



Unique Stressors and Coping Strategies of Female Pastoral Couples

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Background

- Clergy and their families experience stress at high levels
- Church administrators and researchers want to better understand
- Research has found these stressors impact personal spirituality and other aspects of life
- Little is known about the non-traditional clergy family
- Expansion of research conducted in the North American Division on challenges and coping within the clergy family conducted in 2015

Purpose

- Examine challenges and stresses female pastoral couples face
- Explore coping strategies that are used to deal with spiritual, financial, and emotional stressors
- Researchers from School of Social Work and Department of Discipleship and Religious Education at Andrews University worked with assistance from church leaders

Methods for Survey

- Surveys were distributed in English to identified female pastors in the Seventh-day Adventist Trans-European and South Pacific Divisions
- The North American Division decided not to participate
- Surveys included demographic questions, Personal Challenges Checklist, & Stress Coping Scale
- Distributed 2018

Methods for Interviews

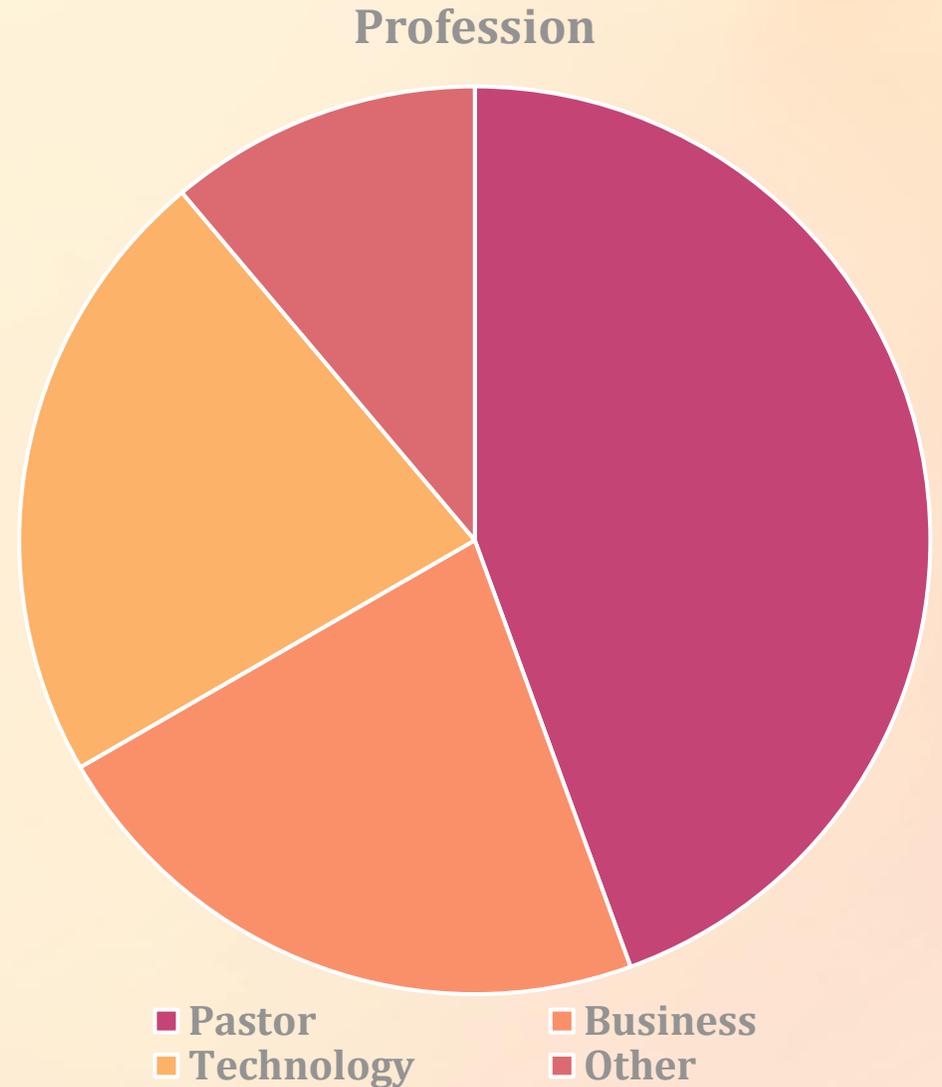
- Follow up interviews were conducted with female pastors and their husbands separately by church leader in their division
- These church leaders were given recruiting materials, interview guide, consent forms, and were given a training on conducting qualitative interviews.
- Husbands and wives interviewed separately, but were identified as couples A-G
- Interviewers paid \$10.50 per hour and each couple given \$40 honorarium
- Interviews audio recorded, transcribed, and analyzed by primary investigator and graduate assistant independently
- Themes identified from the transcriptions through constant comparative method
- Conducted 2018/2019

Topics covered in interviews

- Stress factors
 - Spiritual struggles
 - Financial struggles
 - Causes of emotional struggles
- Coping with stress
 - Coping with spiritual struggles
 - Coping with financial struggles
 - Stress management
- Roles played as pastor or pastor's spouse
- Recommendations by participants

Demographic Findings From Survey Male Spouses

- N = 10
- Ages of the male spouses 26-55
- 9/10 White (Caucasian)



Demographic Findings

Marriage and Children

- Length of marriage
 - 50% married 11-15
 - Range 6-10 to 30+ years
- Amount of children
 - 50% had one child
 - 40% had two children
 - 10% had three children
- Ages of children
 - Most aged 3-12 years of age
 - Range 3 months to 32 years old



Demographic Findings

Female clergy employment

- Position
 - 30% Senior pastors
 - 30% Associate pastors
 - 20% Departmental directors
- Years in ministry
 - 60% in ministry 6-10 years
 - 20% 11-15 years
 - 10% 21-25
 - 10% 5 years or less



Frequency of Moves

- Length between moves
 - 40% every 3-5 years
 - 20% 6-8 years
 - 20% 15+ years
 - 10% 9-11 years
 - 10% 0-2 years
- Frequency of moves
 - 30% moved 6+ times
 - 20% once
 - 20% twice
 - 10% 3 x's
 - 10% 4 x's



Personal Challenges Checklist

- A. Male spouses of female pastors in the TED and SPD reported experiencing personal challenges comparable to those of the female spouses on the Personal Challenges Checklist. Below are listed some of their major challenges.
 - i. 2/3 report spiritual challenges with keeping the Sabbath
 - ii. 3/4 report making time for personal devotion, time with God and prayer
 - i. This was the most significant challenge both for spouses in the study and in the NAD study.
 - iii. Self-care needs to be tended to in male spouses.
 - iv. A large percentage struggle with media addiction in contrast with the NAD spouses. Both sets of spouses tend to struggle with overeating and eating unhealthy foods.
 - v. 75% report anxiety and depression - higher than the spouses in the NAD study.
 - vi. Inadequate support from Conference administration was cited in both studies.
 - vii. Women's ordination continues to be an issue of concern to male spouses of women in ministry.

Pastoral Family Struggles

To what extent was each of these items a problem for you?

Question	Male Spouses
1. I am concerned about my spouse's emotional faithfulness to our marriage.	12.5
2. I wonder about my spouse's physical faithfulness to our marriage.	0
3. Our congregation's expectations and obligations lead to a communication breakdown between my spouse and I.	28.6
4. My children resent our family's congregational obligations.	42.9
5. Our church responsibilities lead to conflict with my children's schedules.	42.9
6. The congregation often takes priority over family.	71.4
7. Balancing the care of our children – especially on Sabbath days	62.5
8. Dealing with the prejudicial tendency of conference administrators who do not want to place a woman clergy in the same church as her husband for fear that if the woman clergy is unpopular it will negatively impact the husband's ministry.	16.7
9. The personal impact to the clergy couple when the male pastor is held in high esteem by church members while the female pastor spouse is not accepted by some.	16.7

Pastoral Family Struggles

- A. Several factors were cited as contributing to the struggles that pastoral families experience as they minister to their congregations.
 - i. Some spouses reported that congregational expectations contributed to a breakdown of communication between them and their pastor spouse.
 - ii. The impact on the children in pastor families was of great concern to male spouses in the areas of the children resenting church, their scheduled activities being interrupted and their care on Sabbath being inadequate.
 - iii. The greatest concern - the needs of the congregation take priority over the needs of the family.

Clergy Family Life Inventory

- A. This extensive instrument gives even more specific information about the lives of clergy families. The data for male spouses can also be compared with NAD spouses.
 - i. Financial concerns are a source of stress for pastors and spouses, from meeting today's needs to their inability to save money for the future.
 - ii. The regular and unexpected time demands of congregations are a major source of stress for pastors and spouses as they try and have family time.
 - iii. Pastors and spouses report a strong sense of emotional isolation from others and strong needs for connection to others.
 - iv. Pastors and spouses reported that the lack of ability to control when and where they moved a significant source of stress.
 - v. Demands on their time was the most significant source of stress in that they report not having adequate time for family and friends in light of the demands of ministry.

Pastoral Family Coping Strategies

- A. This instrument was designed to explore the ways that pastoral families cope with the stresses of pastoral life.
 - i. The major finding of this instrument is that the male spouses in this study differed significantly from the predominately female spouses in the NAD study.
 - ii. Male spouses were much more likely to stand their ground and fight for themselves, try to change the mind of others, and express anger toward the one that stresses them.
 - iii. They also let their feelings out and talked with someone else to try to understand the situation better.
 - iv. Interestingly, they were more likely than NAD spouses to seek sympathy from others and to talk with others about how they were feeling.

Qualitative Interview Results

Demographics

- N = 7 couples (14 participants)
- Two couples from TED interviewed by Patrick Johnson, Director of personal ministries
- Five couples from SPD interviewed by Danijela Schubert, Women's ministries director.
- Three of the husbands were pastors themselves

Qualitative Interview Results Identified Themes

- Challenges
 - High levels of expectations
 - Social isolation
 - Financial struggles



Challenges

High Expectations Theme Quotations

- *“Um, one of the critical things, when um, when my wife become a pastor, that, that routine of how spiritual and kind like what we used to have a devotionals together or attending counsel spiritual seminars, or events together, I was affected because of the different struggles ... and that was one of the visible things that we used to do together in a spiritual journey, discussion, study. Um, it was affected along the way... because, uh, time, we couldn't continue in the same way as we used to do before. And um, that has affected my spirituality...” Male Participant, Couple E*
- *“I think sometimes just to the busyness of the, to do list can sometimes impede on our own spiritual journey, I think. And we sometimes forget that actually to achieve the, to do list, we've got to spend time in our own spiritual walk. Um, I think for me personally, um, things that impact on my spiritual journey, um, can be, uh, just the fact that I'm a mom. Um, and, and juggling the role of being a mom and the pastor and having that spiritual time. Um, I have found a challenge...” Female Participant: Couple D*

Challenges

Social Isolation Theme Quotations

- “... I believe in all of those things about having a social network and trusted family and friends and everything. And it might be because I'm a pastor as well, but there is still a certain element of isolation when you have friends you have close friends, but you feel like you are their friend rather than they are your friends. You know they'll tell you about their lives but you're still guarded about your own life being the pastor and I think that would happen you'd be guarded by your own life. So. It's very. I see, I agree in the premise that there is there is a lack of support.” Male Participant: Couple C
- “...well we, my husband and I live out of state from all our families, so we have no family support, in um, the conference that we work in, we got no relatives, so from that perspective that has been isolating...” Female Participant: Couple C

Challenges

Financial Struggles Theme Quotations

- *“But from a perspective of (wife’s name) salary...what do you call them, um, inflation, her salary has not really increased. It just stays the same...”* Male Participant: Couple F
- *“...especially pastors who have more than, you know, two children and teenagers (and) school children, they can be really tough to provide what is necessary for them, high education it will mean that tuition, paying at least to the school fee can be very tough...”* Male Participant: Couple E
- *“And they kind of struggle with this, to be part of this society on the same level as other people but our salary can’t match with the higher class in this country.”* Female Participant: Couple E

Coping Strategies

- Good self-care
- Schedule personal devotions and family worship
- Good financial management and savings
- Boundaries



Coping Self-care Theme Quotations

- *“...if I have time to rest personally that helps me. If I am doing exercise that contributes to my spiritual wellbeing as well... that helps or enhances your spirituality.”* Male Participant: Couple A
- *“Yes, well if you have things in balance, so if you have got...um, you know you have got personal time with God, you have got personal time for yourself like exercise, if you, you know like if you feeling fairly...um, balance then that helps you to feel better all around...”* Female Participant: Couple B

Coping

Schedule Devotional Time Theme Quotations

- *“I think it's mainly personal situations that I, I'm able to take time for personal devotion...when (Wife's name) and I will schedule time to have, um, um, yeah, time for prayer together.”* Male Participant: Couple F
- *“...when (wife's name) is not working, we spend a bit more with the family, that tends to help.”* Male Participant: Couple B
- *“...for me personally, I can speak that whenever I have ample time to sit and really read my Bible and have my devotional, and really get situated into the world, I feel that all the other things just naturally, you just have extra energy in the day to do things you just feel positive...”* Female Participant: Couple A
- *“My husband and I...if we have had a really great week of prayer or comeback from a really great event or worship service or things like that, generally we are feeling more positive about work and that affects our spirituality in a positive way.”* Female Participant: Couple C

Coping Financial Management Theme Quotations

- “...I would suggest that the best way to have financial contentment and happiness is to plan well and really know what you want in life because mostly we are spending or spending happens when we don't know what we want...” Male Participant: Couple A
- “...grow your savings reserves so that you can have a stronger back bone when it comes to finance.” Male Participant: Couple A
- “...I guess it's really valuable. We sort of need that money to allow me to go on maternity leave um, because we don't get um, paid maternity leave um, he's income has helped that we have been able to buy a house um, and we have been able to travel...” Female Participant: Couple C

Coping Boundaries Theme Quotations

- “...I'm back to boundaries again. You know when you have good boundaries around you and there's good boundaries that are made. I use the definition of boundaries as boundaries to keep the bad out and good in and sometimes we need boundaries to keep the good in.” Male Participant: Couple C
- “...you learning how to separate what you do from who you are, you allowing yourself to have time I think that's the main thing that I would notice that um, when I'm really stressed, I get caught up in work so much but when I manage it well like there's always going to be stress but you can sort of separate things out like alright I'm going to leave these behind now you know like I'm going to stop thinking about this, I'm going to be present in this moment with my family I'm not going to let other things interrupt it or I'm going to be present for me and I'm going to read a book that's going to be you know positive for me whether it's positive in that it gives me um, something else to think about or it's positive in that it's I'm learning something new or helping in different ways I think yeah (pause) that's what I found.” Female Participant: Couple B

Recommendations

Promote the spiritual development of pastoral families.

- * This could be done through pastoral family retreats,
- * Development or dissemination of literature/books on developing intimacy with God.
- * Encourage emphasis on “being” rather than “doing.”

An emphasis on self-care in terms of diet and practices that could become addictive such as media and overeating.

- * A seminar could be produced and disseminated to pastoral families related to addiction and the pastoral family.

Recommendations

Address mental health concerns

- * Encouraging counseling without stigma
- * Consider developing a treatment facility dedicated to providing a safe place for pastoral families to heal from addiction, marriage, family, and mental health challenges.

Isolation/Stress

- * Pastoral family activities at retreats, mentoring opportunities, and small groups
- * Support groups

Conference support

- * Personal support
- * Get to know the whole family
- * Provide extra support during periods of conflict or stress

Recommendations

Financial concerns

- * Financial counseling seminars at pastoral family retreats

Work/Life balance

- * Set healthy boundaries with congregants

Frequent moves

- * Consider the needs of the entire family

Implications

- Female pastoral couples share some of the same stressors and coping strategies as traditional pastoral couples
- There are some unique stressors
- Church leadership should be aware of these unique stressors and listen to non-traditional pastoral couples' concerns
- Limitations
 - Results not generalizable to the female clergy family population due to low N, lack of ethnic diversity, and not conducted in NAD

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