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Predictors of Burnout in Spiritual Leadership Positions: Role Conflict, Role Ambiguity, and Personal Spirituality

Burnout, a well-documented and wide spread psychological phenomena that has been linked to significant negative physical and psychological outcomes, develops when chronic job stress drains individuals of emotional and mental resources. Leadership positions in religiously-affiliated organizations often have both spiritual leadership (e.g., teaching, discipleship, mentoring, etc.) and organizational responsibilities (e.g., communication, personnel management, discipline, etc.). Because of these multifaceted responsibilities, spiritual leaders often encounter situations where they may be unsure of how to proceed (i.e., role ambiguity) or where their multiple roles may require apparently contradictory responses (i.e., role conflict). Workers that serve in jobs with a high degree of role ambiguity and\or role conflict are more likely to suffer from burnout. Spirituality is often related to more positive outcomes and less burnout. Resident Assistants (RAs) at religious institutions, by the nature of the range of spiritual leadership and organizational responsibilities, are vulnerable to role conflict and role ambiguity and, ultimately, the development of burnout. At the same time, the spiritual development aspects of the role may inoculate RAs from the development of burnout. The focus of this research is to assess the degree that spirituality moderates the potential impact that role conflict and role ambiguity on the development of burnout.

The RAs (N=120) completed the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI), to assess the level of burnout, the Spiritual Assessment Inventory (Awareness of God and Instability), to assess personal spirituality and Rizzo, House, and Lirtzman's (1970) role conflict and role ambiguity in complex organizations instrument to assess their role.   As expected role conflict and role ambiguity were predictive of levels of burnout. In addition both, measures of personal spirituality were predictive of total burnout. Personal spirituality did not moderate the relationship between role conflict and role ambiguity and burnout.