often accompanied by a sense of failure. Many rural clergy feel that those who run the diocese do not appreciate how different and demanding the rural job really is.

Little systematic research, however, has been undertaken to explore the experiences of rural clergy themselves and test the extent to which such perceived pressures are impacting their work-related psychological health. Drawing on data collected during the second half of the 1990s and employing the model of work-related psychological health prepared by the Maslach Burnout Inventory (Maslach & Jackson, 1986), Francis and Rutledge (2000) set out to test the hypothesis that clergy serving in rural ministry were more susceptible to professional burnout than clergy serving in other geographical areas. The Church Commissioners kindly generated a 15 percent random sample from their database of full-time stipendiary male parochial clergy. From this database 1,476 questionnaires were mailed, and a total of 1,071 thoroughly completed questionnaires were returned, making a response rate of 73%. The questionnaire included, alongside the Maslach Burnout Inventory, information about age, marital status, years in present parish, number of churches in the benefice, the rurality of the benefice, and the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (Eysenck & Eysenck, 1975) to assess extraversion, neuroticism and psychoticism. Multiple regression was employed to control for personal factors, for contextual factors and for psychological factors before assessing the impact of rurality on the three measures of emotional

exhaustion, depersonalization and personal accomplishment. The statistical analyses demonstrated that rural clergy have a lower sense of personal accomplishment than comparable clergy working in other geographical areas, but that they experience neither higher levels of emotional exhaustion nor higher levels of depersonalization.

The study by Francis and Rutledge (2000), conducted in England during the 1990s posed the research question, "Are rural clergy in the Church of England under greater stress?" A similar question was posed by Miles and Proeschold-Bell (2012) among United Methodist clergy in the USA, asking, "Are rural clergy worse off?" Their initial analyses, prior to taking control variables into account, found two somewhat contradictory trends. On the one hand, rural clergy reported higher levels of a number of stressors, including more frequent participation in multi-church ministry, less frequently taking a day off each week, and lower salaries. On the other hand, rural clergy reported lower rates of congregational conflict, lower rates of negative interaction with church members, higher levels of social support, lower levels of loneliness, and lower levels of stress from organizational challenges. Miles and Proeschold-Bell concluded from these findings that "while rural clergy experience higher levels of some stressors, overall they have *better* experiences than non-rural clergy" (p. 39).

In the second stage of their analyses, Miles and Proeschold-Bell (2012) controlled for demographic characteristics, bi-vocational status, and congregation size and found then that the difference between rural clergy and non-rural clergy almost entirely disappeared. On this basis they concluded that "observed differences are predominantly *not* due to features unique to rural ministry" (p. 39) and that "rural ministry *per se* is neither particularly harmful nor beneficial when compared with ministry in other settings" (p. 23).

A series of recent studies led by Christine Brewster has set out to document and to analyze in greater detail and depth the work-related psychological health and work-related stress of rural clergy. In a first study, Brewster, Francis, and Robbins (2011) employed the model of work-related psychological health proposed by Francis, Kaldor, Robbins, and Castle (2005) and operationalized through the Francis Burnout Inventory. This model draws on the classic notion of balanced affect rehearsed by Bradburn (1969) and argues that professional burnout is the consequence of high levels of negative affect in the absence of high levels of positive affect. The Francis Burnout Inventory measures negative affect through the Scale of Emotional Exhaustion in Ministry and positive affect through the Satisfaction in Ministry Scale.

Drawing on data provided by 521 Anglican clergy serving in rural benefices of at least three churches, Brewster et al. (2011) found that rural clergy reported both high levels of emotional exhaustion in ministry and high levels of satisfaction in ministry. For example, item endorsements for the Scale of Emotional Exhaustion in Ministry revealed that exactly half (50%) of the rural clergy in the survey felt drained by fulfilling their ministry roles, and just under half of these clergy (48%) found themselves frustrated in their attempts to accomplish tasks which are important to them. Item endorsements for the Satisfaction in Ministry Scale reported that almost four out of every five rural clergy in the survey (79%) gained a great deal of personal satisfaction from working with people in their current ministry, and that the same proportion (79%) felt that their pastoral ministry was exercising a positive influence on people's lives.

In a second study, Brewster (2012) conducted in-depth interviews with ten rural clergy in order to identify the aspects of ministry that they regarded as generating work-related stress. From these ten interviews 84 distinctive statements emerged after removing duplicates. Brewster organized these 84 statements into 11 themes

conceptually defined as: role conflict, logistics, administration, multi-tasking, anxiety, isolation, irritation, frustration, developmental issues, issues of commitment, and parish conflicts. These 84 statements were then incorporated into a questionnaire survey that was completed by 722 rural clergy. On the basis of the replies received to the questionnaire, Brewster was able to quantify the frequencies with which each of these 84 sources of work-related stress were experienced.

In a third study, Francis and Brewster (2012) returned to the data provided by the questionnaire survey to test the specific thesis that the notion of time-related over-extension could draw together a number of the key sources of work-related stress endorsed by the clergy. The notion of time-related over-extension has its roots in a number of the broader studies examining clergy stress that consistently cite the difficulties generated by a profession that lacks clearly defined boundaries, that embraces multiple and often conflicting expectations, and that often blurs the distinction between work and family life (see, for example, Sanford 1982; Coate, 1989; Fletcher, 1990; Kirk & Leary, 1994; Davey, 1995; Warren, 2002; Burton & Burton, 2009). In short, there is too much to do and not enough time in which to do it. Francis and Brewster (2012) selected from the 84 sources of work-related stress included in the questionnaire survey those items that mapped conceptually into the notion of time-related over-extension. From this set of the items identified on conceptual grounds, factor analyses and correlational analyses selected the 16 items that best cohered to produce a homogeneous unidimensional scale to produce the Brewster Index of Stress from Time-Related Over-Extension (BISTROX). The BISTROX generated an alpha coefficient of .90, a highly satisfactory indicator of internal consistency reliability.

Francis and Brewster (2012) then explored the extent to which individual differences in the experience of work-related stress from time-related over-extension

were related to personal factors (sex and age), environmental factors (number of churches), psychological factors (extraversion and neuroticism), and theological factors (liberal or conservative, catholic or evangelical, and charismatic or non-charismatic).

The data demonstrated that personal and psychological factors were much more important than theological and environmental factors.

Research question

Against this background, the present study has three main aims. The first aim is to revisit the responses recorded by Brewster (2012) to the 84 work-related stressors associated with rural ministry and to employ factor analysis to clarify the main patterns and themes emerging from these items. If a coherent pattern emerges through factor analysis capable of identifying the major burdens of rural ministry, these burdens will be utilized to explore two further aims. The second aim is to establish the personal, contextual, theological and psychological factors predicting individual differences in the intensity with which these burdens are experienced by rural clergy. Building on Francis and Brewster (2012), personal factors will comprise sex and age, contextual factors will comprise the number of churches, theological factors will comprise Village and Francis' (2009) three dimensions defined as the continuum between catholic and evangelical, the continuum between liberal and conservative, and the continuum between charismatic and non-charismatic, and psychological factors will comprise Eysenck, Eysenck, and Barrett's (1985) three dimensions defined as extraversion, neuroticism, and psychoticism. At this stage the burdens of rural ministry are conceptualized as dependent variables predicted by other factors. The third aim is to reconceptualize the burdens of rural ministry as independent variables (alongside personal factors, contextual factors, theological factors, and psychological factors) capable of predicting individual differences in the work-related psychological health of clergy. Building on a

sequence of recent studies, work-related psychological health will be assessed by the two scales of the Francis Burnout Inventory, as originally proposed by Francis et al. (2005). This third aim is intended to examine the extent to which the proposed conceptualization and measurement of the burdens of rural ministry add to our understanding of variations within the work-related psychological health of rural clergy.

Method

Procedure

As part of a larger study concerned with assessing stress among Anglican clergy (Brewster, 2012), a detailed questionnaire was sent to clergy serving in rural ministry in England, excluding those who were working in team ministries. A response rate of 47% generated 722 completed questionnaires. The present analyses are based on a subset of 613 respondents to the survey who were responsible for at least three rural churches.

Measures

Work-related stress was assessed by means of the 84-item stressor inventory developed by Brewster (2012). Participants were invited to indicate how stressful they found each of these 84 aspects of rural ministry on a five-point scale anchored by: 1 = very little, 3 = not sure, and 5 = very much.

Work-related psychological health was assessed by the two 11-item scales reported by Francis et al. (2005): the Scale of Emotional Exhaustion in Ministry (SEEM) and the Satisfaction in Ministry Scale (SIMS). Participants were invited to rate each of the 22 items on a five-point scale: agree strongly (5), agree (4), not certain (3), disagree (2), and disagree strongly (1). Example items from SEEM include: "I feel drained in fulfilling my functions here", and "I am less patient with people here than I used to be".

Example items from SIMS include: “I feel very positive about my ministry here”, and “I am really glad that I entered the ministry”. The 11 items from the SEEM and the 11 items from the SIMS were presented alternately and prefaced by the single description: “The following questions are about how you feel working in your present congregation”. Scale properties have been reported elsewhere in a study of over 6,000 clergy drawn from a range of denominations in Australia, New Zealand and England (Francis et al., 2005), in which both scales showed high internal consistency reliability.

Psychological factors were assessed by the short form of the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire Revised developed by Eysenck et al. (1985). This instrument proposes three 12-item measures of extraversion, neuroticism, and psychoticism, together with a 12-item lie scale. Participants were invited to rate each of the 48 items on a two-point scale: no (0) and yes (1). Example items from the extraversion scale include: “Are you a talkative person?” and “Can you easily get some life into a rather dull party?” Example items from the neuroticism scale include: “Does your mood often go up and down?” and “Are you a worrier?” Example items from the psychoticism scale include: “Do you prefer to go your own way rather than act by the rules?” and “Do you enjoy co-operating with others?” Example items from the lie scale include: “Have you ever blamed someone for doing something you knew was really your fault?” and “Have you ever taken advantage of someone?”

Theological factors were assessed by the three seven-point semantic differential grids refined by Village and Francis (2009). The first grid was anchored by the two poles: 1 = catholic, 7 = evangelical. The second grid was anchored by the two poles: 1 = liberal, 7 = conservative. The third grid was anchored by the two poles: 1 = charismatic, 7 = non-charismatic.

Personal factors were assessed by questions concerning sex and age.

Contextual factors were assessed by questions concerning the number of churches for which the participants held responsibility.

Participants

The sample of 613 Anglican clergy comprised 151 clergywomen and 462 clergymen; 24 were in their thirties, 133 were in their forties, 259 were in their fifties, 192 were in their sixties, and 5 were in their seventies; 219 held responsibility for three churches, 164 for four churches, 97 for five churches, 124 for six or more churches, and 9 failed to answer this question. In the terms of the three indicators of theological position, the following picture emerged. First, on the grid between liberal and conservative, 27% of the clergy marked the two categories closest to the liberal pole and 17% marked the two categories closest to the conservative pole, leaving 56% occupying the three categories of the middle territory. Second, on the grid between catholic and evangelical, 25% of the clergy marked the two categories closest to the catholic pole and 17% marked the two categories closest to the evangelical pole, leaving 56% occupying the three categories of the middle territory. Third, on the grid between charismatic and non-charismatic, 12% marked the two categories closest to charismatic pole and 34% marked the two categories closest to the non-charismatic pole, leaving 54% occupying the three categories of the middle territory.

Results and discussion

The first step in data analysis involved a close examination of the 84 stressors included in the list generated by Brewster (2012) in order to identify and clarify the factor structure within these items. Appendix 1 presents the final rotated solution that identified five distinct factors, each including seven items with loadings in excess of .33. Loadings below this threshold of .33 have been suppressed in Appendix 1 to highlight the clarity of the factor solution. These five factors can be interpreted as expressing

burden of visibility, burden of presence, burden of distance, burden of isolation, and burden of administration. Appendix 1 also presents the item endorsement in terms of the sum of the agree and agree strongly responses.

Factor one, the scale concerned with the *burden of visibility*, reported an alpha coefficient of .87. The burden of visibility caused stress for 49% of clergy by not having enough time to give to their family, for 46% of clergy by lacking time for personal reflection, for 45% of clergy by experiencing overlap of professional and personal life, for 39% of clergy by experiencing too little privacy for their family, for 35% of clergy by experiencing too little privacy for themselves, for 31% of clergy by expectations of family involvement by several church communities, and for 20% of clergy by using the vicarage for church meetings.

Factor two, the scale concerned with the *burden of presence*, reported an alpha coefficient of .84. The burden of presence caused stress for 59% of clergy by being unable to respond to the needs of everyone, for 50% of clergy by being expected to be involved in several communities, for 46% of clergy by managing multiple roles in several communities, for 44% of clergy by being expected to give pastoral care in several communities, for 37% of clergy by allocating their personal and professional experience in several churches, for 31% of clergy by getting to know people in several churches, and for 25% of clergy by preparing and delivering sermons in several churches.

Factor three, the scale concerned with the *burden of distance*, reported an alpha coefficient of .83. The burden of distance caused stress for 41% of clergy by distance and time spent travelling to hospitals and crematoria, for 28% of clergy by being dependent on vehicle reliability in remote rural areas, for 27% of clergy by following slow-moving vehicles down country lanes, for 23% of clergy by distance and time spent

travelling between several churches, for 22% of clergy by experiencing hazards of driving in winter, for 9% of clergy by fearing church vandalism and theft, and for 6% of clergy by fearing for personal safety in isolated areas.

Factor four, the scale concerned with the *burden of isolation*, reported an alpha coefficient of .81. The burden of isolation caused stress for 36% of clergy by lacking opportunities for mental stimulation, for 31% of clergy by lacking colleagues for daily prayers and sharing of ideas, for 25% of clergy by lacking enthusiasm because of small numbers, for 21% of clergy by experiencing social isolation, for 20% of clergy by having too few rewards, for 18% of clergy by having too little supervision for their work, and for 8% of clergy by having too few challenges.

Factor five, the scale concerned with the *burden of administration*, reported an alpha coefficient of .79. The burden of administration caused stress for 56% of clergy by doing separate paperwork for several churches, for 38% of clergy by having responsibility for several churchyards, for 27% of clergy by having oversight of financial issues in several churches, for 26% of clergy by having oversight of rota setting for several churches, for 26% of clergy by supporting fundraising for several churches, for 23% of clergy by completing expenses forms for several church treasurers, and for 13% of clergy by balancing representation from different churches in parish magazines.

- Insert table 1 about here -

Table 1 examines the bivariate correlations between the four categories of predictor variables (personal factors, contextual factors, theological factors, and psychological factors) and the five burdens of rural ministry identified by factor analysis. In view of the number of correlations tested simultaneously, those achieving the five per cent level of probability will not be interpreted as statistically significant.

In terms of personal factors, only the burden of distance shows a sex difference, but this did not reach statistical significance beyond the five percent level of probabilities. Older clergy are less susceptible than their younger colleagues to experiencing stress from the burden of administration, the burden of presence, the burden of isolation, and the burden of visibility. This can be explained either as an age effect (older clergy learn how to manage these issues) or as a cohort effect (younger clergy who have been stressed in these ways have already dropped out of ministry). The burden of distance does not, however, work in the same way. If older clergy learn how to cope better with the burdens of administration, presence, isolation and visibility, this learning does not extend to embrace the burden of distance.

In terms of contextual factors, the number of churches in the benefice does not add to the levels of stress generated by these five burdens of ministry. This finding needs to be clearly interpreted in the light of the specific nature of the present sample of clergy. All clergy in the sample held responsibility for at least three churches. Whatever stresses are caused by multi-parish benefices, these stresses seem already to be in evidence within benefices of three churches and are not exacerbated significantly further by the adding of additional churches.

In terms of theological factors, only one of the fifteen correlations recorded statistical significance. Location on the continuum between liberal and conservative was not related to any of the five burdens. Similarly, location on the continuum between charismatic and non-charismatic was not related to any of the five burdens. Location on the continuum between catholic and evangelical was not related to the burden of administration, the burden of presence, the burden of isolation, or the burden of visibility. Catholic clergy were, however, more likely to feel stressed by the burden of distance.

In terms of psychological factors, neuroticism scores were a strong predictor of the levels of stress experienced from all five burdens. Neuroticism scores were most strongly related to the levels of stress caused by the burden of presence and the burden of isolation, and least strongly related to the levels of stress caused by the burden of distance. Extraversion scores were a significant predictor of levels of stress (beyond the five percent level of probability) caused by two of the five burdens of ministry. Introverts recorded higher levels of stress caused by the burden of presence, and the burden of isolation. Neither psychoticism scores nor lie scale scores were related to any of the five burdens.

- Insert table 2 about here -

Table 2 examines the bivariate correlations between the two measures of work-related psychological health (emotional exhaustion in ministry and satisfaction in ministry) and five categories of predictor variables (personal factors, contextual factors, theological factors, psychological factors, and the five burdens of ministry). Once again, in view of the numbers of correlations tested simultaneously, those achieving the five percent level of probability will not be interpreted as statistically significant.

Neither contextual factors nor theological factors were significantly related to either positive affect (satisfaction) or negative affect (emotional exhaustion). While sex was not a significant predictor of work-related psychological health, age was a significant predictor. Older clergy recorded higher levels of positive affect and lower levels of negative affect. Personality factors served as a significant predictor of both positive affect and negative affect. Clergy who recorded high scores on extraversion, low scores on neuroticism, and low scores on psychoticism (stable, tenderminded extraverts) recorded higher levels of positive affect and lower levels of negative affect. The point of key interest, however, from table 4 is that four of the five burdens of

ministry were significantly and strongly related both to increased negative affect and decreased positive affect. The exception here concerned the burden of distance, which was strongly related only to an increase of negative affect.

- Insert tables 3 and 4 about here -

Tables 3 and 4 now complete the story by examining the cumulative impact on the two measures of work-related psychological health of personal factors, psychological factors, theological factors, contextual factors, and the burdens of ministry, entered into the regression equation in that fixed order. The following conclusions emerge from these two regression models. The first conclusion is that the three personality variables of extraversion, neuroticism and psychoticism are key predictors of the levels of work-related psychological health experienced by clergy in terms of both positive affect and negative affect. The second conclusion is that personal factors (sex and age), theological factors, and contextual factors are largely irrelevant after taking personality into account. The third conclusion is that the burdens of ministry are important predictors after personality has been taken into account.

The regression model develops the story considerably further than what was revealed by the correlation matrix in three ways. First, although the correlation matrix suggested that four of the burdens were associated with higher levels of negative affect and lower levels of positive affect, the regression model is able to identify the burden of isolation as the key predictor of poor work-related psychological health. Second, after the burden of isolation has been taken into account, neither the burden of administration nor the burden of visibility is implicated in detracting further from good work-related psychological health. Also, after the burden of isolation has been taken into account, the burden of presence adds further to the levels of emotional exhaustion, but does not erode further levels of satisfaction in ministry, Third, although the

correlation matrix suggested that the burden of distance was unrelated to positive affect and only mildly related to negative affect, the regression model identifies something rather different at work within the total regression model. After taking the burden of administration into account, the burden of distance serves as an ameliorator of work-related psychological health, and in that sense counteracts some of the effects caused from the burden of isolation.

Conclusion

This study was designed to build on existing knowledge about the experience of stress among rural clergy by addressing three specific research questions. The first research question set out to clarify the main patterns and themes emerging from Brewster's (2012) earlier identification of 84 stressors associated with rural ministry. The solution proposed by factor analysis isolated five distinct factors characterized as the burden of administration, the burden of presence, the burden of isolation, the burden of distance, and the burden of visibility. This empirically derived solution provides a framework within which to distinguish between the main kinds of factors that cause stress to rural clergy, and a framework within which to understand and address the different sources of stress identified by rural clergy.

The second research question set out to establish the personal, contextual, theological and psychological factors predicting individual differences in the intensity with which these five burdens of rural ministry are experienced by rural clergy. The solution proposed by correlational analysis indicated that contextual factors (numbers of churches) and theological factors (catholic or evangelical, liberal or conservative, charismatic or non-charismatic) were trivial in comparison with personal factors (especially age) and psychological factors (especially neuroticism).

In terms of age, older clergy were less susceptible than their younger colleagues to experiencing stress from the burden of administration, burden of presence, burden of isolation, and the burden of visibility. This correlation with age can be explained either as an age effect or as a cohort effect. An age effect proposes that older clergy have learned how to deal with these burdens of ministry more effectively as a consequence of maturity and experience. A cohort effect proposes that younger clergy who have been stressed in these ways have already dropped out of ministry and therefore do not appear within the older cohort. Irrespective of the underlying causation, the correlation suggests that older clergy fare better in multi-church rural benefices than their younger colleagues. The practical implication of this finding is that bishops may be advised either to appoint their older clergy to this form of ministry or to offer additional support to younger clergy appointed to this form of ministry.

In terms of psychological factors, clergy who recorded higher scores on the neuroticism scale were more susceptible to reporting stress from the burden of administration, from the burden of presence, from the burden of isolation, from the burden of distance, and from the burden of visibility. This finding is consistent with Eysenck's broader understanding of the function of this dimension of personality within human psychology (Eysenck & Eysenck, 1975). The fact that this dimension of personality emerges as such a consistent high predictor of experienced stresses in ministry carries practical implications for the ways in which clergy are appointed to specific ministries and for the ways in which they are supported in such ministries. Routine psychological assessment of clergy would enable bishops to know which individuals are likely to be most stressed by appointment to serving in multi-church rural benefices. Then they would find themselves in a stronger position to fulfil their duty of care by targeting support where it may be most needed.

The third research question sets out to examine the extent to which these five burdens of rural ministry (as experienced by rural clergy) add to our understanding of variations within the work-related psychological health of rural clergy. The solution proposed by multiple regression analysis, after taking into account the effect of personal factors (sex and age), psychological factors (extraversion, neuroticism, psychoticism, and lie scale), theological factors (catholic or evangelical, conservative or liberal, and charismatic or non-charismatic), and contextual factors (number of churches), provided three main insights into the sources of stress experienced by rural clergy.

The first insight is that of the five burdens of ministry identified by the study, it is the burden of isolation that is most important both in exacerbating emotional exhaustion and in undermining satisfaction in ministry. In other words, the burden of isolation is the most important predictor of poor work-related psychological health among rural clergy serving in multi-church benefices. This finding suggests that those who may be charged with responsibility to tackle problems of poor work-related psychological health among rural clergy may be wise to start by tackling the problems caused by the burden of isolation. The component parts of the burden of isolation identified by the present study include: the sense of having too few rewards; the sense of having too few challenges; experiencing the lack of opportunity for mental stimulation; the dispiriting consequences of working with small numbers; experiencing social isolation; lacking colleagues for daily prayers and sharing ideas; and having too little supervision for their work. These may be structural issues that could be addressed, at least to some extent.

The second insight is that, after the burden of isolation has been taken into account, neither the burden of administration nor the burden of visibility is implicated in detracting from good work-related psychological health. Also, after the burden of

isolation has been taken into account, the burden of presence adds further to exacerbating the levels of emotional exhaustion, but does not erode further levels of satisfaction in ministry. This finding suggests that those who may be charged with responsibility to tackle problems of poor work-related psychological health among rural clergy may be wise to tackle the problems caused by the burden of presence. The burden of presence may strike at the theological heart of Anglican commitment to rural ministry. The parochial structure may assume the presence of a priest living in a local community, living among local people (Francis, 1985). The development of multi-church rural benefices may assume the continuity of presence but with the parish priest no longer being able to deliver on that assumption. The development of multi-church rural benefices may need a different theological underpinning of ministry.

The third insight is that, after the burden of isolation has been taken into account, the burden of distance serves as an ameliorator of work-related psychological health, and in that sense counteracts some of the deleterious effects caused from the burden of isolation. While the burden of distance causes its own problems (and when considered on its own is correlated with poorer work-related psychological health), when considered as part of a dynamic system of stressors, the burden of distance may provide some respite from the other pressures. The long drive in the car to the hospital may provide a space for quiet reflection (for the introvert) or a time to listen to conversation (for the extravert). Here the priest is both fulfilling a justified demand of ministry (making a journey required by pastoral care) and away from the call of new demands (at least if the mobile phone is switched off).

The major limitation with the present study is that it focused exclusively on rural clergy serving at least three churches and so excluded the comparison with clergy

serving just one or two rural churches. Future research may wish to ensure that this comparison can be included.

References

- Archbishops' Commission on Rural Areas (1990). *Faith in the countryside*. Worthing: Churchman Publishing.
- Bowden, A. (1994). *Ministry in the Countryside*. London: Mowbray.
- Bradburn, N.M. (1969). *The structure of psychological well-being*. Chicago, Illinois: Aldine.
- Brewster, C.E. (2012). The fate of the rural Anglican clergy: Caring for more churches and experiencing higher levels of stress. In F.-V. Anthony, & H.-G. Ziebertz (Eds.), *Religious identity and national heritage: Empirical - theological perspectives* (pp. 149-169). Leiden Brill.
- Brewster, C. E., Francis, L. J., & Robbins, M. (2011). Maintaining a public ministry in rural England: Work-related psychological health and psychological type among Anglican clergy serving in multi-church benefices. In H.-G. Ziebertz, & L. J. Francis (Eds.), *The public significance of religion*, (pp. 241-265). Leiden: Brill.
- Burton, J., & Burton, C. (2009). *Public people, private lives: Tackling stress in clergy families*. London: Continuum.
- Coate, M. A. (1989). *Clergy stress: The hidden conflicts in ministry*. London: SPCK.
- Davey, J. (1995). *Burnout: Stress in ministry*. Leominster: Gracewing.
- Eysenck, H. J., & Eysenck, S. B. G. (1975). *Manual of the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (adult and junior)*. London: Hodder and Stoughton.
- Eysenck, S. B. G., Eysenck, H. J., & Barrett, P. (1985). A revised version of the psychoticism scale. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 6, 21-29.
doi:10.1016/0191-8869(85)90026-1
- Fletcher, B. (1990). *Clergy under stress: A study of homosexual and heterosexual clergy*. London: Mowbray.

Francis, L. J. (1985). *Rural Anglicanism: A future for young Christians?* London: Collins Liturgical Publications.

Francis, L. J., & Brewster, C. E. (2012). Understanding stress from time-related over-extension in multi-parish benefices: The role of personal, environmental, psychological, and theological factors among rural Anglican clergy. *Rural Theology, 10*, 161-178. doi:10.1558/ruth.v10i2.161

Francis, L. J., Kaldor, P., Robbins, M., & Castle, K. (2005). Happy but exhausted? Work-related psychological health among clergy. *Pastoral Sciences, 24*, 101-120.

Francis, L. J., & Rutledge, C. J. F. (2000). Are rural clergy in the Church of England under greater stress? A study in empirical theology. *Research in the Social Scientific Study of Religion, 11*, 173-191.

Kirk, M., & Leary, T. (1994). *Holy matrimony? An exploration of marriage and ministry*. Oxford: Lynx.

Maslach, C. & Jackson, S. (1986). *The Maslach Burnout Inventory* (2nd edition). Palo Alto, California: Consulting Psychologists Press.

Miles A. & Proeschold-Bell R. J. (2012). Are rural clergy worse off?: An examination of occupational conditions and pastoral experiences in a sample of United Methodist clergy. *Sociology of Religion, 73*, 23-45. doi:10.1093/socrel/srr025

Russell, A. (1993). *The Country Parson*. London: SPCK.

Sanford, J. A. (1982). *Ministry burnout*. London: Arthur James.

Village, A., & Francis, L. J. (2009). *The mind of the Anglican clergy: Assessing attitudes and beliefs in the Church of England*. Lampeter: Mellen.

Warren, Y. (2002). *The cracked pot: The state of today's Anglican parish clergy*. Stowmarket: Kevin Mayhew Ltd.

TABLE 1 *Correlations with the five burdens of ministry*

	admin	pres	isol	dist	vis
<u>Personal factors</u>					
Sex	-.00	.08*	.04	.17***	.01
Age	-.12**	-.19***	-.15***	.02	-.24***
<u>Contextual factors</u>					
N Churches	.03	.02	.01	.06	-.02
<u>Theological factors</u>					
Catholic/evangelical	-.07	-.01	-.04	-.14***	-.05
Liberal/conservative	.01	.01	-.00	.05	-.02
Charismatic/non-charismatic	-.01	.01	-.02	-.02	-.04
<u>Psychological factors</u>					
Extraversion	-.05	-.19***	-.15***	.00	-.09*
Neuroticism	.28***	.39***	.40***	.19***	.34***
Psychoticism	-.02	-.07	-.01	-.09*	-.03
Lie scale	-.01	-.03	.02	.04	-.01

Note: admin = burden of administration

pres = burden of presence

isol = burden of isolation

dist = burden of distance

vis = burden of visibility

N = 613

** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

TABLE 2 *Correlations with Scale of Emotional Exhaustion in Ministry and Satisfaction in Ministry Scale*

	SEEM	SIMS
<u>Personal factors</u>		
Sex	-.08*	.08*
Age	-.20**	.12**
<u>Contextual factors</u>		
N churches	.00	.00
<u>Theological factors</u>		
Evangelical	-.07	.03
Conservative	.06	-.05
Charismatic	-.09*	.08*
<u>Psychological factors</u>		
Extraversion	-.29***	.28***
Neuroticism	.55***	-.33***
Psychoticism	.12**	-.29***
Lie scale	-.05	-.00
<u>Burdens of ministry</u>		
Administration	.36***	-.16***
Presence	.48***	-.26***
Isolation	.55***	-.38***
Distance	.16***	.01
Visibility	.39***	-.17***

Note: $N = 613$

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

TABLE 3 *Regression model for SEEM*

	r ²	Increase			Beta	t	p <
		r ²	F	p <			
<u>Personal factors</u>							
Sex	.003	.003	1.9	NS	-.034	-1.1	NS
Age	.042	.039	24.0	.001	-.044	-1.4	NS
<u>Psychological factors</u>							
Extraversion	.121	.079	52.9	.001	-.131	-4.3	.001
Neuroticism	.341	.219	195.3	.001	.313	9.3	.001
Psychoticism	.366	.025	23.4	.001	.155	5.2	.001
Lie scale	.367	.001	0.9	NS	-.048	-1.6	NS
<u>Theological factors</u>							
Evangelical	.367	.000	0.3	NS	-.043	-1.2	NS
Conservative	.370	.003	2.8	NS	.085	2.5	.01
Charismatic	.374	.003	3.1	NS	-.065	-1.9	NS
<u>Contextual factors</u>							
N churches	.374	.001	0.6	NS	.018	0.6	NS
<u>Burdens of ministry</u>							
Administration	.417	.043	42.6	.001	.092	2.4	.05
Presence	.451	.034	35.8	.001	.147	3.6	.001
Isolation	.506	.055	64.6	.001	.323	8.5	.001
Distance	.518	.012	14.1	.001	-.135	-3.8	.001
Visibility	.518	.000	0.2	NS	.018	0.5	NS

N = 613

TABLE 4 *Regression model for SIMS*

	r ²	Increase			Beta	t	p <
		r ²	F	p <			
<u>Personal factors</u>							
Sex	.004	.004	2.1	NS	.011	0.3	NS
Age	.017	.013	8.0	.01	.012	0.3	NS
<u>Psychological factors</u>							
Extraversion	.088	.071	45.9	.001	.169	4.7	.001
Neuroticism	.147	.059	40.4	.001	-.183	-4.6	.001
Psychoticism	.253	.106	83.0	.001	-.319	-9.2	.001
Lie scale	.253	.000	0.3	NS	.029	0.8	NS
<u>Theological factors</u>							
Evangelical	.253	.000	0.0	NS	.018	0.4	NS
Conservative	.254	.001	1.0	NS	-.062	-1.6	NS
Charismatic	.260	.006	4.5	.05	.075	1.9	NS
<u>Contextual factors</u>							
N churches	.260	.000	0.2	NS	-.015	-0.4	NS
<u>Burdens of ministry</u>							
Administration	.264	.004	3.1	NS	-.024	-0.5	NS
Presence	.275	.011	8.6	.01	-.087	-1.8	NS
Isolation	.315	.040	34.1	.001	-.317	-7.1	.001
Distance	.337	.021	18.4	.001	.167	4.0	.001
Visibility	.340	.004	3.2	NS	.081	1.8	NS

N = 613

APPENDIX 1 *Rotated factor matrix*

	Yes %	1	2	factor 3	4	5
<u>Burden of visibility</u>						
Experiencing too little privacy for my family	39	.82				
Not having enough time to give to my family	49	.76				
Experiencing too little privacy for me	35	.72				
Overlap of professional and personal life	45	.65				
Expectations of family involvement by several church communities	31	.49				
Lacking time for personal reflection	46	.43				
Using vicarage for church meetings	20	.42				
<u>Burden of presence</u>						
Being expected to be involved in several communities	50		.74			
Being expected to give pastoral care in several communities	44		.70			
Managing multiple roles in several communities	46		.59			
Allocating my personal/professional experience in several churches	37		.58			
Getting to know people in several churches	31		.51			
Being unable to respond to the needs of everyone	59		.51			
Preparing and delivering sermons in several churches	25		.34			
<u>Burden of distance</u>						
Being dependent on vehicle reliability in remote rural areas	28			.75		
Fearing for personal safety in isolated areas	6			.68		
Experiencing hazards of driving in winter	22			.66		
Following slow moving vehicles down country lanes	27			.66		
Fearing church vandalism and theft	9			.50		
Distance and time spent travelling between several churches	23			.47		
Distance and time spent travelling to hospitals and crematoria	41			.43		
<u>Burden of isolation</u>						
Having too few rewards	20				.59	

Lacking colleagues for daily prayers and sharing of ideas	31				.59
Having too little supervision for my work	18				.55
Having too few challenges	8				.53
Lacking enthusiasm because of small numbers	25				.52
Experiencing social isolation	21				.52
Lacking opportunity for mental stimulation	36				.50
<u>Burden of administration</u>					
Doing separate paperwork for several churches	56				.57
Having oversight of financial issues in several churches	27				.57
Having oversight of rota setting for several churches	26				.57
Completing expenses forms for several church treasurers	23				.51
Having responsibility for several churchyards	38				.48
Balancing representation from different churches in Parish Magazines	13				.44
Supporting fundraising for several churches	26				.41
Eigenvalue	10.2	2.6	2.1	1.9	1.5
% variance	29.2	7.5	5.9	5.3	4.3
