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Impact of Stress among the Clergy in the Indian Orthodox Church: Implications on Stress Management and Orthodox Psychotherapy

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Abstract:

The aim of the study is to measure the stress among the clergy in the Indian orthodox church. For this study the researcher takes the 75 samples, 25 each from three dioceses namely thumpamon, kollam and kottayam. The study is primarily an empirical research using Quantitative methods. The following objectives were proposed for the study. 1. To study the effect of stress among the clergy of the Indian Orthodox Church. 2. To study the impact of Diocese, Age income, Education, Marital status, Duration in Ministry, Number of families in parish, Employment status of spouse, Living arrangement, Number of children, Occupation of children, on the stress of the study group. 3. To study the impact of stress among the married and unmarried clergy. From the analysis of the data it is found that there is an adverse effect of stress on the group. Stress is found to have a negative impact among the married Clergy is less than that of the unmarried. The study concluded with suggestions with stress management techniques and orthodox psychotherapy to the Church, Ashrams and Family of the Clergy.

Keywords: Clergy, Stress, Life Satisfaction, orthodox psychotherapy, Indian Orthodox Church.

1. Introduction

‘Stress’ is a universal human experience. It is generally believed that in earlier periods the intensity of stress in Asian Families was low because of the traditional and authoritarian network of families. Recently, the influence of postmodern life style along with the socio-cultural changes have paved the way for stress related issues in every aspect of family and social life. Family as the basic unit of society, particularly, the men in societies bear the negative effect of stress.

Recent Asian studies on stress and coping have a tendency to go along Western lines. A comprehensive account of research on stress in Indian perspective is seen in the works of (Pestonjee, et al.1985, p.16). These studies reveal the major thrusts of Asian Studies. One is to replicate Western findings in Asian Context, for which most of them use Western constructs and tools with a few local adaptations. The other is to identify the indigenous patterns of stress and coping as culture-specific manifestations for which many of the studies use locally developed tools (Lam, DJ, & palsane, MN ,1997, p.35)

Pestonjee identified three important sectors of life in which stress originated. These are (i) job stress and organization (ii) social sector and (iii) intrapsychic sector which include those which are intimate, personal, and specific to the individual.

1.1. Concepts

The term stress can be defined in at least four different ways.

- i. As the stimulus or external force acting on the organism,
- ii. The response or changes in the psychological functions,
- iii. The interaction between an external force and the resistance opposed to it,
- iv. As a comprehensive phenomenon encompassing all the three (Mason, J.W, 1975, p.18).

In the seventeenth century ‘stress’ was used to mean hardship, straits, adversity or affection (Oxford Dictionary, 1933). During the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, it has been used to indicate strain, pressure or strong effort. ‘Stress’ means a bodily or mental tension resulting from factors that tend to alter an existent equilibrium (Webster Merriam, 1988). Stress has also been considered as a set of psychological or behavioral responses (Albert, Pepitone 1967, p.182). Boss defined “family stress as a disturbance in the organization and process of family life, although individuals perceive and react to stress, it may act as the resources of the family that explain the successful management of stress” (Boss, P.G, 1987, p.141). Referring to Szilagyi and Wallance, Mathew defined stress “as an internal experience that creates a psychological or physiological imbalance with an individual and results from factors in the

external environment, the organization, or the individual (Mathew, M. J, 1993, p.131). Pestonjee cites selye (1956) and defines stress as “any external event or any internal drive which threatens to upset the organismic equilibrium (Pestonjee, DM, 1999, p.17).

Vickers defines stress as “the occurrence of psychological, physiological or behavioral symptoms which imply impaired physical or mental health (Vickers, 1979, p.33-34)” Thus stress may be taken as any response to stress falling in to the following categories.

- a. Psychological strain such as job dissatisfaction, anxiety, and low self – esteem,
- b. Psychological strain such as high blood pressure or elevated serum cholesterol level,
- c. Behavioral symptoms of stress such as smoking and drug and alcohol abuse.

1.2. Indian Concept

The origin of stress can be traced out from ancient Indian thought. Many concepts have been developed by the ancient Indian scholars related to the phenomenon of stress. The negative effects of stress and the methods for coping with stress are also developed by them. Some of them are as follows: dukha, Klesa, adhi and prajanapardha (Pestonjee, 1999, p.27). This system mentions three types of stresses: Personal, physiological and psychological (Pestonjee, 1999, p.27-28), Situational stress. In the Indian context, catastrophic events are often attributed to supernatural causes and are assumed to be due to the accumulation of sins (D, Sinha, 1954, p.60).

In the light of the above, (Pestonjee, 1999, p.28-29) has suggested that during threat appraisal the condition of alarm is characterized by cognitive processes combining energy mobilization, emotions, and organic changes. (Pestonjee, 1999, p.29) views the above model proposed in the ‘Yogasutra’ as a comprehensive one which incorporates cognitive structuring, affective or emotional stages and adaptive reasons.

1.3. Occupational Stress

Occupational stress can be defined as the physiological and emotional response that occurs when workers perceive an imbalance between their work demands and their capability or resources to meet these demands. Importantly, stress responses occur when the imbalance is such that the worker perceives they are not coping in situations where it is important to them that they cope. Different levels of stress are associated with different occupations (Lam, Palsane, 1997, p.35). Occupational stress is not a disease. Worker’s responses to stressors may be positive or negative depending on the type of demands placed on them.

2. Review of Literature

As far as the researcher’s knowledge is concerned, there has not been any previous research on. “Stress among the Clergy and its effects on Life Satisfaction in the Indian Orthodox Church and Implications for Pastoral Care and Counseling”. Some early studies related to this field are; PW. Blanton, and Morris, ML studies about ‘Work-related predictors of physical symptom and emotional well-being among clergy and spouses’. Wolfradt conduct the analysis about ‘Sleep behaviors, life satisfaction and perceived performance stress in school’. T.Yoshimura conducted the study about ‘Prospective cohort study of stress, life satisfaction, self-rated health, insomnia, and suicide death ‘the locale is in Japan.E .Huovinen conduct psychopathological study about ‘Asthma in relation to personality traits, life satisfaction, and stress: a prospective study among 11 000 adults’. JA. Mäkinen conduct the research in ‘The differential effects of project stress on life-satisfaction’. Shirley Foster Hartley conducted a field research in among the clergy wife’s. The study is’ Marital Satisfaction among Clergy Wives’ A 138-item questionnaire was completed by 448 wives of clergy in six mainline Protestant denominations, chosen to represent relatively orthodox to liberal theologies.

2.1. Understanding Clergy Stress: A Psycho Spiritual Response

In spiritual terms, stress is considered a threat to one’s spiritual well being and includes: interruption of prayer life, a sense of loss of God’s love and care, and a lack of trust in God and in His Church. Orthodox clergy face the same chronic stress events as the general population. In addition, they have the events common to a hierarchical church: the episcopacy and a parish council both often presuming they have control over the priest. On the surface these common events may appear beginning but when faced day after day for long durations they tend to have a cumulative effect (A. Delongis, et.al, 1988, p.486-495) are similar to the effects of PTSD and ASD.

2.2. Special Condition of Orthodox Clergy

Among Orthodox clergy there are three major stressors are reported: Being under the control and misunderstood by the hierarch, being considered an employee of the Parish Council who has the final say in all administrative matters, for clergy with family the demands of being husband and father.

St. John of Kronstadt demonstrates the nature and responsibility of the Christian priesthood: a worthy priest, who, like the seraphim, would burn before the Lord with love, praise and gratitude for the wonders of His mercy and His wisdom ... As a light and heat are inseparable from the sun, so should holiness, a zeal to teach, and love and compassion for all, be inseparable from the person of the priest. For whose dignity does he bear? Christ’s ... God Himself ... By myself I am nothing, but by the grace of the priesthood I become the means of healing. Though me the grace of the Holy Spirit gives new life; the Body and Blood of Christ to the faithful ... uniting them with God (St. John of Kronstadt, 1994).

2.3. Orthodox Psychotherapy and Clergy

The term refers to "the process of spiritual growth and development" as used in the Eastern Orthodox Church. In this context, it is a theological term rather than medical or psychological term. The term is not limited to traditional psychotherapy used to treat psychological problems, but it rather refers to all people by dealing with their core existential issues. Metropolitan Hierotheos introduced the phrase through his homonymous book. Finally, psychotherapy is an important task of the Orthodox theology. It is also an important aspect, which forms "mentality" of people, which is historically related to the culture of the Christian East. And finally, it can be an interesting suggestion in matter of Human spirituality.

2.4. Statement of the Problem

The study intends to measure the stress among the clergy in the Indian Orthodox Church. It also proposes to investigate the relationship between the stress of clergy and its effects on Life satisfaction.

2.5. Objectives

- i. To study the life satisfaction of the clergy in the Indian Orthodox Church
- ii. To study the effect of stress on the Life Satisfaction.
- iii. To study the impact of Diocese, Age, income, Education, Marital status, Number of families in parish on the life satisfaction of the Study group.
- iv. To study the impact of stress on the life satisfaction of married and unmarried clergy

3. Research Methodology

The universe of the study consisted of Orthodox Clergy working in three dioceses. The sample for the study was selected from Orthodox Clergy of Kerala state, from three Diocese namely Kottayam, Kollam and Thumpamon, a group of married Clergy and unmarried clergies. The sample included 75 clergies in the age group between 28 -62 years from three diocese of Kerala state. The tools are distributed and collected from 83 clergies. Randomly selected 75 clergies, 25 from each diocese. The study uses quantitative data analysis method.

3.1. Tools and Techniques

The tools for sampling are the following;

- i. Schedule for socio-demographic and background information
- ii. Stress Rating Scale

In addition to these qualitative questions were added to the inventory to elicit important information from the respondents. A Stress Rating Scale (R.R. Rundall and E.M. Altmaier1994) standardized by D. Barnabas (2001). In addition to this a data sheet was used. The statistical test applied for the present study were t-test, chi-square test, Analysis of Variance (one-way ANOVA) and Duncan's test.

Age		
	Frequency	Percent
Up to 30 Years	7	9.3
30-40 years	23	30.7
40-50 years	21	28.0
50-60 years	13	17.3
Above 60 years	11	14.7
Total	75	100.0

Table 1: Distribution of Sample According to Age

Table 1.0 shows the frequency distribution of age among five groups. Age group 1 is up to 30 years, group 2 is 30 - 40 years, group 3 is 40-50 years, group 4 is 50-60 years and group 5 is Above 60 years.

Monthly Income		
	Frequency	Percent
Below Rs 5000	26	34.7
Rs 5000-10000	39	52.0
Rs 10000-25000	10	13.3
Total	75	100.0

Table 2: Distribution of Sample According to Monthly Income

Table 2.0 shows the frequency distribution of monthly income among three groups. Group1 is below 5000 Rs, group 2 is 5000 – 10000 Rs, and group 3 is 10000-25000 Rs.

General Education		
	Frequency	Percent
Under graduates	6	8.0
Graduates	44	58.7
Post Graduates	25	33.3
Total	75	100.0

Table 3: Distribution of Sample According to General Education

Table 3.0 shows the frequency distribution of general education among three groups. Group1 is Under Graduate, group 2 is Graduate, and group 3 is Post Graduate.

Marital Status		
	Frequency	Percent
Married	52	69.3
Unmarried	23	30.7
Total	75	100.0

Table 4: Distribution of Sample According to Marital Status

Table 4.0 shows the frequency distribution of marital status among two groups. Group1 is Married, group 2 is Unmarried.

Duration of Ministry		
	Frequency	Percent
Up to 5 years	17	22.7
5-10 years	12	16.0
10-20 years	17	22.7
20-35 years	14	18.7
Above 35 years	15	20.0
Total	75	100.0

Table 5: Distribution of Sample According to Duration of Ministry

Table 5.0 shows the frequency distribution of duration of ministry five groups. Group 1 is up to 5 years, group 2 is 5-10 years, group 3 is 10-20 years, group 4 is 20-35 years and group 5 is Above 35 years

No of families in Parish		
	Frequency	Percent
Below 100	23	30.7
100-500	39	52.0
Above 500	13	17.3
Total	75	100.0

Table 6: Distribution of Sample According to No of Families in Parish

Table 6.0 shows the frequency distribution of no of families in parish among three groups. Group1 is below 100, group 2 is 100-500, and group 3 is Above 500.

Theology Education		
	Frequency	Percent
Under graduates	26	34.7
Graduates	42	56.0
Post Graduates	7	9.3
Total	75	100.0

Table 7: Distribution of Sample According to Theological Education

Table 7.0 shows the frequency distribution of theological education among three groups. Group1 is Under Graduate, group 2 is Graduate, and group 3 is Post Graduate.

Duration of Marital Life		
	Frequency	Percent
Up to 5 years	9	17.3
5-10 years	16	30.8
10-20 years	16	30.8
20-35 years	11	21.2
Total	52	100.0

Table 8: Distribution of Sample According to Duration of Marital Life

Table 8.0 shows the frequency distribution of duration of ministry four groups. Group 1 is up to5 years, group 2 is 5-10 years, group 3 is 10-20 years, and group 4 is 20-35 years

3.2. Life Satisfaction Scores and Stress

Testing whether life satisfaction scores differ with stress. Statistical tool used is one-way ANOVA. There is no significant difference between the life satisfaction scores of clergy belonging to various stress groups.

ANOVA					
Life Satisfaction Score					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	10349.671	2	5174.836	20.819	.000
Within Groups	17896.275	72	248.559		
Total	28245.947	74			

Table 9

Since the value of F statistic is 20.82 which are significant at 0.01 level, we reject the null hypothesis. Thus life satisfaction scores of the clergy differ with various stress groups.

The life satisfaction scores of all the three stress groups are significantly different when taken pair-wise.

3.3. Stress and Marital Status

Stress * Marital Status Crosstabulation					
			Marital Status		Total
			Married	Unmarried	
Stress	Low	Count	17	4	21
		% within Marital Status	32.7%	17.4%	28.0%
	Medium	Count	25	7	32
		% within Marital Status	48.1%	30.4%	42.7%
	high	Count	10	12	22
		% within Marital Status	19.2%	52.2%	29.3%
Total		Count	52	23	75
		% within Marital Status	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 10

The value of chi-square statistic is 8.396 which is significant at 0.05 level. Hence we reject the null hypothesis. Thus stress and marital status are associated. Stress is less in the case of married clergy than unmarried ones.

3.4. Stress and Marital Status

Stress is less in the case of married clergy than unmarried ones. It is surmised that stress is a factor related with one's work place routine and the family could be a good soothing platform. The null hypothesis is not tenable.

3.5. Implications

Often clergy men cannot open their problems to others because their self esteem is in high level. From the present experience of the ministry and the information from the study, it is essential that the clergy men have to get some mental support and counseling. The awareness for the spouse of the married priests is an important matter. In the "Baskiyomo" (partner of priest) association meeting, classes must be conduct.

Unmarried priests should not be left to live alone. Ashram should give opportunity to handle emotional problems of members in a healthy way. Adequate Financial support should be given to the clergy in order to overcome the financial problems. The Priest Welfare Fund should be function properly. Healthy relaxation techniques are essential to the clergy men; hearing to good music, preaching, yoga, breathing exercise, and meditation are also good.

The following means are suggested for stress management in the priestly ministry

- i. Commitment to the Vocation
- ii. Sharing Problems through healthy interpersonal relationships.
- iii. Rest and recreation
- iv. Practice of stress management techniques, orthodox faith and orthodox psychotherapy.
- v. Personal Prayer (Manalel, George, 2006, p.109).
 - A. Prayer gives the person a sense of security
 - B. It restores emotional equilibrium thus restoring calm and peace to the psyche
 - C. It solidifies and stabilizes ego- strength.
 - D. It enables the individual to transcend human conflicts and tragedies.

Clergy men are called for helping and understanding the difficulties of peoples. They have their own problems. Most often others will consider the clergy men as extra ordinary persons. The stress of the clergymen affects their life satisfaction and it results the ministry adversely. It is believed that the results of the present investigation may provide an awareness regarding the emotional level of Orthodox Clergy and need to improve the situation by adopting adequate measures.

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