Clergy Family Satisfaction

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The minister's family provides a variety of complexities and possibilities for family scholars. This review covers many of the stresses felt by clergy and their families in terms of work and family conflict, specifically those relating to time, role, and behavior conflicts. Additionally, a model which is sensitive to individual differences between clergy families (using a systems approach) while allowing for differences between denominational beliefs and values (using a Troeltschian model) is proposed.

The clergy family as a family unit has been somewhat elusive to family scholars. The denominational structure of each church, of the conjugal-occupational role conflicts of the pastor, and of the professional stigma and stereotypes for all family members serve to present a rather complex family picture. The particular stresses of ministry, of maintaining privacy in a public profession (the "fishbowl existence"), and of negotiating the strain of a two-person/one-career ideal provide more than the typical variables for investigation. The complexity becomes two-fold when considering dual-clergy couples (both spouses are clergy), divorced clergy, and professionally employed spouses.

Although the list of resources for clergy families is fairly extensive (e.g., see Mace & Mace, 1980), the majority focus on the "how-to" components, often providing bland spiritual encouragements to survive the challenges of the ministry. These and other resources are often anecdotal and are typically not published in traditional marriage and family journals. Even with the inception of the Religion and Family Life section of the National Council on Family Relations (NCFR) in 1984, much has been discussed but little published on the clergy family by its membership. The purpose of this review, then, is to focus on the limited research findings and to outline some areas of theoretical import and therapeutic potential for family scholars.

WORK AND THE FAMILY

In some ways, the role of the clergy person in his/her work is little different from that of other professionals. Many professionals experience role strain, conflict between work and family priorities, and even the pressure of public life. Yet, the specifics of the areas of conflict do vary as a result of the role of the clergy. Reviewing the daily life of the clergy family within the context of religious work raises issues for research and therapy.

As indicated in their review of work-family conflict, Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) noted that there are three basic forms of conflict: time-based conflict where multiple

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pressures compete for one's time; strain-based conflict where the employed person feels the strain from multiple roles; and behavior-based conflict where specific behaviors of one role may be incompatible with expectations for behavior in another role. Using this model, specific examples of each type of conflict are readily found in clergy families.

Time-based Conflict

As mentioned in several accounts of ministry burn-out, the demands of the minister are never-ending (Prestwood, 1972; Sanford, 1982; Willimon, 1989). The minister's work is ongoing, and its results often are intangible. The pastor "faces a continuous onslaught of services, weddings, funerals, crises, parish conflicts, holy day celebrations, sick persons to see, shut-ins to visit, classes to teach, and administrative tasks" (Sanford, 1982, p. 5). Additionally, most clergy manage many administrative duties, including denominational paper-work, perpetual (weekly) fund-raising, and coordinating a volunteer staff while meeting the weekly deadlines of sermon and worship preparation. This is typically accomplished without much secretarial support.

Clergy also are "crisis people," involved in "the pains of life, the crises of life and death" (Hulme, 1985, p. 2). Thus, the time spent must be quality time.

Likewise, family issues never are finished. As in other families, children continue to grow and change regardless of the number of committee meetings the parent must attend. Marriages need both quantity and quality time to develop, and cannot stay "on hold" indefinitely. Yet, ministers work a great deal.

In one older study, Koehler (1961) found that half of the 119 ministers' wives surveyed reported that their husbands had not taken one day off in the last month, and only two reported that their spouse had taken one day off each week during the last month. Even with the recent trends of stress reduction and time management, ministers' lives have not changed much. In more recent studies, ministers reported an average work week of 56 hours, with 67% working more than 50 hours a week and 23% working more than 60 hours a week (Orthner, 1986; London, 1983; Mace & Mace, 1980). They averaged being away from home more than 12 evenings a month (Orthner, 1986). Additionally, spouses appeared to be very active in church activities themselves, spending 5-15 hours a week at the church (London, 1983).

While striking, the number of hours worked still does not tell the entire story. Unlike many other professionals, ministers do not have the luxury of being "on call" every other weekend or only certain nights of the week. They are expected to be available at any time, day or night, every day of the week. This time constraint takes on an additional dimension when comparing time-off for modern-day couples. The common work week is Monday through Friday; weekends are for leisure. This is not true for the minister. And if the spouse works a traditional job (Monday through Friday, nine to five) and the children are in school, merely scheduling time-off for leisure becomes a difficult task (Campbell, 1985). Orthner (1986), in his survey of almost 2,000 United Methodist clergy, found lack of time spent with spouse was the primary problem mentioned in clergy families. London (1983), as well as Mace and Mace (1980), found similar results.

Strain-based conflict

Strain-based conflict is seen most clearly in the conjugal-occupational role conflicts felt by clergy and analyzed first by Scanzoni (1965b). For the minister, the ideal is to be

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compassionate and servant-like to all those in need and to serve the church. To meet
the "call" of God, one must be set apart for service, and this often has included all
members of the family. While providing examples of team ministry, it also has
"produced confusion and pain when one, or more, family members feels forced to
conform to a lifestyle that is incongruent with personal intentions and calling" (Rediger,
1986, p. 6). For spouses and children, it is difficult to complain about time spent away
from the family when the minister is serving God. One can hardly complain about a
broken dinner engagement when an elderly spinster has broken a hip. A missed piano
recital is "understandable" in light of the needs of an 8-year-old whose mother has just
been killed tragically in a car accident. Yet, there are times when the minister's own
family needs, however vital, are not heard because they are not habitually the minister's
highest priority.

Family needs are not the only place strain is noticed. London (1983), in a survey
of 1,000 clergy and their spouses, found that when career goals were considered, over
70% of the ministers and their spouses agreed that the clergy role takes precedence over
the spouse's career. While many spouses were homemakers, 30% held professional or
managerial positions. These couples faced the strain of dual conjugal-occupational role
conflicts, both trying to meet the demands of their positions while being supportive
spouses.

Strain also is seen in the pressures of continued public exposure. While many
clergy see their family as a way to present a Christian model to the congregants,
problems also have their way of becoming public. Separation and divorce become
community events, often resulting in the minister losing his/her church appointment.
While teen pregnancy or drug abuse is difficult for most families to handle, for clergy
families, it can be the source of community alienation and perhaps dismissal. Yet,
because of the need to maintain the appropriate public persona, as few as 4% of the
clergy Orthner (1986) surveyed indicated that they would contact either their district
superintendent or bishop in times of personal need, and only 20% would contact another
United Methodist minister. Almost 40% of the clergy indicated moderate to high levels
of psychological isolation, abandonment, and loneliness. "Since the responsibility
of being a pastor requires interactions with and connections to others, feelings of
psychological isolation are a potentially sensitive indicator of a pastor's ability to perform
his or her tasks well" (Orthner, 1986, p. 64). One third of the pastors reported feeling
psychologically vulnerable most or all of the time (Orthner, Moreley, Adams, Brown, &
Camp, 1987). Yet, they feared the stigma of seeking professional counseling. One
minister wrote, "Many ministers are afraid to seek help. I believe they fear
confidentiality and view seeking help as a weakness" (Orthner et al., 1987, p. 41).
Orthner (1986; Orthner et al., 1987) found that many ministers were afraid that
expressing the need for counseling or seeking professional help would affect the
appointment process. After voluntary hospitalization for depression and a three month
disability leave, one minister found that his new church size (and salary) were
considerably reduced. He wrote, "My personal life and relationships are the best ever.
My career went down the tubes when I sought help" (Orthner et al., 1987, p. 41).

Behavior-based Conflicts

Behavior-based conflicts present the most unique problems for clergy and their
families. Mace and Mace (1980) found that as the resident "Holy Family," ministers
were "almost obsessed with the feeling that they are expected to be superhuman and to
provide models for the congregation and the community" (p. 41). Furthermore, these
idealistie expectations generated guilt and depression. As one minister stated,
"Congregations desperately need clergy marriages to work. They think that if their

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ministers can't make it work, how can they? That's an awful burden" (Gilbert, 1987, p. 15).

To cope with church members, clergy often develop strategies that are ineffective, if not destructive, at home. For example, lack of self-disclosure is one strategy for dealing with the fishbowl existence; yet low levels of self-disclosure are associated with poor marital relationships and parent-child relationships (Cozby, 1973). Spouses and clergy may value honesty and integrity in their personal relationships, but complete honesty with parishioners may not be politically astute. Mace and Mace (1980) found that clergy and their spouses both reported difficulty expressing themselves in their families. Nearly one-third had difficulty expressing positive feelings toward each other, while an even greater percentage has trouble expressing their negative feelings. Nearly half felt that they were unable to resolve conflict in an acceptable manner.

Isolation from others besides family also is a common occurrence among clergy families. The pressure to be model families takes on dramatic consequences when considered in the context of clergy family support and structure. Orthner (1986) found that 64% of the pastors cited their spouses as their primary confidant. Only 18% of the pastors surveyed indicated that they were very likely to go to friends in times of stress, while 58% indicated that they were only somewhat likely to go to their friends. Similar studies also have reported that about 50% of minister's surveyed listed their spouse as their best friend (Mace & Mace, 1980; Warlick, 1982). While on the surface it may be comforting to see this bond between clergy and spouse, it is important to note that typically both partners are under time and role strain, and both partners usually must deal with the same parishioners and the same church problems. With no outside source of support, continually pouring frustrations and stress into an already stressed environment could create a 'Black Hole' of emotion, with family members feeling more isolated and fragmented from the world at large, and having fewer and fewer resources for each other.

Pastor's children also feel this behavior-based conflict, and it is seen most likely in the anecdotal literature regarding P.K.'s ("preacher's kids"). For example, it is not uncommon for adolescents in general to experiment with alcohol, and to enjoy movies and dances. Church authorities, however, may not approve and may even try to hold the minister's child to a higher standard than they do for their own children. Solutions are difficult to find. One minister's son reported developing what he called "a kind of schizophrenia. I had a split personality. I acted loveable when I was in the presence of people in the church and I would be a 'holy terror' when I was in the presence of my friends" (London, 1983, p. 147). Others expressed a great deal of conflict regarding social life and moral values, particularly in the areas of pre-marital sex, and alcohol and drug use. Some reported less than subtle hints by community members. One pastor reported, "My son came home from school where his teacher told him he should behave differently because he is the minister's son" (London, 1983, p. 158). Even parents may put undue pressure on their children. Ministers, afraid of the public outcry, sometimes control their children by asking, "What will people say?" For the minister who preaches that one does what is right regardless of the public reaction, such a question seems incongruous and hypocritical. Yet, the parents "are under pressure to perform, to be superspiritual, to give leadership, etc., and they pass these same pressures on to their children by extension" (Bouma, 1979, p. 69).

It would appear, then that work and family conflicts are abundant in the minister's family. Time, role, and behavior conflicts may all be understood in the context of this particular family type. From this perspective, it is clear that ministers' families are not exempt from stressful conflicts between work and family. Yet, additional questions remain about the public pressures and the differential treatment clergy receive in the workplace, as well as the family issues associated with these pressures.
remain for the researcher interested in the interplay of religion and family. Aside from the public life, aside from the work and family conflicts, is the minister’s family really different from other families? How might religious structure and belief systems change the way a family operates? And, how can we intervene in these families to reduce stress and provide support?

FAMILY STRUCTURE

While the preceding questions are too broad to completely address here, an investigation of structure might be useful in conceptualizing the family system of clergy families. Assessments of the family system which consider the religious organizational structure can describe and explain some of the daily struggles and conflicts experienced by clergy families. For example, time, role, and behavior-strain all may be clarified in terms of boundary ambiguity. However, it is interesting to consider the effect of religious commitments and values on the establishment of boundaries.

While the broader issues related to religiosity and commitment are dealt with elsewhere in this special issue (e.g., see Larson’s review of marital and religious commitment), the specific relation found in the minister’s family presents a unique forum. Ministers’ families continually resolve and relate family religious precepts. Yet, as a whole, clergy families represent a variety of structures and behavioral practices.

Religious values and behaviors vary from denomination to denomination, and from clergy to clergy. While drinking is considered a sin in some denominations, in others wine is served at communion. Whereas dancing is considered licentious in some denominations, for others dancing is an important part of the sacramental celebrations of baptism and marriage. Likewise, a major theological tenet of the Christian faith is that of suffering for a greater cause. Thus, the more committed one is, the more one is willing to suffer and sacrifice. Yet, sacrifice and suffering are interpreted differently by different churches and clergy.

Religiosity also affects behaviors in families. For example, Ranck (1961) found that more religiously conservative persons were more likely to emphasize discipline, and to promote the gender identities of the dominant-assertive male and the rigidly conservative female. Religiously liberal persons placed greater emphasis on self-expression, both for themselves and for their children.

Additionally, the stresses of time, role, and behavior outlined previously take on different dimensions when considering the religious orthodoxy of clergy and their congregations. Several researchers (Hadden, 1968; Schuller, Strommen, & Brekke, 1980) have indicated that congregations and clergy, both conservative and liberal, differ greatly from each other. They have their own social expectations, and often define the clergy family’s roles in different ways. Although mutual family commitment (agreement between the minister’s deep commitment to family and the family’s commitment to ministry) remained fairly stable across denominations, evangelical and fundamental clergy scored more similarly with their congregations than did more liberal clergy. Discrepancies between clergy and laity expectation of mutual support also were greater among the more liberal denominations (Schuller, 1980). It would be interesting to know, for example, whether such discrepancies lead to additional conflicts for the minister and his/her family.

One possible method of analysis combines family structure with religious organization into a framework which is sensitive to both the influences of religious beliefs...
and values as well as individual differences between families. Specifically, this entails synthesizing the concept of cohesion (from family systems theory) and Troeltsch's typology of religious groups. Cohesion includes the concepts of enmeshment and disengagement of family subsystems, and often focuses on the existing boundaries between subsystems (Olson, Bell, & Porter, 1978). The Troeltsch model, comparing church-and sect-type organizations, is sensitive to differences between denomination, particularly as they relate to societal practices (Scanzoni, 1965a).

As previously indicated, differences between denominations, regarding both perceived biblical mandates and expectations, influence family/church roles as well. Clearly, not all ministers' families value the same religious precepts, nor do they engage in the same religious practices. Thus, ministers' families must be considered in the context of their religious commitments. In other words, what may be quite appropriate behavior in one minister's family, might seem dysfunctional to a scholar, therapist, or, in fact, to another clergy. The issue for the family analyst is to maintain the religious integrity of the minister's family as a whole, while incorporating differences between families. The proposed model, while far from comprehensive, begins to consider the multidimensionality of the minister's family and raises specific issues which could be studied within this context.

This approach provides several methodological benefits. First, it maintains the integrity of the minister's family as it seeks to function within the confines of a specific religious belief system. Secondly, it lends itself to clarifying the specific threats to boundary maintenance. Third, it is directly applicable to therapeutic intervention. In preliminary work, this approach seems to be sensitive to the issues pertinent to all religiously-committed families, but particularly so in the case of the minister's family.

Cohesion

Enmeshment and disengagement, theoretical constructs ordinarily confined to the family structure, may be expanded to include the family as an element of the church system. In this case, the church becomes the basic unit of analysis, and the clergy family becomes one of the subsystems within the church system. The degree of ambiguity between the boundaries of the church and family then becomes the focus (Lee, 1988). For example, the boundaries that separate the minister's family and the church may become rigid; the family may be understood as enmeshed within or disengaged from the church. Likewise, role definition and satisfaction, both professionally and within the family, might be expected to vary depending upon this cohesion dimension.

Sect-type Groups

In his study of role conflict in clergy couples, Scanzoni (1965a) suggested a model for the analysis of the organizational influences. Scanzoni suggested that differing organization and values of a religious group may result in divergent conjugal-occupational roles. Briefly reviewing church-sect differences, sect refers to:

the sectarian approach to Christianity--in the sense that this term was used first by Max Weber and later amplified and systematized by Ernst Troeltsch. Sect-type religious groups, as contrasted with what Weber labeled the church-type group, have always been distinguished by their familiar call "Come ye apart." From its earliest days, Christianity has contained a radical element which stresses the importance of the individual breaching completely with the world and with secular and social relationships, even those of the family. (Lenski, as cited in Scanzoni, 1965b, p. 396)
In sect-type groups, then, families are encouraged to reject society and family, and to maintain a primary bond with the church. In this case, a minister's family may be categorized as enmeshed in the church. Members of this enmeshed subsystem experience a heightened sense of belonging to the church and the congregation in general. This requires, however, a major yielding of autonomy (Minuchin, 1974). In the extreme, the identity of this family is influenced only by its sense of belonging to the church and not by a sense of being a family unit. The boundaries within this system become so diffuse that the church and minister's family become collapsed upon each other, so that it is not clear where one ends and the other begins. Typically, this would be seen as an unsatisfactory way of life, dysfunctional in that it maintains an unbalanced sense of identity. For the sect-type group, however, the goal is: "Breaking completely with the world and with secular and social relationships, even those of the family."

Within this model, then, an enmeshed family might be one in which the primary activities and relationships of the family occur within the church setting and roles are defined in terms of the church. Family members may respond to the minister as minister rather than as father or husband. A clergyman may act as a minister rather than as a father or a husband to his family. External relationships also might be defined in the church-related roles (minister's wife at the ladies' social; preacher's kid at a friend's party).

Church-type Groups

Church-type groups are "identified with society and accepting of it, generally adopting a 'laxist' attitude toward societal norms and values" (Scanzoni, 1965a, p. 3). The church-type group views the family as an ally deserving support. Within the church-type group, members are bound only loosely by the church, and their primary functions, activities, and relationships take place outside the church. The minister's family would be as any other family within the church, disengaged from the church in that they function autonomously from the church. These families may "experience a sense of independence and lack feelings of loyalty and belonging" to the church (Minuchin, 1974, p. 55). These are families who just happen to have a member who is employed by the church. Work roles do not interfere with family roles. A disengaged clergy family would view itself as any other professional family, no different than a lawyer's, professor's, or doctor's family. Roles would be defined primarily outside the church, and the degree of involvement in church activities by family members would probably be minimal, or at least, no more than any other "regular" church member.

Role Expectations

When considering the minister's family, the conjugal-occupational role conflicts outlined by Scanzoni (1965a, 1965b) become increasingly clear. Clergy are not exempt from work and family conflicts. Indeed, many carry over to other family members as well. Likewise, they are not exempt from family pressures experienced by many modern couples. Yet the degree of guilt and the need for being "model" families appear high. To consider these issues separately, however, seems to threaten the integrity of the family—to overlook the fact that in the minister's family these issues can never be separated.

This model, then, considers the effect of church structure (and expectations) on family systems. Following this model, it is possible to begin to predict outcomes for different families. For example, one might expect that a sect-type clergy family will appear more enmeshed in church life. Those who follow the expectation of enmeshment...
might be more highly satisfied with their roles of clergy and family than those who are not enmeshed. On the other hand, church-type clergy families will appear disengaged from the church, with roles and expectations for family involvement less related to church activities. Likewise, those who are mismatched with their organizational type will be less satisfied with their position.

This model may be theoretically intriguing, but empirically, much work still needs to be done. One such example of research is that by Moy and Malony (1987). Fifty-two ministers, spouses, and children were assessed in terms of work behavior of the minister, life satisfaction, and psychological adjustment of the children. Boundaries were found to be high ranges of adaptability, almost to the point of being chaotic. The majority fell in the mid-range between "Balanced" and "Extreme" in terms of family types. It is unclear, however, whether extreme adaptability is a negative reaction to the stresses of ministerial life or a positive adaptation to unbearable stress.

Using the model of church and sect-type organizations within an extended family systems approach may lead to clearer empirical findings. In developing this model for study, it is necessary to note that these typologies are extremes on a continuum. Most families will function somewhere in the middle between enmeshed and disengaged, as most religious organizations function between church and sect. Nevertheless, typologies offer several conceptual and methodological advantages. Conceptually, typologies make it possible to focus on actual families rather than on individual variables because the type incorporates and summarizes the cluster of variables that define each type. Typologies also enable researchers to establish criteria (operationally defined) to determine whenever a family fits a particular type and to distinguish differences between types. Methodologically, typologies allow one to empirically test relations between variables and types, and then to translate those findings directly to the families (Olson, Russell, & Sprengle, 1980).

Additionally, being therapeutic in origin and sensitive to personal differences and systemic changes, this model provides a conceptual framework for studying crisis periods within individual families. For example, a crisis period may occur for a minister's child in adolescence, as he or she attempts to develop an identity beyond the image of "preacher's kid." The resolution of that crisis may be different for the two family types. In a sect-type, enmeshed family, disengagement from the church may include disengagement from the parent as well. In a church-type, disengaged family, relationships with the parents may remain strong even though the adolescent has stopped attending church regularly or begins going to parties. The trend toward women's employment outside the home also may create a crisis for the family-church structure, as the minister's wife attempts to disengage herself from the church and not from her husband. Recent emphasis on helping ministers cope with stress factors in their jobs also requires that they disengage from the church at times so that they will not experience "burn-out" or ultimately leave the church (Gilbert, 1987; Gleason, 1977; Hulme, 1985; MacDonald, 1980; Wilhmon, 1989). Therapy which focuses on differentiation of family members, on establishing firm boundaries, and on "unlocking the triangle" of the minister, family, and the congregation have been suggested as particularly effective means of growth for clergy families (Friedman, 1985; Gilbert, 1987; Hulme, 1985; Whybrew, 1984).

CONCLUSIONS

Ultimately, a review of this type leads to more questions than answers. The complexities of dual-clergy families, the isolation facing single ministers and homosexual ministers, the possibility that divorced ministers and homosexual ministers have not been addressed.

The model to which this paper contributes is the family of the clergy. The family of the clergy is unique because it functions within and outside the church, as well as within the secular community.

With the emphasis on the possibility of a new family structure, the problems of accompanying the pathways of clergy families are more difficult. Family boundary issues are often ignored, but they are crucial in maintaining a healthy family structure, as well as in maintaining a healthy relationship between clergy and the church.

The model of family of the clergy provides a conceptual and theoretical framework for analyzing family structure, as well as for analyzing the problems that can arise in clergy families. The model is not a panacea, but it is a step in the right direction. It is a step towards understanding the complexities of family of the clergy.

References


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ministers, the increasing number of female clergy, and emerging opportunities for divorced and remarried clergy, are all beyond the scope of this initial review, but remain issues which should be addressed by family scholars.

The nature of the relation of religion and family also is not resolved. The degree to which religion positively or negatively influences family interaction and structure still is unclear. While it is complex and cannot be adequately measured in any one family, the clergy family might be an interesting model for study. The effects of religious values as well as societal expectations seem to be heightened in these families.

Within the structure of the clergy family, we find many constraints, yet many possibilities. Although the clergy family is complex in nature and structure, the underlying precepts of family research in general should prove to encourage us rather than discourage us from further investigation. For all the reasons the clergy family is difficult to research (personalities, religious feelings, private versus public sector, boundary ambiguity), it still remains a model of hope for family strength and perseverance for many laypersons and clergy alike. As a model for the integration of religion and family life, the minister's family could serve as a prototype for researchers and therapists as well.

The issues of religion and family can never be separated for the clergy family. To consider them separately violates the integrity of the minister's family. As scholars interested in the interaction of religion and family life, we have considered the effects of one variable on the other. Perhaps considering them as an integrated whole which cannot be separated would provide new insights. In this case, investigating the minister's family seems like a worthy cause.

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The role of religious power in family and church relationships has been a topic of interest for many scholars. The work of sociologists such as Zelizer, who studied the impact of religious institutions on family life, has shed light on the ways in which religious communities shape family dynamics. The comparison of religious families with non-religious families has highlighted the differences in family structures and dynamics. It is quite important to consider the unique aspects of traditional religious families and how they influence family life. Among the various factors, the expansion of religious and national boundaries has greatly affected mainline Protestantism.

The study of religious power in family and church relationships has been collectively known as the "religion and family" agenda. This agenda has sought to unite American religious leaders and scholars in order to understand the dynamics of family and religious institutions.

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