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**THE EFFECT OF PSYCHOSOCIAL RESOURCES IN  
MITIGATING CLERGY BURNOUT AT CHRIST IS THE  
ANSWER MINISTRIES IN KENYA**

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**Abstract:**

Burnout is a universal issue increasingly being experienced by members of the clergy. While literature linking burnout with mental health of clergy is well developed, psychosocial resources and interventions that can be used to mitigate burnout among the clergy in Kenya is under-researched. The present study sought to empirically delineate those set of psychosocial resources that together can constitute members of the clergy's 'toolkit' for mitigating clergy burnout using insights from Christ Is The Answer Ministries (CITAM). The research was a mixed methods study that entailed the collection and analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data types. The focus of this study was 86 clergy members of CITAM based in Kenya who constituted the accessible population. Questionnaires were administered to all clergy members while in-depth interviews were conducted with 12 senior clergy members based at the church's headquarters. A census study was conducted. Descriptive statistical techniques as well as inferential analysis were used to analyse quantitative data while qualitative findings were subjected to thematic analysis. Members of CITAM clergy had access to a variety of psychosocial resources. It also showed that the significance of the effect of burnout on clergy mental health was eliminated by the psychosocial resources, implying that psychosocial resources reduced the negative influence of burnout on mental health from significance to a level of insignificance. There were organisational factors that served to protect clergy members from burnout. These can be classified into factors that relate to good human resource management practices (meetings, retreats, recreational facilities and days off) and those that provide the psychosocial support structures and systems within the church community (counselling, fellowships, and care groups).

**Keywords:**

Burnout, Mental Health, Psychosocial Support, Psychological Resources

## Introduction

Burnout is a universal issue increasingly being experienced by many clergy. It has been documented that in some countries, as high as 45 per cent of clergy suffer from burnout (Jackson-Jordan, 2013). This is caused by the nature of their job as they are frequently exposed to highly distressing news and situations in the course of discharging their duties such as death of a member or a members' loved one, distressed marriages, hospitalisation of a member and other forms of traumatic experiences (Proeschold-Bell et al., 2013). However, whereas clergy are often available to offer helping services to their community, such exposures sometimes take a toll on them since they are also human beings like any other person and frequently require similar psychosocial resources. Psychosocial resources entail resources from the self and from the environment that can help protect clergy from burnout and its ramifications on mental health. It may be emanating from immediate supervisors or from family and co-workers as well as from members of the congregation. This can be in the form of emotional support, which is related to affection and includes attitudes such as attention, trust, empathy, civility and affection; instrumental support, that is, the provision of tangible goods or services or specific assistance; the provision of information in times of stress; and evaluative support (Velando-soriano et al., 2018).

According to Velando-soriano et al. (2018), psychosocial resources such as social support are predictive and protective factors against burnout syndrome. Smith (2019) gives the example that support groups can play a role in alleviating the psychological stress that contributes to burnout in pastors. However, he argues that such peer support groups are most beneficial to clergy when the group functions in a way that is compatible to the personality type of the recipient of support. They illustrate for instance that if a support group encourages venting, but the member of the clergy being supported finds venting uncomfortable, then he/she will not find that participation in the support group provides help for emotional stress. They recommend that for support groups to be effective, the techniques need to be matched to what meets the needs of the intended beneficiary. This signals underlying nuances in the efficacy of psychosocial resources in mitigating clergy burnout.

Further nuances in the nexus between psychosocial resources and clergy burnout are postulated by Lee (2017) who suggests that while clergy may experience burnout, the effects may be mitigated by the satisfaction received by helping others. This points to the existence and utility of personal resources, implying clergy psycho-social self-efficacy that warrants closer empirical scrutiny. In tandem with a life-stress viewpoint, there is further evidence to the idea that personal resources moderate the effect of life stressors on mental health, and this also can vary with the personality trait of the clergy and the social support at their disposal (Miles & Proeschold-Bell, 2013). Among these are religiosity which is assumed to be one of the sources of mental health. This is implied in several scriptural references. For instance, in one of Paul's letters, he suggests that trusting in God results in being filled with peace and joy and overflowing hope powered by the moving of the Holy Spirit (Romans 15:13). The knowledge base is however characterised by limited empirical support. A study by Bougea et al. (2016) among social workers found that emotional exhaustion is related negatively to social support. However, the mechanism through which the two variables are linked was not explained, hence presenting a study gap.

Generally, literature linking burnout with mental health of clergy is well developed (Buys & Rothmann, 2010; Gauger & Christie, 2013; Miles & Proeschold-Bell, 2013). However,

psychosocial resources and interventions that can be used to mitigate burnout among the clergy in Kenya remain under-researched. The current study investigated psychosocial resources at CITAM in Kenya and their contribution in mitigating clergy burnout. Christ Is The Answer Ministries (CITAM) was selected because it unapologetically articulates as a statement of faith, a belief in Jesus Christ who offers the liberating gift of the spirit in whom the clergy should find encouragement, comfort, affection and compassion (Philippians 2:1). This means that CITAM clergy is uniquely resourced than the average member of the helping profession to overcome burnout and its adverse effects on their mental health. However, inadequate pastoral care program was acknowledged in the church's strategic plan as one of the weaknesses the church is grappling with (CITAM, 2016). Against this backdrop, the present study sought to empirically delineate those set of psychosocial resources that together can constitute members of the clergy's 'toolkit' for mitigating clergy burnout.

### Literature Review

Proeschold-Bell et al. (2015) investigated the mental health of 1,476 church appointed clergy and found that social support or isolation, and financial stress together explained between 8 percent and 34 percent of the variance in both positive and negative affect outcomes. The clergy-specific variables accounted for an additional 11 percent -16 percent of variance. Congregation pressures and thoughts of quitting clergy work were significantly associated with affect, both positive and negative. Spiritual well-being, positive congregations, congregation support of clergy, and confidence in supervisor consideration of future church appointments were significantly related to positive affect outcomes. This is corroborated by a study undertaken by Cocklin (2013) who found that former members of the clergy who quit ministry lacked necessary resources to successfully navigate ministry challenges, had no accountability mechanisms, felt lonely, possessed poor conflict management skills, felt inadequately prepared for ministry work, and often suffered from burnout. This signals an urgent need for interventions that promote the spiritual, physical, relational and emotional life of the clergy in the face of the unique occupational challenges they confront (Hedman, 2014).

Miles and Proeschold-Bell (2013) investigated the role of peer support managing occupational stress by United Methodist Church clergy in North Carolina. Results showed that the contribution of peer support groups was weak. They speculated that the weak result could be due to individual differences in coping mechanisms adopted. They cautioned against a blanket assumption that peer support groups were uniformly effective. This means that peer groups may not be effective to all clergy suffering from burnout. The current study sought to establish whether peer groups are effective interventions against clergy burnout and its ramifications on mental health.

Supporting the findings by Miles and Proeschold-Bell (2013), a main finding in the study by Barnard and Curry (2012) was that clergy possessing higher self-compassion were more satisfied with ministry and reported less motional exhaustion. This led to their conclusion that clergy who are kind towards themselves in the face of failure or stress are less likely to be burnt out, and; by extension, report higher levels of mental health. This means that a self-resilient personality plays a significant role in mitigating burnout and its ramifications on mental health. The current study tested this assumption by exploring the interaction between personality, burnout and mental health of CITAM clergy. Muse et al. (2016) summarised common factors repeatedly identified in the aetiology of burnout which deserve attention by faith groups in order to support clergy resilience and promote their mental health. These are: quality of

interpersonal skills, relationships outside the congregation, peer/mentor relationships, high role expectations, personal spirituality, and the ability to set healthy boundaries as being among the critical variables identified in the literature. The current study sought to explore these claims through empirical testing with a clergy sample in Kenya.

### Methodology

A mixed-methods approach was applied. This combines the use of quantitative techniques which entails the collection and analysis of numerical data and qualitative techniques which involves the collection and analysis of textual data to draw insights about the phenomenon under investigation (Askarzai & Unhelkar, 2017). This enabled the corroboration of the empirical data with in-depth insights from interviews held with selected clergy members of CITAM. The researcher in the process combined the advantages that quantitative and qualitative methods avail into one solid piece of research. Queiros et al. (2017) undertook a vivid summarisation of the advantages inherent combining the quantitative and qualitative approaches. They observed that mixed methods research allows the researcher to apply statistical techniques for data analysis, reduce the risk of subjectivity, easily calculate association between study variables and ensure rigor of the process while also being able to extract in-depth findings, get detailed data useful for revealing nuances and seek clarification necessary to put empirical data into context. It is these advantages that the researcher sought to exploit in order to achieve a robust investigation of the subject matter. In line with the definition of a mixed methods study as a study involving the application of at least two data gathering methods in a piece of scientific inquiry (Fusch et al., 2018), the usage of questionnaires and in-depth interview technique to collect data was considered adequate to elicit robust data for analysis.

The focus of this study was 86 clergy members of CITAM based in Kenya who constituted the accessible population. A census study was conducted. Altogether, there were 25 assemblies located in various parts of Kenya, with majority of the assemblies based in Nairobi. The rest were scattered over five counties including Machakos County, Kajiado County, Kisumu County, Nakuru County, Uasin Gishu County, Kiambu County, Nyeri County and Kisii County.

According to Denscombe (2014), 'population' mean all the people from which the samples are drawn. The focus of this study was 86 clergy members of CITAM. The individual in-depth interviews were conducted with 12 purposively selected senior level clergy members of CITAM based at its Head Office because of their privileged position to influence the provision of psychosocial resources to their employees as policymakers since they are both the creators and beneficiaries of policy. This includes members of the Deacon Board and the Elders' Council. Clergy who were not members of the Deacon Board and Elders' Council were excluded from in-depth interviews because of their less privileged position to provide most of the insights into measures instituted by the church to mitigate clergy burnout since they only benefit from it but have no power to create policy. Among the questions asked included: to what extent do you feel the church support its clergy? What mechanisms are there in place to help clergy deal with some of the challenges of the job? What do the church do to make clergy work less stressful? Martinez-Mesa et al. (2016) argue that whenever possible, census-based techniques should be adopted in research as it eliminates the risk of sampling errors. Thus, census was conducted instead of sampling because the accessible population of 86 clergy members of CITAM was small and therefore, collecting data from all clergy in CITAM Kenya

was possible. Although this approach imposed budgetary, time and logistical implications, it was favoured since reliability of statistical estimates was assured.

Clergy burnout was investigated using a modified version of Malasch Burnout Inventory for Human Services Survey (MBI-HSS) (Faye-Dumanget et al. 2017; Malasch et al., 2016). Data on psychosocial resources was gathered using researcher-developed tool after establishing its validity and reliability. All institutional clearances were obtained before gathering data. Descriptive statistical techniques as well as inferential analysis were used to analyse quantitative data while qualitative findings were subjected to thematic analysis.

## Results

A total of 60 questionnaires were successfully filled and returned out of the 86 that were distributed. The remaining 26 questionnaires comprised of incomplete data and clergy who did not respond due to lack of time. Table 1 presents the minimum (Min), maximum (Max), mean ( $\mu$ ) and standard deviation ( $\sigma$ ) scores of psychosocial resources items on a 5-point scale. The table shows that the overall psychosocial support was 3.75 on a scale of 1 to 5.

**Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Psychosocial Resources Items**

Psychosocial resources	Min	Max	$\mu$	$\sigma$	N
I like putting every adversity that come my way in God's perspective	1	5	4.37	0.94	60
I always focus on the brighter side of life in every situation.	1	5	3.97	0.97	60
As part of my philosophy of life, I try to get failures quickly behind me	1	5	3.60	1.20	60
I receive a lot of support from the church community	1	5	3.57	1.11	60
I am a member of a peer support group which help us deal with some of the challenges	1	5	3.50	1.30	60
Generally, I would describe myself as a very out-going person	1	5	3.50	1.07	60
Overall psychosocial support	1	5	3.75	0.72	60

This implies that majority of the respondents did receive psychosocial support from the church community. As pertains whether respondents always focused on the brighter side of life in every situation, a high mean score was obtained ( $\mu=3.97$ ,  $\sigma=0.97$ ,  $N=60$ ). In terms of whether respondents liked putting every adversity that come their way in God's perspective, a high mean score was obtained ( $\mu=4.37$ ,  $\sigma=0.94$ ,  $N=60$ ), suggesting that most of the respondents put into perspective every perspective according to God's word. This was taken to imply that members of CITAM clergy tapped into their spiritual resources to manage the stresses that accompany ministry, hence acting as a protective factor against burnout. Respondents were asked whether they received a lot of support from the church community. The overall measure of psychosocial support as revealed by the descriptive analysis on a 5-point scale was moderately high ( $\mu=3.75$ ,  $\sigma=0.72$ ,  $N=60$ ) implying that on average, members of CITAM clergy did receive psychosocial support to mitigate against challenges of ministry. A moderately high mean score was computed ( $\mu=3.57$ ,  $\sigma=1.11$ ,  $N=60$ ). Therefore, majority of the respondents received support from the church community. This was taken to imply that most of the clergy

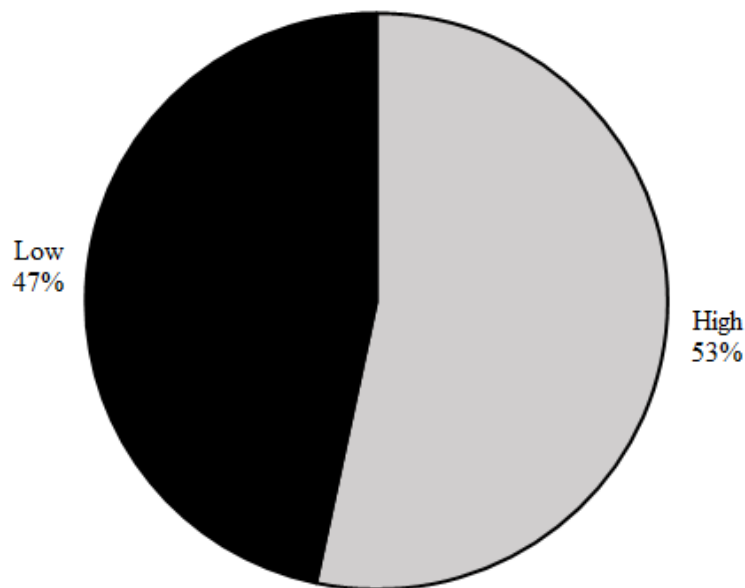
members of CITAM enjoyed a lot of social support from the church community. Respondents were asked whether they were members of peer support group which helps in dealing with some of the challenges of life. A moderately high mean score was obtained ( $\mu=3.50$ ,  $\sigma=1.30$ ,  $N=60$ ), implying that on average, members of CITAM clergy were part of peer support system found in the church. Respondents were also asked whether they would describe themselves as very out-going persons. The mean score obtained on a 5-point scale was moderately high ( $\mu=3.50$ ,  $\sigma=1.07$ ,  $N=60$ ). This means that most of the members of CITAM clergy had an outgoing personality. Given that clergy work involves dealing with people's issues, the outgoing personality of the clergy members was potentially a personal resource for most of them.

The quantitative finding is corroborated by results from in-depth interviews which revealed that majority of the clergy members focused on God through prayer and deeper relationship with him in the face of adversity. This was revealed in the response from SLC 1 who drew strength from fellowship with and faith in God: "I talk to God and believe God is sovereign. Celebrates every little success. Even in failure, God does not make mistakes." Others like SLC 2 established a structured way to manage stress through debriefing sessions besides practicing spiritual disciplines of prayer and fasting: "Have monthly meetings with the bishop to share the failures. The bishop prays with me. Mourn over the failure. Spend time in prayer and fasting." For SLC 3, a time for reflection helped: "Stop and take a break. Ask what went wrong. Learn my lessons and pick up again. Failure is woven in our success stories. Focus on the relationship with God (being righteous and getting up)." Others like SLC 4 were more discrete in the way they handled failure: "Crying from inside and cry in. deal with failures in closed doors and communicates directly to the Lord."

From both quantitative and qualitative analysis of the findings, it is clear that religiosity played a significant role as a psychosocial resource that members of CITAM clergy exploited to overcome burnout in ministry. This is consistent with the scriptural link between seeking God and mental health as revealed in one of Apostle Paul's letters, where he insinuated that trusting in God results in being filled with peace and joy and overflowing hope (Romans 15:13). Related findings is reflected in the responses from interviews with senior clergy who generally described the attitude of the flock towards ministry as positive although with less optimism as implied in the response of SLC 1: "In evangelism – more cooperative. Receives truths (message) in a more understanding way. Discipleship – 'a prophet is not appreciated in their home' by virtue of staying with them, walking with them, they do not appreciate as much." For SLC 4, discouragement was the exception rather than the norm: "They are responsive, respectfully, trusting. One or two cases leave you discouraged – by being disrespectful." However, SLC 5 was less impressed with the attitude of the congregation: "Two attitudes that come strongly: A few embrace the vision of the church in actively practicing and participating in church activities. The majority stand on the fence where they do little or nothing."

Figure 1 summarises the overall score into two categories: high availability of psychosocial resources and low availability of psychosocial resources. The findings in figure 1 indicates that 53% of the respondents reported that psychosocial resources were highly available while 47% of the respondents reported otherwise. Therefore, most of the members of CITAM clergy were of the view that psychosocial resources were available. This finding is corroborated by in-depth interview results with senior clergy members of CITAM who testified that the feedback they received from the church was good, suggesting that as clergy, they did receive psychosocial

support from the church community. This was evident from the response of SLC 1: “Good feedback. Doing well in ministering. Thank you notes. There are also a few complains. For complaints on the content and presentation of ministry. Kind of conflict between the flock and the evangelism team on content.” The experience of SLC 3 was all positive: “It’s positive. Have really thrived. Church planting. I get recognition for my work in the community.” However, while SLC 4 concurred, he also identified room for improvement in terms of visitation: “Doing well but could do better – by visiting homes. Reaching to them directly.” The most upbeat respondent was SLC 5 who said the feedback was excellent: “General feeling is excellent for the congregation. They are actually thinking about raising money to construct a permanent church. They are inclined to give because they feel they are giving their own.”



**Figure1: Overall Availability of Psychosocial Resources**

Further results from in-depth interviews with senior clergy of CITAM suggested that there were a variety of psychosocial support systems in place to protect members of the clergy against adverse effects of burnout on mental health. The most salient included support system and structures that allows for social interaction and debriefing within the organisation. For instance, SLC 1 took note of the retreat opportunities, marriage counselling groups and the availability of elders who support in ministry. For SLC 3, there existed proper support system from the leadership which was helpful in dealing with challenges of ministry. In support, SLC4 enumerated the various psychosocial support systems in the church: “Performance management systems, mid and end year appraisals, quarterly pastors meetings, staff meetings, personal meetings, pastors and spouses retreats, days off, facilitation to the gym, a book alliance, fellowship with elders and deacons, marriage couples care groups, pre-marital counselling classes.”

Further in-depth interview results with senior clergy members of CITAM who testified that the feedback they received from the church was good, suggesting that as clergy, they did receive psychosocial support from the church community. This was evident from the response of SLC 1: “Good feedback. Doing well in ministering. Thank you notes. There are also a few complains. For complaints on the content and presentation of ministry. Kind of conflict between the flock and the evangelism team on content.” The experience of SLC 3 was all

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Pearson's rank correlation analysis was run on the composite scores of burnout, psychological resources and mental health of clergy as well as the interaction between burnout and psychosocial resources. Table 2 presents the output at  $p < .05$ . The findings reveal that burnout had a statistically significant negative effect on mental health ( $r = -.286$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $N = 60$ ). This means that mental health increased with decrease in burnout. The table also shows that mental health was positively correlated to psychosocial resources, though the relationship was not statistically significant ( $r = .243$ ,  $p > .05$ ,  $N = 60$ ). This was taken to imply that although mental health improved with increase in psychosocial resources, the direct contribution of psychosocial resources to mental health of members of the clergy was weak. Further, there was a weaker and statistically insignificant negative correlation of mental health with the interaction term between burnout and psychosocial resources ( $r = -.194$ ,  $p > .05$ ,  $N = 60$ ). This was taken to imply that the significance of the effect of burnout on clergy mental health was eliminated by psychosocial resources. Thus, it can be inferred that psychosocial resources reduced the negative influence of burnout on mental health from significance to a level of insignificance.

**Table 2: Correlation of Mental Health with Burnout, Psychosocial Resources and the Interaction between Burnout and Psychosocial Resources**

Spearman's rho		1	2	3	4
1. Mental health	Correlation Coefficient	1.000			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.			
	N	60			
	Correlation Coefficient	-.286*	1.000		
2. Burnout	Sig. (2-tailed)	.027	.		
	N	60	60		
	Correlation Coefficient	.243	-.108	1.000	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.061	.413	.	
3. Psychosocial Resources	N	60	60	60	
	Correlation Coefficient	-.194	.853**	.361**	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.138	.000	.005	.
	N	60	60	60	60

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

\*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).



## Discussion

The findings demonstrated that CITAM clergy exhibited self-efficacy which potentially cushioned them against the adverse effects of burnout from clergy work. This finding agrees with empirical results by Barnard and Curry (2012) which showed clergy who are kind towards themselves in the face of failure or stress are less likely to experience burnout, and; by extension, report higher levels of mental health. The study established that majority of the respondents focused on the brighter side of life. This means that most of the members of CITAM clergy maintained a positive mental attitude about life, which potentially protected against burnout associated with clergy work. This agrees with life-stress viewpoint which, according to Miles and Proeschold-Bell (2013), lend credence to the idea that personal resources moderate the effect of life stressors on mental health.

It was found that most of CITAM clergy put into perspective every perspective according to God's word. This finding is in line with Muse et al. (2016) whose study conducted among Roman Catholic priests revealed that one of the most significant variables in the low burnout rates among Roman Catholic priests working an average of 63 hours a week were the inner peace of feeling personally close to God. Further results showed that clergy received social support from the church community, implying that the general interaction of members of CITAM clergy with the church congregation was positive and supportive. This potentially contributed to the low incidences of burnout among members of the clergy, thereby supporting the argument that social support was an important factor in the equation between burnout and mental health of clergy. The finding disagrees with the assertion by Gauger and Christie (2013) that the clergy experience more negative interaction from congregants such as criticisms, distress calls, conflict with parishioners, forceful resignations, discouragement and rejection which have deleterious effects on their mental health. The finding is supportive of the results of a previous study by Proeschold-Bell et al. (2015) which found that social support from the church community made a significant contribution to clergy mental health.

Results showed that the church had put in place peer support systems to offer psychosocial support for members of its clergy as they undertook clergy work. The finding is in line with the perspective of Miles and Proeschold-Bell (2013) who drew from a number of studies to argue that support from peers can buffer clergymen against occupational stress and burnout through being an emotional outlet and avenue for comparison. In keeping with their viewpoint, this study lends credence to the argument that relief can be gained from such peer groups because they provide understanding, support and forum for emotional release. This is because members can compare notes during such peer interactions, encourage each other and share wisdom that help stressed out clergymen to cope. This finding on peer support goes contrary to the observations made in the US by Chartrand (2015) who noted that having no one they consider a close friend was one of the risk factors to clergy burnout and poor mental health. The finding also contradicts the findings of a study by Ruto (2015) which identified lack of cooperation from congregants and peers as major triggers of burnout among members of the clergy. This difference in research results signals to the potential existence of country-level and organisational level differences. It is noteworthy that Chartrand (2015) did his study in US which is characterized by an individualist culture as opposed to Kenya which is more communal. The results are in line with Conservation of Resource Theory which postulates that in a work environment, among the major resources available to workers are social support (Chen et al., 2015).

## Conclusion

Members of CITAM clergy had access to a variety of psychosocial resources. There were organisational factors that served to protect clergy members from burnout. These can be classified into factors that relate to good human resource management practices (meetings, retreats, recreational facilities and days off) and those that provide the psychosocial support structures and systems within the church community (counselling, fellowships, and care groups). The psychosocial resources were instrumental in mitigating the adverse effects of burnout on clergy mental health. While burnout negatively impacted on clergy mental health, the psychosocial resources helped reduce the effect of burnout to a level from significance to insignificance.

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