

Prevalence of Burnout in Pastoral Ministry among Catholic Religious Men and Women of Mbarara Archdiocese in Uganda

Ronald Musinguzi Kersteins¹, Elizabeth Ngozi Okpalaenwe (PhD)¹, Wambua Pius Muasa (PhD)²

¹*The Psycho-Spiritual Institute of Lux Terra Leadership Foundation, Marist International University College, a Constituency of the Catholic University of Eastern Africa*

²*Tangaza University College, Catholic University of Eastern Africa*

Abstract: Burnout in pastoral ministry is increasingly becoming an issue of concern among helping professionals. It is generally associated with certain emotional and psychological symptoms that may arise in the context of work stress. However, there are minimal studies with Catholic religious men and women. Therefore, the current study had two objectives: to examine the prevalence of burnout in pastoral ministry among Catholic religious men and women in Mbarara Archdiocese in Uganda; and to establish burnout prevalence in different years of pastoral ministry among Catholic religious men and women in Mbarara Archdiocese in Uganda. The study adopted a mixed method explanatory sequential design. The target population of the study was 280 Religious men and women. Through proportionate stratified random sampling, a sample size of 165 participants was selected. Purposive sampling was utilized to select 10 participants for the qualitative strand. Data was collected using Questionnaires and In-depth Interview Guide. The quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics with IBM SPSS version 21 application software and the qualitative data was analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings of the study show that most religious men and women in Mbarara Archdiocese have moderate levels of burnout. However, the fact that there are those with higher levels of both emotional exhaustion (n=15; 10.6%) and depersonalization (n=31; 21.8%) coupled with lower levels of personal accomplishment (n=53; 37.3%) could not be under looked. On regard to burnout prevalence in different years in ministry, the result indicated that those religious between 5-10 years of ministering scored low on personal accomplishment (M=1.1395) and scored high on both emotional exhaustion (M=2.4186) and depersonalization (M = 2.7805) compared to the rest of the other groups.

I. INTRODUCTION

Burnout has increasingly become an area of interest among researchers. It is generally associated with certain emotional and psychological symptoms that may arise in the context of work stress. Maslach (1993) defined burnout as a sustained response to the chronic work stress comprising of three components: the experience of being emotionally exhausted (emotional exhaustion), negative feelings and attitudes towards the recipients of the service (depersonalization) and feelings of low accomplishment and professional failure (lack of personal accomplishment). This definition has become the most widely used and accepted definition and has set the stage for more research and writings

on this phenomenon mainly in the fields of education, social services, medicines, the criminal justice system, mental health, religion, and various people-oriented occupation (Schaufeli et al., 1993).

According to Maslach et al. (2008), burnout is a process that begins with excessive and prolonged levels of job tension. This stress produces strain in the worker, such as, feelings of tension, irritability and fatigue. The process is completed when the workers defensively cope with the job stress by psychologically detaching themselves from the job by becoming apathetic, cynical and rigid. It is a common phenomenon among individuals who do people-oriented jobs, such as priests and religious, social work, counselors and teachers, due to their nature of intense personal involvement emotionally, psychologically and physically. According to Muasa (2021), caring for others evokes powerful emotional responses such as a strong desire to provide the best care possible and constant pressure to deal with negative feelings elicited in the process of caring, especially, for those who are undergoing physical and psychological pain.

Piedmont (2014), reported that burnout syndrome found among human service professionals has been associated with the pastorate as well. A study that was conducted Turkana County by Muasa (2021) found that Church ministers had suffered moderate burnout. Moreover, a study by Dias (2019) in Brazil reported that Catholic priest had suffered burnout. Church ministers by nature of their vocation, work with people for the entirety of their life, sometimes with little time to rest, subjecting them to work-related stress that is typical of other human service occupations. They are predominantly confronted with excessive pastoral demands pushing them to overdo and overextend themselves. Fee (2018), describes well the state of their work conditions as follows:

No other profession demands competency in such a variety of roles as the Church ministry. Ministers[religious men and women] are expected to be administrators, spiritual advisors, caregivers, healers, preachers, teachers, conflict negotiators, arbiters, lawyers, biblical scholars, Church and denominational historians, visionaries, fathers, mothers,

sisters, brothers, confidants, psychologists, sociologists, economists, fundraisers, prophets, priests, advocates for social justice, defenders of the poor and oppressed, evangelists, spiritual warriors, truth tellers, armor bearers, and leaders of workshops, worship services, Bible studies, and church retreats.

The immensity of such responsibilities clearly shows how a Religious, who constantly attends to numerous Christians with numerous needs, is at high risk of experiencing pastoral stress and burnout. Esibor (2017), acknowledges that Religious can easily suffer from burnout as a result meeting pastoral needs of the people they are called to serve. In the last 20 years, according Fee (2018), scholars have recorded increased workload, unending conflict, and high levels of stress in clergy across a wide range of denominations, which has resulted in high levels of burnout. Notably, Egunjobi (2019), reported that female religious also experience stress as a result of a lacuna in expectations religious women have of themselves, others, and the religious congregation they belong; poor relationship in the community, struggles or demands of apostolate, unfaithfulness to commitments, sense of meaninglessness, and crises in values.

Phoseka (2017) conducted a research on association between work engagement and dimensions of burnout among Catholic priests in Durban metro, South Africa. The target population of the study was 384 priests in Durban Metro of KwaZulu Natal, South Africa. The quantitative data was analyzed using inferential statistics while qualitative data was analyzed using thematic analysis. Findings revealed significant levels of both work engagement and dimensions of burnout which implies that they experience both burnout and work engagement concurrently. In other words, too much workload leads to experience of burnout. Although the study was conducted on priests alone, the findings were valid for the current study which opined that both religious men and women, by nature of their vocation of working with people for the entirety of their life, sometimes with little time to rest, are equally subjected to work-related stress that is typical of other human service occupations.

In a research by Gichara (2017) on burnout in Nurses at a Referral Hospital in Western Kenya, 379 (198 female and 181 male) nurses working in a referral hospital in Western Kenya were recruited through simple random sampling using the lottery technique to participate in the study. Burnout questionnaire that was developed by Maslach and Jackson (1996) designed to assess burnout in human services occupations was used to evaluate the level of burnout and compassion fatigue in nurses. The data was entered into a computer database designed in SPSS and analyzed using descriptive statistics. The results showed that respondents experienced high levels of emotional exhaustion and diminished personal accomplishment ranging 21-40%. A combination of overload, long working hours, and low pay were identified as fueling burnout in nurses. Though this study was on nurses, it supported the current study in

exploring burnout experience among religious men and women who are also care givers in a pastoral setup which is also characterized by excessive demands, working for long hours, and with little or no payment.

Moreover, another study by Barnard and Curry (2012) who emphatically stated that religious leaders often experience burnout, which is characterized by emotional exhaustion and/or low satisfaction. However, the study did not address the influence of these experiences on the psycho-spiritual wellbeing of religious men and women, for instance, some get depressed and suffer from suicidal ideation and other psychological complications.

The present study was conducted to establish the prevalence of burnout among the Church ministers serving in Mbarara Archdiocese of Uganda. Mbarara Archdiocese is one of the biggest and highly populated Catholic dioceses in Uganda. Although there is a boom in vocations, the numbers of religious men and women cannot match the number of Christians who are always in need of pastoral care. Christ mentioned it that the harvest is abundant but the laborers are few (cf. Mt. 9:37b). Consequently, the few religious are always overworked due to high demand of pastoral needs of the people and other responsibilities that surround their vocation. This has seen a number of them getting fatigued, exhausted, stressed, and depressed. Gandi et al. (2017), confirms that there are many negative outcomes related to burnout, including job function (performance, output, and so forth), health-related outcomes (increases in stress hormones, coronary heart disease, circulatory issues) and mental health problems (such as, depression). Consequently, such burnout effects may be detrimental, not only to the quality of the services provided but also, to the psycho-spiritual wellbeing of the service provider. Though globally, studies have reported high levels of burnout among the Church ministers, there is lack of similar studies with Catholic religious men and women in Uganda and therefore, the current study aimed at filling this gap.

II. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study employed sequential explanatory research design. This design implied the collection of quantitative data prior to that of qualitative data. According to Phoseka (2017), the qualitative data are used to enhance the findings from the quantitative data with regard to the key research question. The design does not imply mixing quantitative and qualitative data but the integration of the two sets of data takes place when the findings are interpreted. Besides, the design also gives more weight to the quantitative component as compared to the qualitative component when interpreting data (Creswell, 2009). This method was chosen for the study because the phenomenon under consideration is both descriptive and measurable.

Location of the Study

The study particularly was carried out in Mbarara Metropolitan Catholic Archdiocese, located in Western region of Uganda within Mbarara City. It is the largest diocese in Uganda covering around twelve districts. As an Archdiocese, it covers four more dioceses administratively. Considering the vastness of its geographical size, the study was restricted to six districts within the same vicinity. These include Mbarara, Isingiro, Ntungamo, Ibanda, Sheema, and Bushenyi.

Target Population

According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2003), target population refers to all members of a real or hypothetical set of people, events, or objects to which we wish to generalize results of the research. The target population comprised of 280 priests, brothers and sisters serving in Mbarara Archdiocese. According to the Diocesan Office Directory, there are 152 Catholic priests, 115 consecrated women and 13 consecrated brothers serving in the diocese. To capture the experience of burnout in the ministry, the demographics mainly the years of experience and the nature of apostolate were used to determine inclusion or exclusion of respondents in the sample. Those who are five and above years of experience and are engaged in demanding apostolate, such as parish work, schools, hospitals, nursing the elderly, and office work were given a higher chance of participating in the study.

Sampling Procedure and Sample Size

For quantitative data, Yamane sample size determination formula was adopted to determine the sample size for this study. According to Israel (2003), as cited (in Egberi, 2020), the confidence level is 95% and margin of error 5%. The formula is mathematically presented as follows:

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$$

Where n = sample size

N = target population

E = margin of error (0.05)

$$n = \frac{280}{1+280(0.05)^2} = \frac{280}{1.7}$$

Approximately, **n = 165**

Sampling Procedure

For Quantitative data, the researcher used proportionate stratified random sampling technique to select 165 participants for self-administered questionnaires as indicated in Table I. The names of all the priests, sisters and brothers were written on small pieces of paper, folded and placed them in separate containers according to each category. Then the researcher randomly picked the names from each container to get the desired number.

For qualitative data, the study employed purposive sampling in the recruitment of the respondents. Purposive

sampling is a sampling technique that allows a researcher to use cases that have the required information with respect to the objectives of his or her study (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003). The researcher picked 10 participants from the same 165 respondents that filled questionnaires to also participate in in-depth interviews. This assisted the researcher to get more comprehensive responses on their experiences of burnout. The interview respondents were selected based on their involvement, knowledge, and experiences in pastoral ministry.

Table I. Proportionate Stratified Random Sampling

Type of Population	Total Population	Sample size	Percentage
Priests	152	90	55.0%
Sisters	115	68	41.2%
Brothers	13	7	3.8%
Total	280	165	100%

Instruments for Data Collection

The study utilized MBI-HSS Scale to collect data on prevalence of burnout in pastoral ministry. The scale was developed by Maslach and Jackson (1996) with an aim of measuring burnout in three dimension namely emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and lack of personal accomplishment. The scale has a total of 22 items, 9 of them to measure emotional exhaustion, 5 to measure depersonalization and 8 to measure lack of personal accomplishment. Each item is rated on a scale ranging from 0 (never) to 6 (always). The MBI-HSS provides burnout scores along a continuum ranging from high to low burnout. A high degree of burnout is reflected by high scores on the emotional exhaustion and depersonalization scales and low scores on the personal accomplishment scale. Scores are considered high when they are in the upper third of the normative distribution. Average scores are situated in the middle third, while low scores are situated in the lower third (Maslach, et al., 2008).

The qualitative data was collected using in-depth interview guide. The researcher used in-depth Interview guide to gather qualitative data from 10 Church ministers based on their experiences of burnout in pastoral ministry. It consisted of 2 open-ended questions, drawn from the research questions, which the researcher used to probe the participants to share their experiences and opinions on the studied phenomenon.

Data Analysis Procedure

The quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics with tables, frequencies and percentages. For qualitative data was analyzed using thematic analysis. The transcribed data was coded and analyzed using thematic analysis. This involved reading and critically reviewing all transcripts to identify the themes, patterns, and contexts, of each individual response, that were related with the study objective. The analyzed qualitative data was used to enhance the findings from the quantitative data.

III. RESULTS

The study sought to examine prevalence of burnout in pastoral ministry among Catholic priests, consecrated brothers and sisters in Mbarara Archdiocese in Uganda; and to establish burnout prevalence in different years of pastoral ministry among Catholic religious men and women in Mbarara Archdiocese in Uganda. The study began by presenting the demographic details of the participants followed by the findings of the study.

The Demographic Details of the Respondents

Vocation type

The vocation type of the participants was considered in this study. Table 2 provides the findings in accordance to the vocation type of the participants.

Table 2. Vocation type of the Respondents

Categories of Respondents	Frequency	Percent
Priest	72	50.7
Brother	7	4.9
Sister	63	44.4
Total	142	100.0

As indicated in table 2 the results shows that the majority participants were priests (50.7%), followed by sisters (44.4%) and the brothers were the least (4.9%). This shows that all the relevant categories were involved in the study hence no bias as regards to the studied phenomenon.

Type of Ministry

The study sought to understand the various ministries that Catholic religious men and women were involved in Mbarara Archdiocese in Uganda. Table 3 shows the results on type of ministries that Church ministers were involved in the current study.

Table 3. Type of Ministry

Ministry	Frequency	Percent
Parish	68	48.0
School	51	36.0
Hospital	11	8.0
Office	7	5.0
Counseling/Social Work	5	3.0
Total	142	100

The results in table 3 shows that the majority of the participants do parish work (48%, n=68) and schools (36%, n=51). Only few individuals are involved in hospitals (8%, n=11), office work (5%, n=7) and counseling/social work (3%, n=5).

Years in priesthood/ Religious life

The study sought to understand the period that Church ministers had lived in the Catholic Church. This was to understand whether duration of spend in religious life can lead to burnout among the priests, consecrated Brothers and Sisters. Table 4 indicates the years that pastoral agents have spend in the Catholic Church.

Table 4. Years of Priesthood/Religious Life

Years of Religious Life	Frequency	Percent
5-10	43	30.3
10-20	49	34.5
21 and above	50	35.2
Total	142	100.0

The table 4 show that as regards to the number of years spent in the ministry, 30.3% of the respondents indicated that they have served for 5-10 years while 34.5% have worked for 10-20 years with the rest 35.2% indicating that they have served in their various ministries for 21 years and above. This demonstrates that most of the respondents have vast experience in the in the pastoral ministry and probably clear knowledge of the study phenomenon.

Demographic Details for Participants Interviewed

The respondents who participated for interviews were 10. The study captured their vocation type and years of working experience. Table 5 presents the demographic details of the participants.

Table 5. Demographic Details of the Interviewed Respondents

Respondent Identity	Vocation Type	Years of Experience
Respondent R1	Priest	21 and above
Respondent R2	Priest	21 and above
Respondent R3	Sister	21 and above
Respondent R4	Brother	10-20
Respondent R5	Brother	21 and above
Respondent R6	Priest	21 and above
Respondent R7	Sister	21 and above
Respondent R8	Sister	10-20
Respondent R9	Sister	21 and above
Respondent R10	Priest	21 and above

Prevalence of Burnout among Church Ministers

The current study was carried out to examine the prevalence of burnout in pastoral ministry among Priests and consecrated Brothers and Sisters serving in Mbarara Archdiocese, Uganda. Burnout was measured using the MBI-HSS designed by Maslach and Jackson (1996). For analysis and interpretation, the cumulative score of 39 or over indicated high, while 32-38 indicated moderate and 0-31 indicated low in terms of Personal Accomplishment. For the

context of Emotional Exhaustion 27 or over indicated high while 17-26 indicated moderate and the 0-16 indicated low. In the other subscale of Depersonalization, the score indicated that 13 or over as high while 7-12 as moderate and 0-6 as low. The results are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Prevalence of burnout among Religious Men and Women

Dimensions of Burnout	MBI-HSS Points	Frequency (N=142)	%
Personal accomplishment	High(39-48)	28	19.7
	Moderate (32-38)	61	43.0
	Low (0-31)	53	37.3
	Total	142	100.0
Emotional Exhaustion	High (27-54)	15	10.6
	Moderate (17-26)	65	45.8
	Low (0-16)	62	43.6
	Total	142	100.0
Depersonalization	High (13-30)	31	21.8
	Moderate (7-12)	65	45.8
	Low (0-6)	46	32.4
	Total	142	100.0

As indicated in table 6, majority of the participants had experienced moderate emotional exhaustion (n= 65; 45.8%) and depersonalization (n= 65; 45.8%). Likewise, majority of the participants had experienced moderate personal accomplishment (n= 61; 43.0%). Overall, the participants had experience moderate pastoral burnout in the three dimensions. Nevertheless, the study couldn't ignore the fact that there are those with higher levels of both emotional exhaustion (n=15; 10.6%) and depersonalization (n=31; 21.8%) coupled with lower levels of personal accomplishment (n=53; 37.3%). This was a sign that some priests, brothers and sisters in Mbarara Archdiocese suffer high levels of burnout.

These quantitative findings were supported by qualitative findings. During in-depth interviews, two important themes emerged with regard to personal knowledge and experience of burnout: denial and lack of awareness. For instance, respondent R4 said,

It very is unfortunate that people do not want to talk about burnout in our religious circles. But me who has been in the ministry for some time, I can assure you that burnout is with us; and sometimes when I look at some of my colleagues, I can sense they could be more exhausted than me. We all get exhausted at different levels but some people it is a real problem which is never addressed (Personal Response, R4, January 17, 2022).

On a similar note, another respondent R7 expressed:

First of all, I'm glad that you have picked that subject because it is a subject which people don't know much about. As a matter of fact, many people do not talk about

it. I came to know of burnout when I was in Europe but ever since I came back, I can see a number of religious with burnout symptoms but nobody wants to admit, if at all they know what it is (Response from R7, January18, 2022).

Likewise, another respondent R9, who has just retired from active ministry said:

Yes, burnout was there. But whenever I felt tired and exhausted, I would withdraw from whatever I was doing for a week or two and then come back when I am better. However, very few people will do that until the point of breakdown.

Burnout Prevalence in Different Years of Pastoral Experience

In addition, the study aimed to examine the prevalence of burnout among the Priests, Consecrated Brothers and Sisters based on the years of service in the Church. The participants were to indicate their years of service ranging from 5 to 10 years, 10 to 20 years and 20 years and above. The results are presented in table 7.

Table 7. Burnout prevalence in different years of pastoral experience

Years of Religious life		Personal Accomplishment scores	Emotional Exhaustion	Depersonalization
5-10	Mean	1.1395	2.4186	2.7805
	N	43	43	43
	Std. Deviation	.77402	.62612	.75869
10-20	Mean	2.1020	1.3265	1.6735
	N	49	49	49
	Std. Deviation	.68450	.65789	4.48789
21 and above	Mean	2.2800	1.2400	1.3000
	N	50	50	50
	Std. Deviation	.75701	.68690	.76265
Total				
	N	142	142	142

The findings in table 7 indicated that those religious between 5-10 years of ministering scored low on personal accomplishment (M=1.1395) and scored high on both emotional exhaustion (M=2.4186) and depersonalization (M = 2.7805) compared to the rest of the age groups.

IV. DISCUSSION

The study was to examine the prevalence of burnout in the pastoral ministry among Church ministers of Mbarara Archdioceses in Uganda. Furthermore, it was to examine the prevalence of burnout across different years of religious experience among the Church ministers. Majority of the participants had experienced moderate emotional exhaustion (n= 65; 45.8%) and depersonalization (n= 65; 45.8%). Likewise, majority of the participants had experienced

moderate personal accomplishment (n= 61; 43.0%). These study findings were contrary to the findings of Esibor (2017) who found out that majority of Church ministers in Diocese of Minna, Niger State Nigeria had experienced high levels of burnout in all the three dimensions of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and personal accomplishment and thereby reducing productivity in their work. Also, the findings of this study disagreed with findings of Mwangi (2020) who reported high levels of emotional exhaustion among the Catholic Priests serving in the Diocese of Muranga.

The study also found out that there are those with higher levels of both emotional exhaustion (n=15; 10.6%) and depersonalization (n=31; 21.8%) coupled with lower levels of personal accomplishment (n=53; 37.3%). This was a pointer that some priests, brothers and sisters in Mbarara Archdiocese suffer high levels of burnout which was the matter of concern because of the likely impact on their wellbeing. This result was affirmed by qualitative findings which ascertained that a number of religious experience heavy burnouts but do not want to disclose or are not aware of what it is. This is in agreement with the findings of Barnard and Curry (2012) who reported that many clergy (religious) attempt to disguise these feelings and maintain a positive public persona, perhaps because they believe that God has called them to ministry and therefore, they should be able to cope with stressors.

The study also sought to examine the prevalence of burnout across different years of religious experience. It emerged that those religious between 5-10 years of ministering scored low on personal accomplishment and high on both emotional exhaustion and depersonalization compared to those above 10 years of religious experience. The explanation for this finding could be that the young ministers are overzealous and overwork themselves ending up emotionally depleted and psychologically eroded which vanquishes their sense of accomplishment. This is different with those who have been in the ministry for more years maybe they know how to plan and manage their ministerial duties. This concurs with the findings of Rossetti (2011) who, in her survey of priests, noted that the most burned out were the youngest priests. Similarly, a study conducted by Leslie (2018) reported high levels of emotional exhaustion among young priests compared to those who had worked for long in ministry. This was further supported by the findings from the qualitative data, for instance, where respondent R4, observed that the young entrants in the ministry come with “too much fire and overwork themselves until the same fire burns them” (Interview Response, R4, 2022). He added: “we see a number of them begin with energy and zeal but sooner or later, all is lost” (R4, 2022).

Similarly, respondent R7 also remarked: “the young people have a lot of energy and they really want to use it” (R7, 2022). This could partly explain how years of experience can contribute to burnout among religious men and women in Mbarara Archdiocese. Those who have just joined the ministry may, out of excitement and ambitiousness,

overextend themselves. This is supported by Längle (2013), who claimed that a person whose life is dominated by a narcissistic pursuit of career or social acceptance is a life that lacks fulfilment and emotional reward.

V. CONCLUSION

The study concluded that the prevalence of burnout in pastoral ministry among Church ministers in Mbarara Archdiocese in Uganda was moderate. Majority of the participants had a moderate emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and personal accomplishment. That means Priests, consecrated Brothers and Sisters are prone to high levels of burnout if measures are not taken. Also, the study concluded that those who are between 5-10 years are more likely to experience burnout compared to those are older in religious life. Based on the findings, the Church ministers need to be sensitized about burnout in order avoid experiencing mental health issues. There is need of Bishops and Major Superiors to put in place programs that can help in alleviating burnout in the ministry and enhancing the psycho-spiritual wellbeing of the religious men and women for an efficient and life-giving pastoral ministry.

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