

**Resilience and wellbeing in ministry:
An empirical enquiry within the Church of Scotland
Summary of key findings**

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Context

The Resilience in Ministry Survey was designed and implemented within the Church of Scotland to give an up-to-date profile of those currently engaged in ministry within the Church and to provide a well-informed basis on which future strategies could be planned for ministerial development and for enhancing the wellbeing of ministers. The survey was designed in consultation with a working group convened by the Ministries Council. This survey was mailed to all ministers, deacons, and locums serving within the Church of Scotland. Over half of those to whom the survey was sent invested time and care in completing the detailed range of questions. The report is based on the information provided by the 505 ministers who responded to these questions.

Theoretical roots

The study was rooted in a theology of individual differences, in psychological type theory, and in a balanced affect model of work-related wellbeing. A theology of individual differences recognises that God calls a variety of people into discipleship and into ministry. As a consequence, not all ministers look alike, not all ministers exercise ministry in the same way, not all ministers have the same giftings, and not all ministers find the same aspects of ministry fulfilling or stressful.

Psychological type theory recognises that there are some key (and healthy) patterns in psychological differences among ministers. For example, introverts and extraverts are equally likely to be called by God into ministry, but there will be systematic patterns in their different approaches to ministry. As a consequence, the Church needs to recognise that the different giftings of introverts and extraverts need to be respected and valued. The same point is valid for the differences between sensing types and intuitive types, between feeling types and thinking types, and between perceiving types and judging types.

The balanced affect approach to work-related wellbeing distinguishes between negative affect (emotional exhaustion) and positive affect (satisfaction in ministry). It is not unusual for ministers to feel drained from an emotionally exhausting vocation, and yet at the same time to feel sustained by the sense that they are making a real difference to the lives of others through their response to God's call. The balanced affect approach recognises that positive affect can reduce the detrimental impact of negative affect on the lives of ministers.

Resilience in Ministry Survey

Rooted in a theology of individual differences, in psychological type theory, and a balanced affect model of work-related wellbeing, the survey explored the demographic profile of

ministers, their general health, their support mechanisms, personality factors (psychological type and emotionality), the Dark Triad of subclinical pathologies (Machiavellianism, Narcissism, and Psychopathy), and the Bright Trinity of positive psychology (Purpose in Life, Emotional Intelligence, and Intrinsic Religiosity). While the full report explores each of these factors in depth, this summary of findings concentrates on highlights from the data.

Demographic profile

Sex. Of the 505 ministers who participated in the survey there were 337 men, 165 women, and 3 individuals who did not disclose their sex.

Age. The majority of ministers who participated in the survey were aged fifty or over: 2 were in their twenties, 17 in their thirties, 81 in their forties, 204 in their fifties, 168 in their sixties, 31 in their seventies, and 2 did not disclose their ages.

Church background. Nearly two thirds of the ministers who participated in the survey had grown up within the Church of Scotland. Thus, during their years of secondary education 63% of the ministers felt that they belonged to the Church of Scotland, compared with 20% who belonged to a another Christian denomination and 17% who had not belonged to a church.

Previous work experience. The majority of ministers who participated in the survey had significant experience in paid employment before training for ministry: 20% had been in paid employment for between one and four years, 19% for between five and nine years, and 40% for ten years or more. This left just 22% of the ministers who had less than one year's experience in paid employment before training for ministry.

Call to ministry. For the majority of ministers who participated in the survey the decision to enter ordained ministry developed over time: 16% described the decision as very gradual and 67% as gradual, compared with 14% who described the decision as sudden and 2% as very sudden.

Form of ministry. Of the 505 participants to the survey, the majority identified themselves as full-time paid ministers (83%), with a further 2% identifying themselves as part-time paid ministers. Of the remaining 15%, 3% were full-time paid deacons, 1% were part-time paid deacons, and 11% were serving as locums (including 2% serving as readers).

Years in post. Nearly half of the ministers participating in the survey had been in their current post for under five years (47%); 20% had been in post for between five and eight years, and 34% had been in post for more than eight years.

General health

Healthy bodies. In order to gauge how seriously ministers take a healthy lifestyle, the survey asked, 'Do you engage in moderate or vigorous exercise for a minimum of 30 minutes?' rated on a three-point scale: rarely, sometimes, and at least three times a week. More than two out of every five ministers reported that they engaged in such exercise at least three times a week

(44%) compared with half that number who reported that they never engaged in such exercise (23%). This leaves one third of the ministers who reported that they engaged in such exercise sometimes (34%).

Healthy minds. In order to gauge how seriously ministers take engaging with study and personal reflection, the survey asked two questions. The first question asked, ‘During the past year have you participated in?’ a residential conference, study day, or retreat. Half of the ministers had participated in a residential conference (50%); two fifths had participated in a study day (40%), and about a third had participated in a retreat (30%). The second question asked ‘During the past five years have you taken study leave?’ Nearly half the ministers reported that they had taken study leave during the past five years (47%).

Objective measures. In order to probe more deeply into health-related issues, the survey asked three specific questions, each of which was rated on a three-point scale: no, yes once, and yes more than once. The first question asked, ‘Since ordination have you had a period of certified absence of more than three months?’. For 21% of the ministers the answer was yes: yes once (15%) and yes more than once (6%). The second question asked, ‘Since ordination have you suffered from a major physical illness?’. For 26% of the ministers the answer was yes: yes once (20%) and yes more than once (6%). The third question asked, ‘Since ordination have you suffered from a serious stress-related illness?’. For 23% of the ministers the answer was yes: yes once (18%) and yes more than once (5%).

Thoughts of leaving. As measures of dissatisfaction the ministers were asked two questions concerned with thoughts of leaving ministry. The first question asked, ‘Have you since ordination considered leaving ministry?’. Half said that they had never considered leaving ministry (50%), 35% had done so once or twice, and 15% had done so more than twice. The second question asked, ‘Have you since ordination considered finding secular employment?’. Over three-fifths had never done so (63%), 24% had considered it but done nothing about it, 8% had made enquiries, and 4% had gone as far as making applications. These responses, however, are based on the answers of those still actively engaged in ministry.

Support mechanisms

Experience of support. In order to gauge the extent to which ministers had experience of different forms of support, the survey asked, ‘Which of the following have you engaged?’ followed by a list of six sources of support: mentor, supervisor, coach, spiritual director, counsellor/therapist, and peer group. Of these six sources of support, the most frequently endorsed was the peer group which had been experienced by more than half of the ministers (55%). Nearly a third of the ministers had experience of a mentor (33%) or a supervisor (31%). Almost a quarter of the ministers had experience of a spiritual director (24%) or a counsellor/therapist (24%), and one in ten had experience of a coach (10%).

Willingness to seek support. In order to gauge the extent to which ministers would be willing to engage with different forms of support in the future, the survey asked, ‘To support your resilience in ministry would you be willing to engage with?’ followed by a list of six sources of support: GP, counsellor/therapist, mentor, supervisor, coach, and spiritual director. Of

these six sources of support at least three out of every five ministers were willing to engage with a spiritual director (69%), a GP (63%), and a mentor (60%). Half were willing to engage with a counsellor/therapist (52%), and less than half with a supervisor (46%) or a coach (42%).

Psychological type profile

The basic building blocks of psychological type theory distinguish between two orientations (extraversion and introversion), two perceiving functions (sensing and intuition), two judging functions (thinking and feeling), and two attitudes toward the outer world (judging and perceiving).

Male ministers serving in the Church of Scotland displayed preference for introversion (64%) over extraversion (36%), for sensing (55%) over intuition (45%), for feeling (59%) over thinking (41%), and for judging (77%) over perceiving (23%). In terms of dominant type preferences 31% were dominant sensing types, 29% dominant intuitive types, 25% dominant feeling types, and 14% dominant thinking types. In terms of the sixteen complete types, the most frequently occurring types were ISFJ (16%), ISTJ (14%), and ESFJ (13%). In terms of the four temperaments, 49% reported SJ, 26% NF, 19% NT, and 6% SP.

Female ministers serving in the Church of Scotland display preference for introversion (64%) over extraversion (36%), for sensing (52%) over intuition (48%), for feeling (71%) over thinking (29%), and for judging (80%) over perceiving (20%). In terms of dominant type preferences, 33% were dominant sensing types, 31% dominant feeling types, 27% dominant intuitive types, and 10% dominant thinking types. In terms of the sixteen complete types, the most frequently occurring types were ISFJ (21%), ESJF (13%), and INFJ (12%). In terms of the four temperaments, 49% reported SJ, 34% NF, 14% NT, and 3% SP.

These new data provided by ministers serving in the Church of Scotland confirm the four main conclusions generated by earlier research. In terms of the orientations, both female ministers and male ministers were much more likely to prefer introversion than men and women in general. In this sense, in ministry both sexes showed this preference for the inner world rather than for the outerworld. In terms of the judging process, both male ministers and female ministers are much more likely to prefer feeling than to prefer thinking (and for male ministers this is a significant departure from the profile of men in general). In this sense, in ministry both sexes share a calling to pastoral care and to building communities of harmony and peace. In terms of the attitudes toward the outer world, both male ministers and female ministers are more likely to prefer judging than men and women in general. In this sense, in ministry both sexes share a commitment to structure, to order, and to discipline.

Thus, in common with clergymen and clergywomen serving in other Churches (including the Church of England and The Presbyterian Church, USA) male and female ministers serving within the Church of Scotland displayed clear preferences for introversion, for intuition, for feeling, and for judging. Such preferences among the ministers may help to explain distinctive strengths and weaknesses within the mission and ministry strategies supported by these Churches. Recognising these strengths and weaknesses, an understanding of type theory

can also identify ways in which ministers may be helped to play to their strengths and also be better equipped to manage their weaknesses.

First, both male and female ministers serving within the Church of Scotland prefer introversion over extraversion. On the one hand, introverted ministers may be energised by many aspects of ministry such as private study and preparation, one-to-one encounters in counselling and in spiritual direction, silent prayer and reflection, and focusing deeply on interior spiritual issues. On the other hand, introverted ministers may be drained by many other aspects of ministry, such as attending social events, speaking in public (especially without preparation), talking with strangers as part of evangelism or parish visiting, and assuming a high profile within the parish. Since many aspects of the clerical profession tend to require an extraverted approach to life, introverted ministers may need to be properly prepared during their initial ministerial training and during their continuing ministerial education to develop effective coping strategies that enable them both to fulfil extraverted expectations and then afterwards to create the personal space necessary to re-energise.

Second, both male and female ministers serving within the Church of Scotland prefer intuition over sensing. On the one hand, intuitive ministers may be energised by many aspects of ministry, such as the opportunity to speculate about meanings and possibilities in scripture, drawing inspiration from the symbols and teachings of the Church, welcoming change and experimentation in liturgy, and developing a vision for the future of their church. On the other hand, intuitive ministers may be drained by other aspects of ministry, such as the value placed on tradition, encountering resistance to change, the need to focus on practical realities, and the importance of details and accuracy in church administration. Since many aspects of the clerical profession tend to require a sensing approach to life, intuitive ministers may need to be properly prepared during their initial ministerial training and during their continuing ministerial education to develop their less preferred sensing function and to appreciate how sensing types perceive their environment.

Third, both male and female ministers serving within the Church of Scotland prefer feeling over thinking. On the one hand, ministers who prefer feeling may be energised by many aspects of ministry, such as spending time caring for others through visiting, counselling or pastoral care, needing to support and empathise with those in need, and the importance of interpersonal values in Christian teaching, such as love, harmony, peace, and compassion. On the other hand, ministers who prefer feeling may be drained by other aspects of ministry, such as having to look at problems objectively and logically, the need to make tough decisions which affect other people's lives, the need to be critical when necessary, and parish management. Since many aspects of the clerical profession tend to require the detached and impartial stance characteristic of a thinking approach to life, ministers who prefer feeling may need to be properly prepared during their initial ministerial training and during their continuing ministerial education to develop their less preferred thinking function and to appreciate how thinking types evaluate their environment.

Fourth, both male and female ministers serving within the Church of Scotland prefer judging over perceiving. On the one hand, ministers who prefer judging may be energised by many

aspects of ministry, such as the need for organization both in their own lives and in the life of their parishes, arranging services and events well in advance, maintaining efficient administrative systems, and managing local affairs. On the other hand, judging types may be drained by other aspects of ministry, such as the need to think on their feet, responding effectively to unanticipated crises, and adapting to changing situations. Since many aspects of ministry tend to require the flexibility, spontaneity, and responsiveness characteristic of a perceiving approach to life, ministers who prefer judging may need to be properly prepared during their initial ministerial training and during their continuing ministerial education to develop their less preferred perceiving attitude toward the outer world and to develop strategies which enable them to function confidently in situations for which they have not had time to prepare in advance.

Work-related wellbeing

The balanced affect approach to work-related wellbeing distinguishes between negative affect (emotional exhaustion) and positive affect (satisfaction in ministry). In terms of satisfaction in ministry, over three quarters of the ministers gain a lot of personal satisfaction from working with people in their current ministry (88%), feel that their pastoral ministry has a positive influence on people's lives (86%), are really glad that they entered ministry (85%), gain a lot of personal satisfaction from fulfilling their ministry roles (83%), agree that the ministry in their location gives real purpose and meaning to their life (78%), and feel that their ministry is really appreciated by people (78%). Over two thirds of the ministers feel that they have accomplished many worthwhile things in their current ministry (75%), feel very positive about their current ministry (69%), agree that they can easily understand how those among whom they minister feel about things (68%), and feel that their teaching ministry has a positive influence on people's faith (68%). The proportion drops to 53% who feel that they deal very effectively with the problems of the people in their current ministry.

In terms of emotional exhaustion in ministry, at least one in three of the ministers found themselves frustrated in their attempts to accomplish tasks important to them (47%), feel drained by fulfilling their ministry (43%), do not always have enthusiasm for their work (42%), find that fatigue and irritation are part of their daily experience (41%). At least one in five of the ministers find themselves spending less and less time with those among whom they minister (31%), and feel that they are less patient with those among whom they minister than they used to be (22%). Nearly one in five of the ministers have been discouraged by the lack of personal support for them in their current location (19%), feel that they are invaded by sadness that they cannot explain (18%), are feeling negative or cynical about the people with whom they work (16%), and recognise that their humour has a cynical and biting tone (16%). At least one in ten of the ministers are becoming less flexible in their dealings with those among whom they minister (13%).

Employing the Francis Burnout Inventory in the study among Church of Scotland ministers allows their profile of emotional exhaustion in ministry and satisfaction in ministry to be set alongside other recent studies, including: 748 Presbyterian clergy in the USA; 3,715 clergy across denominations in Australia, England, and New Zealand; 874 Church of England

clergywomen; 521 Church of England rural clergy; 212 Australian clergywomen; 134 Newfrontiers leader elders; 266 Church in Wales clergymen; and 155 Italian priests.

Church of Scotland ministers record levels of emotional exhaustion consistent with Presbyterian ministers in the USA and with clergy in the Church of England. Church of Scotland ministers record similar levels of satisfaction in ministry as Presbyterian ministers in the USA and higher levels than clergy in the Church of England.

Personal and personality foundations of wellbeing

Stepwise multiple regression was employed in order to test the cumulative impact on wellbeing of personal factors (age and sex), psychological type (using the underlying continuous scale scores with extraversion, intuition, feeling and judging as the high scoring direction for the measures) and emotionality (assessing neuroticism).

In terms of emotional exhaustion in ministry, the data demonstrates that:

- male and female ministers experience similar levels of emotional exhaustion;
- younger ministers experience higher levels of emotional exhaustion than older ministers;
- introverts experience higher levels of emotional exhaustion than extraverts;
- intuitive types experience higher levels of emotional exhaustion than sensing types;
- thinking types experience higher levels of emotional exhaustion than feeling types;
- perceiving types experience higher levels of emotional exhaustion than judging types;
- high scores on emotionality provide the strongest predictor of high levels of emotional exhaustion.

In terms of satisfaction in ministry, the data demonstrates that:

- male and female ministers experience similar levels of satisfaction in ministry;
- younger and older ministers experience similar levels of satisfaction in ministry;
- sensing types and intuitive types experience similar levels of satisfaction in ministry;
- extraverts experience higher levels of satisfaction in ministry than introverts;
- feeling types experience higher levels of satisfaction in ministry than thinking types;
- judging types experience higher levels of satisfaction in ministry than perceiving types;
- low scores on emotionality provides the strongest predictor of high levels of satisfaction in ministry.

The theory on which the present study has been constructed is that theologically and psychologically personal factors (age and sex) and personality factors (extraversion and

introversion, sensing and intuition, thinking and feeling, judging and perceiving) are relatively stable factors that define the givenness with which the Church may need to work among its ministers. Additionally there is considerable evidence to regard individual differences in emotionality in the same way. Two main conclusions emerge from these data and from the theoretical framework.

First, from a scientific point of view this model that places personal factors and personality factors as the first blocks in the regression models will be carried forward into the following two sections. From a scientific point of view the question being addressed concerns the extent to which other psychological factors (the Bright Trinity and the Dark Triad) and contextual factors account for *additional* variance in emotional exhaustion and in satisfaction in ministry, after these fundamental factors have been taken into account.

Second, if the Church cannot expect to transform introverts into extraverts, perceiving types into judging types, thinking types into feeling types, or ministers displaying higher emotionality into ministers displaying lower emotionality, strategies may need to be found to enable such ministers to display higher resilience within the ministries to which God may have called them.

Psychological factors and wellbeing

After taking personal factors and personality into account, the present study explored the effect of three positive psychological factors (the Bright Trinity) and three negative psychological factors (the Dark Triad) on both emotional exhaustion and satisfaction in ministry. The Bright Trinity comprises purpose in life, emotional intelligence, and intrinsic religious orientation. The Dark Triad comprises Machiavellianism, subclinical Narcissism, and subclinical Psychopathy. Each of these six psychological factors is explored in depth in the full report.

In terms of emotional exhaustion in ministry, regression analysis shows that both the Dark Triad and the Bright Trinity explain significant additional variance in the scale scores. Among the Dark Triad Machiavellianism significantly predicts higher levels of emotional exhaustion, subclinical Narcissism significantly predicts lower levels of emotional exhaustion, and subclinical Psychopathy is independent of levels of emotional exhaustion. Among the Bright Trinity, purpose in life is the strongest predictor of lower levels of emotional exhaustion, but emotional intelligence also adds significantly to lower levels of emotional exhaustion after taking purpose in life into account. When both purpose in life and emotional intelligence are taken into account, intrinsic religiosity offers no additional predictive power on emotional exhaustion.

In terms of satisfaction in ministry, regression analysis shows that neither Machiavellianism nor subclinical Psychopathy are significantly associated with individual differences in levels of satisfaction in ministry, although there is a small significant association between subclinical Narcissism and higher levels of satisfaction in ministry. Among the Bright Trinity there is a strong positive association between purpose in life and higher levels of satisfaction in ministry. After taking purpose in life into account emotional intelligence adds significantly

further to enhancing satisfaction in ministry. When both purpose in life and emotional intelligence are taken into account, intrinsic religiosity offers no additional predictive power on satisfaction in ministry.

These findings are far from trivial in aiding understanding of vulnerability and resilience among ministers. In terms of the Bright Trinity, both purpose in life and emotional intelligence are associated with higher levels of wellbeing. The important observation here is that intervention strategies are able to enhance both levels of purpose in life and levels of emotional intelligence.

In terms of the Dark Triad, it is important to recognise that the three factors of Machiavellianism, subclinical Narcissism and subclinical Psychopathy are all evident among ministers to varying degrees. Each may have detrimental implications for the people among whom ministers serve, but they impact the ministers themselves in different ways. While Machiavellianism is associated with poorer work-related wellbeing, subclinical Narcissism is associated with better work-related wellbeing. This effect makes Narcissistic ministers even more dangerous. Rather than being damaged themselves by the damage they inflict on others, seeing their own success in damaging others merely enhances their own sense of wellbeing.

Contextual factors and wellbeing

After taking personal factors and personality into account, the present study explored the effect of a wide range of contextual factors on both emotional exhaustion and satisfaction in ministry. Most of these factors made no significant difference.

Marital status. The questionnaire offered two options: single and other. Being single had effect on neither emotional exhaustion nor satisfaction in ministry.

Companion animals. The questionnaire offered two options: cats and dogs. Neither cats nor dogs had an effect on either emotional exhaustion or satisfaction in ministry.

Types of community. The questionnaire offered eight types of community and of these eight types ministers were asked to tick all those in which they currently minister: island, remote rural, rural, small town, large town, city, suburb, and priority area. None of these communities were associated with higher or lower levels of emotional exhaustion, but two of the communities were associated with significantly higher levels of satisfaction in ministry: small towns and priority areas.

Extra-parochial responsibilities. Holding extra-parochial responsibilities had effect on neither emotional exhaustion nor satisfaction in ministry.

Multiple churches or worship centres. Having oversight of multiple churches or worship centres had effect on neither emotional exhaustion nor satisfaction in ministry.

Medical history. The questionnaire asked the following three questions: Since ordination have you had a period of certified absence of more than three months? Since ordination have you suffered from a serious stress-related illness? Since ordination have you suffered from a

major physical illness? Answering yes to a period of certified absence or yes to a major physical illness had effect on neither emotional exhaustion nor satisfaction in ministry. Answering yes to a serious stress-related illness had no significant effect on satisfaction in ministry, but predicted a significantly higher level of emotional exhaustion.

Physical exercise. The questionnaire asked the following question: Do you engage in moderate or vigorous exercise for a minimum of 30 minutes? Three options were given: rarely, sometimes, at least three times a week. Frequency of such engagement in moderate or vigorous exercise had effect on neither emotional exhaustion nor satisfaction in ministry.

Engagement with short programmes. The questionnaire asked about participation ‘during the past year’ in three types of activity: residential conference, study day, or retreat. Participation in none of these three activities was significantly associated with levels of emotional exhaustion or satisfaction in ministry.

Engagement with more substantial programmes. The questionnaire asked about participation ‘during the past five years’ in two types of activity: study leave, or ministry exchange. Participation in neither of these two activities was significantly associated with levels of emotional exhaustion or satisfaction in ministry.

Support mechanisms. The questionnaire asked about engagement with six forms of professional support: mentor, supervisor, coach, spiritual director, counsellor/therapist, or peer group. Two of these support mechanisms were associated with significant differences on one of the measures of work-related psychological wellbeing. Engagement with a counsellor/therapist was associated with significantly higher levels of emotional exhaustion. Engagement with a mentor was associated with significantly higher levels of satisfaction in ministry.

By way of summary, this process of examining contextual factors one at a time identified three contextual factors associated with higher levels of satisfaction in ministry (serving in small towns, serving in priority areas, and engagement with a mentor), and two contextual factors associated with higher levels of emotional exhaustion (suffering from a serious stress-related illness, and engagement with a counsellor/therapist). This picture was further clarified by regression analysis.

Regression analysis shows that only one of the five contextual factors serves as a significant predictor of individual differences in levels of emotional exhaustion. Having suffered from a serious stress-related illness is associated with experiencing higher levels of emotional exhaustion in ministry. However, once the stress-related illness has been taken into account, the correlation with engagement with a counsellor/therapist ceases to be significant. In other words, the model suggests that the counsellor/therapist has probably been engaged as a consequence of the stress-related illness and not as an independent factor.

In terms of satisfaction in ministry, regression analysis shows that each of the three factors shown by the correlation coefficient to be predictors of higher levels of satisfaction in ministry continue to add independent predictive powers within the context of the total model.

This confirms the view that ministers serving in small towns, ministers serving in priority areas, and ministers engaging with a mentor enjoy higher levels of satisfaction in ministry.

Building the future

The Resilience in Ministry Survey was rooted in a theology of individual differences that recognises that God calls a variety of people into discipleship and into ministry. Such a position accepts that not all ministers look alike, not all ministers exercise ministry in the same way, not all ministers have the same giftings, and not all ministers find the same aspects of ministry fulfilling or stressful. The data generated by this survey from 505 ministers serving in the Church of Scotland suggest that deep-seated individual differences within ministers (in terms of psychological type and emotionality) are the most significant factors both in predicting vulnerability to poor work-related psychological wellbeing, and also in predicting resilience against such vulnerability. The most effective way of enhancing resilience among the more vulnerable is through programmes promoting self-awareness. A Church that has taken seriously an investigation into resilience and wellbeing among its ministers, may also wish to invest in continuing ministerial formation programmes that offer sustained opportunities for exploring the implications of individual differences both for healthy human flourishing, and for flourishing ministries fulfilling God's call to a diversity of people.