

# THE IMPACT OF SPIRITUAL WELL-BEING, CALLING, AND RELIGIOUS COPING ON BURNOUT, MEDIATED BY JOB STRESSORS, AMONG THAI PROTESTANT PASTORS

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**Abstract:** The present study attempted to investigate the direct and indirect influences of spiritual well-being, calling, and religious coping on burnout among Protestant Thai pastors, being mediated by job stressors. This investigation consisted of two parts (Study 1 and 2) which included the examination of the psychometric properties of five Thai-translated Western-based measures: The Clergy Spiritual Well-Being Scale (CSWS), the Calling and Vocation Questionnaire (CVQ), the Brief Religious Coping (Brief RCOPE), the Challenge and Hindrance Stressors Scale (CHSS), and the Francis Burnout Inventory (FBI). The participants consisted of 505 Thai Protestant pastors aged between 23 to 65 years, recruited from three major Christian church organizations in Thailand. The results revealed that (1) the five Thai-translated measures were psychometrically sound (reliable and valid); (2) both spiritual well-being and calling have direct influences on burnout; (3) only religious coping has an indirect influence on burnout, being mediated by job stressors; (4) the full path model which incorporated the hypothesized direct and indirect influences is a better representation of causal relationships among the variables than the indirect model.

**Keywords:** Spiritual Well-being, Calling, Religious Coping, Burnout, Job Stressors, Thai Protestant Pastors.

## Introduction

The problem of burnout among pastors is significant and had been mentioned as a major reason for pastors having thoughts of leaving the ministry, dropping out, or exiting from the ministry (Francis, Hills, & Kaldor, 2009; Hodge & Wenger, 2005). Clergy are leaving the ministry in greater numbers than ever before. In the United States, it was reported that approximately 1,800 pastors leave the ministry each month (Fisher, 2010). More specifically, it was demonstrated that ex-pastors were facing burnout (Beebe 2007; Doolittle, 2007). Moreover, in the Asian setting, pastors in Hong Kong revealed their intention to give up ministerial work due to severe job stress (Hang-yue, Foley, & Loi, 2005). It is generally acknowledged that ministry as

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a vocation is inherently stressful, given the intensive people-helping component of the work. There is little doubt that clergy stress and burnout can be detrimental to the mental health and well-being of the minister (Maloney, 1988). Many pastors attempt to hide these feelings and try to maintain a positive public persona because they believe in God's calling for them to engage in their ministry and, thus, should be able to deal with stressors (Charlton, Rolph, Francis, Rolph, & Robbins, 2008). However, the pastors' families frequently see inside the persona how fatigued, withdrawn, and discouraged the pastors have become (Miner, 2007).

According to Maslach, Jackson, and Leiter (1996), burnout is a negative experience of individuals that emerges through stressful results from one's work environment, and which incorporates any or all of the following dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. In this context, emotional exhaustion refers to the emotional feeling of being overextended, tired, and fatigued; depersonalization is defined as the negative, pessimistic, cold-hearted, and detached attitude that tends to develop towards people with whom one works; while reduced personal accomplishment refers to the loss of or reduced feeling of personal accomplishment caused by particular jobs and employees which, often, are valued negatively (Maslach et al., 1996; Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001).

Burnout among pastors negatively impacts both physical and emotional well-being, often resulting in depression (Buys & Rothman, 2010; Doolittle, 2010), loss of vision for ministry due to unsolved conflicts (Chandler, 2010), as well as threatens the ability to provide effective and caring leadership to those seeking spiritual guidance and support in time of crisis (Maslach et al., 2001). It is a serious problem for congregations and local communities because the pastor is the first person many turn to in times of crisis. Pastors are even considered to be effective mental health providers by many (Weaver, Koenig, & Larson, 1997). Burnout, thus, impacts the well-being and relationships of pastors (Buys & Rothman, 2010; Maslach et al., 2001).

The main reasons for pastor burnout, mostly, include spiritual life dissatisfaction, incompetence, or suffering caused by emotional exhaustion (Doolittle, 2010; Zylstra, 2009). By the same token, Mann (2007) opined that for some pastors, spiritual burnout symptoms are signs of losing meaning and purpose, feeling loss of faith and calling by God, lack of desire to practice spiritual activities, and detachment from others.

Pargament (1997), a prolific writer on the psychology of religion, asserted that the aspect of spirituality can encourage individuals to use religious coping effectively. Pastors are expected to have a closer relationship with God in the spiritual domain and a stronger spiritual foundation compared to non-pastors. Thus, when they face personal crisis, they could either apply religious coping strategies in a positive way to focus on God as a supportive source, or in a negative way that highlights God's trials in order for them to enhance their individual strength. Past research proved that pastors are more likely to have an advantage over other individuals since they are able to see a crisis as a potential benefit being a trial from God, or because they are more secure in their long-term relationship with God (Pargament, Koenig, & Perez, 2000; Pargament, Smith, Koenig, & Perez, 1998).

## **Objectives**

The purpose of the present study is to investigate the direct and indirect influences of spiritual well-being, calling, and religious coping on burnout, being mediated by job stressors, among Thai Protestant pastors. In order to achieve its purposes, this study incorporated the following specific objectives: 1) To translate selected Western-based instruments for use with the Thai population and test their psychometric properties (reliability and validity). 2) To investigate the structural direct and indirect relationships between spiritual well-being, calling, religious coping with burnout, being mediated by job stressors, as well as investigate which prediction model (the indirect or the full path model) best explains the pattern of structural relationships hypothesized between spiritual well-being, calling, religious coping, challenge/hindrance job stressors, and burnout among Thai Protestant pastors.

## **Literature Review**

The following shortened review of literature contains theoretical perspectives and empirical findings, which demonstrate interrelationships among the key variables of spiritual well-being, calling, religious coping and, job stressors, and burnout.

### *Spiritual Well-being*

‘Spiritual well-being’ is a dynamic internal construct within a person’s life that delivers a sense of wholeness, purpose, and connection to a greater community and/or superior power. According to Ellison (1983), spiritual well-being refers to the quality of life in the spiritual dimension. In support of this, Astin, Astin, and Lindholm (2011) posited that spirituality could be a source of many positive factors that help pastors cope with their problems, including inner strength, moral orientation, and connection that brings faith, hope, peace, and empowerment to the wellness in human life. Moreover, it is a key aspect in discovering meaning, comfort, wholeness, and inner peace which help individuals to transcend their negative condition and incorporate it into their well-being. As reported, spirituality is being recognized more and more, nowadays, since it is a key aspect of health and well-being in individuals with chronic health conditions (e.g., Cronbach & Shavelson 2004; Tse et al., 2005).

### *Calling*

‘Calling’ can be described as the work that is viewed as an expansion of faith within an individual and likely to be perceived as a calling (Davidson & Caddell, 1994). Calling also refers to the understanding of the inner urge to pursue the pastorate as a vocation. It could be simply explained as an individual’s feeling or urge of being called by the Supreme Being for the ministry. Thus, calling is highly related to spirituality and is perceived as a sacred calling included among the personal spiritual resources of religious workers (Gregory, 2013; Hirschi, 2012). An important reason why pastors decide to enter the ministry is because they believe God called them to lead churches with their talents, character, and abilities (Barnard & Curry, 2011).

### *Religious Coping*

‘Religious coping’ involves the use of religious beliefs and behaviors to cope with problems in order to prevent or lessen negative emotional consequences of stressful

life situations. Generally, in times of stress, people often turn to religion particularly in extreme cases of anxiety and threat. Pargament et al. (1998) developed a two-factor model of religious coping – positive and negative religious coping – which explains the coping style one applies to reframe and cope with stressful experiences in a religious context. *Positive religious coping* involves collaborative problem solving with God, seeking spiritual support from the community and a higher power, and helping others in need. *Negative religious coping* involves a feeling of being forsaken by God and blaming God for difficulties, deferring all responsibility to God. Therefore, religious coping can be helpful as well as harmful.

### *Job Stressors*

‘Job stress’ or work-related stress occurs when there is no balance between the demands of the job and the individual worker’s resources and capabilities to match that demand. This definition underscores the relationship between a person and one’s working environment. It also helps to illuminate why a situation that one person regards as a stimulating challenge can, on the other hand, cause another person to experience a significant negative degree of stress.

Prior research (e.g., Cavanaugh, Boswell, Roehling, & Boudreau, 2000; LePine, LePine, & Jackson, 2004) had demonstrated that ‘job stressors’ consist of two domains: challenge and hindrance. *Challenges* are work-related demands or circumstances that, although potentially stressful, have associated potential gains for individuals, whereas *hindrances* are a source of stress which tends to produce negative consequences of stress without offsetting gains (Cavanaugh et al., 2000).

### *Burnout*

‘Burnout’ is a state of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion marked by chronic fatigue, feelings of helplessness and hopelessness, and the development of a negative self-concept and negative attitude towards work, life, and other people (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Burnout is a common condition among those working in caring or serving professions who are generally heart-centered in their jobs, and who tend to perform under high and prolonged levels of stress. By overworking, burnout usually intensifies with the continual flow of stressors as the person feels increasingly unable to deal with the condition at hand (Gladding, 2006).

## **Methodology**

### *Participants*

A total of 505 participants (male:  $n=349$ , 70.1%; female:  $n=149$ , 29.9%; missing 7, 1.3 %) were involved in the confirmatory factor analysis phase of the study. The participants’ ages ranged from 23 to 65 years.

### *Instrumentation*

The researcher used a self-administered survey questionnaire with Likert-type rating scales for data gathering. The questionnaire consisted of a researcher-constructed Personal Information section and the following psychometric scales: Clergy Spiritual Well-being Scale (CSWS), Calling and Vocation Questionnaire (CVQ), Brief

Religious Coping (Brief RCOPE). Challenge and Hindrance Stressors Scale (CHSS) and Francis Burnout Inventory (FBI).

### *Pretest*

Prior to the actual study, a pretest of the Thai version of the survey questionnaire was conducted to check for errors and for readability. A total of 10 participants aged between 23 and 65 years were invited to fill in the Thai questionnaire and requested to report any errors and/or difficulties in the readability of the directions and item statements. Upon verifying that the questionnaire was free from errors and comprehension problems, the researcher proceeded to conduct the actual study.

### *Data Collection*

The convenience sampling method was used to recruit participants. To increase the probability of obtaining a larger sample, completion of the questionnaire was conducted in person. Potential participants were approached in three church organizations in Thailand and were informed about the general nature of the study. Those who met the inclusion criteria were invited to fill in the survey questionnaire. They were also informed that they could withdraw from the data gathering exercise at any time, that no names would be recorded to guarantee participants' anonymity, and that the data collected would only be used for the purposes of this study and accessed only by the researcher and research advisor.

## **Results**

### *Study I*

As the CSWS, CVQ, Brief RCOPE, CHSS, and FBI were translated into the Thai language, it was necessary to investigate their psychometric properties in order to ensure their cross-cultural reliability and construct validity, prior to their use in the present study. This involved the following procedural steps.

#### Step 1: Reliability Analysis

Examination of the Cronbach's alphas for the Clergy Spiritual Well-Being Scale (CSWS=.90), Calling and Vocation Questionnaire (CVQ = .85), The Brief Religious Coping (Brief RCOPE = .74), the Challenge and Hindrance Stressors Scale (CHSS= .85), and the Francis Burnout Inventory (FBI=.84) showed that they ranged from .74 to .90. Examination of the Cronbach's alphas for all five scales and their items' I-T correlations showed no items with very low corrected item-total correlations. Indeed, for the majority of the items, their deletion would have lowered their respective scale's Cronbach's alpha. Even for those items whose deletion would have increased their respective scale's Cronbach's alpha, the increase was too miniscule to warrant their deletion. Thus, the Clergy Spiritual Well-Being Scale (CSWS) was represented by 12 items, the Calling and Vocation Questionnaire (CVQ) was represented by 24 items, the Brief Religious Coping (Brief RCOPE) was represented by 14 items, the Challenge/Hindrance Stressors Scale (CHSS) was represented by 12 items, and the Francis Burnout Inventory (FBI) was represented by 22 items. The computed Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the five scales

ranged from 0.741 to 0.905. Reliability analysis indicated good internal consistency for all five scales.

#### Step 2: Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to evaluate the factor structures of the Clergy Spiritual Well-being Scale (CSWS), the Calling and Vocation Questionnaire (CVQ), the Brief Religious Coping (Brief R-COPE), the Challenge/Hindrane Job Stressors (CHJS), and the Francis Burnout Inventory (FBI). CFA, unlike exploratory factor analysis, allows the researcher to explicitly posit an *a priori* model (e.g., on the basis of the factors identified in the western-based original scale) and to assess the fit of this model to the observed data. After ensuring that the collected data set meets the assumptions underlying CFA, the  $\chi^2$  goodness-of-fit test (via structural equation modeling) was employed to test the null hypothesis that the sample covariance matrix for the model was obtained from a population that has the proposed model structure. The following Figure 1 depicts the five-factor measurement model representing the latent constructs of the CSWS, CVQ, Brief RCOPE, CHSS, and FBI. Table 1 presents the goodness-of-fit indices for the five-factor model.

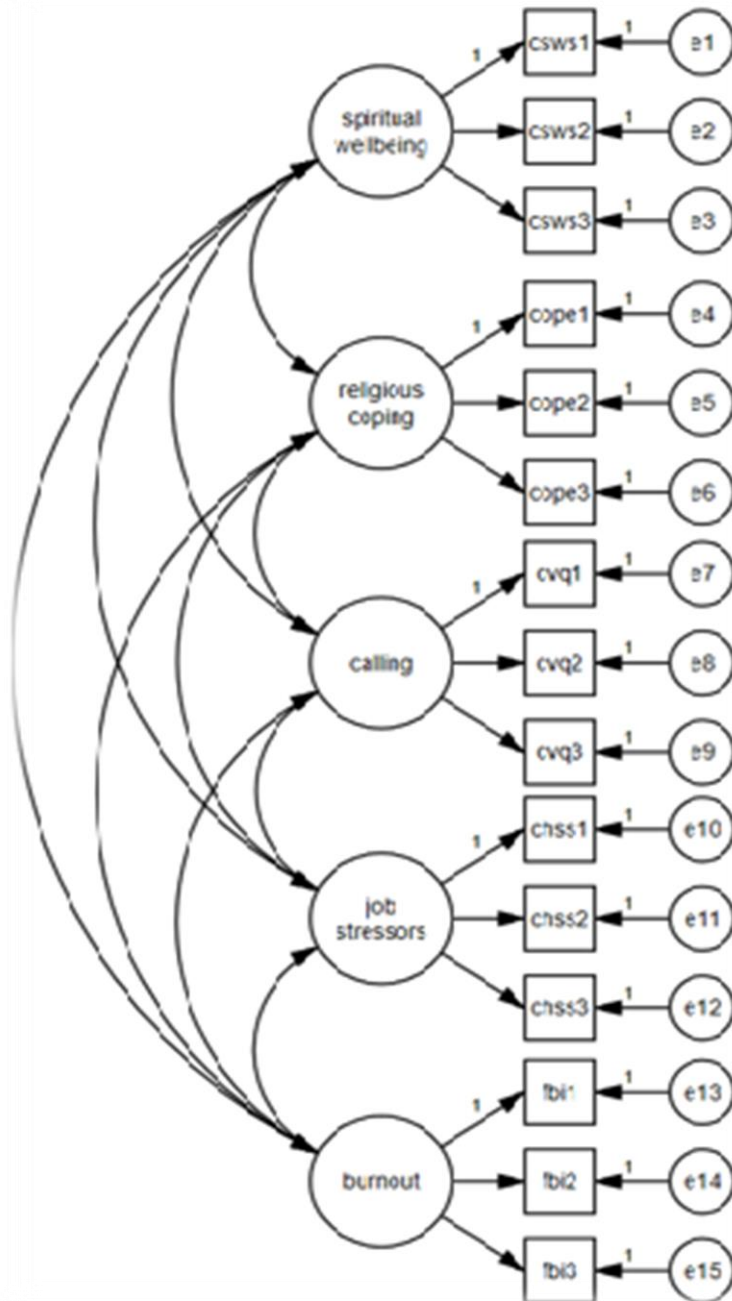
(See Figure 1 on the next page)

**Table 1:  $\chi^2$  Goodness-of-Fit Value, Normed Fit Index (NFI), Incremental Fit Index (IFI), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), Comparative Fit Index (CFI), and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA)**

Model	$\chi^2$ (N=505)	df	p	NFI	IFI	TLI	CFI	RMSEA
Null Model	5460.935	105	<.00	10.00	0.000	.000	.000	.318
5-Factor Model	427.447	80	<.00	.92	0.940	.920	.940	.093

The chi-square goodness-of-fit value for the five-factor model is statistically significant,  $\chi^2(df=80) = 427.447$ ,  $p < .001$ , suggesting that the co-variance matrix for this posited model does not fit the sample co-variance matrix well. However, the incremental fit indices (Normed Fit Index – NFI, Incremental Fit Index – IFI, Tucker-Lewis Index – TLI, Comparative Fit Index – CFI) are all above 0.90 (range: 0.92 – 0.94). These fit indices indicate that the five-factor model provided a very good fit relative to its null or independence model (i.e., the posited model represented between 92% to 94% improvement in fit over its null or independence model) and support the hypothesized structure of the posited five-factor model. The RMSEA value of 0.093 suggests some minor error of approximation when compared to the population co-variance matrix.

While the above fit indices can be used to evaluate the adequacy of fit in CFA, it must be noted that this is only one aspect of model evaluation. As pointed out by Marsh and his colleagues (e.g. Marsh, 1996; Marsh & Balla, 1994; Marsh, Hau, & Wen, 2004), model evaluation should be based on a subjective combination of substantive or theoretical issues, inspection of parameter estimates, goodness-of-fit, and interpretability. Table 2 presents the standardized regression weights, residuals, and explained variances for the five-factor model.



**Figure 1: Five-Factor Measurement Model (With Item Parcels)  
 (Representing the Latent Constructs of the CSWS, CVQ, Brief RCOPE,  
 CHSS, And FBI)**

**Table 2: Standardized Regression Weights, Explained Variances, and Residual Variances for the Five Latent Constructs' (CSWS, CVQ, Brief RCOPE, CHSS, FBI) Indicator Variables**

Parameter			Standardized Regression Wts	Explained Variances	Residual Variances
<u>Spiritual well-being (CSWS)</u>					
csws1	<---	CSWS	.89	.79	.21
csws2	<---	CSWS	.91	.84	.16
csws3	<---	CSWS	.92	.85	.15
<u>Religious coping (R-COPE)</u>					
cope1	<---	R-COPE	.45	.66	.34
cope2	<---	R-COPE	.62	.57	.43
cope3	<---	R-COPE	.62	.58	.42
<u>Calling (CVQ)</u>					
cvq1	<---	CVQ	.80	.63	.37
cvq2	<---	CVQ	.83	.69	.31
cvq3	<---	CVQ	.88	.77	.23
<u>Job stressors (CHSS)</u>					
chss1	<---	CHSS	.88	.78	.22
chss2	<---	CHSS	.93	.87	.13
chss3	<---	CHSS	.80	.64	.36
<u>Burnout (FBI)</u>					
fbi1	<---	FBI	.91	.83	.17
fbi2	<---	FBI	.84	.70	.30
fbi3	<---	FBI	.81	.66	.34

The standardized regression coefficients (factor loadings) for the measurement indicators are all positive and significant by the critical ratio test,  $p < .001$ . Standardized loadings ranged from 0.45 to 0.93 ( $M = 0.806$ ). These values indicated that the indicator variables hypothesized to represent their respective latent constructs – CSWS, CVQ, Brief RCOPE, CHSS, FBI – did so in a reliable manner. The percentage of residual (unexplained) variances for the 15 indicator variables ranged from 13% (i.e., 87% of the variance explained) (chss2) to 37% (i.e., 63% of the variance explained).

The result of confirmatory factor analysis confirmed and further clarified the adequacy of the factor structures in representing these five scales (demonstrating construct validity). Test of convergent validity showed that the five scales are valid by this criterion. Together, these findings point to the sound psychometric properties of the Thai-translated versions of the CSWS, CVQ, Brief RCOPE, CHSS, and FBI, and support their use within the Thai context.

### *Study II*

Study II aimed to investigate the structural direct and indirect relationships between spiritual well-being, calling, religious coping with burnout, being mediated by job stressors, as well as investigate which prediction model (the indirect or the full path model) best explains the pattern of structural relationships hypothesized between



spiritual well-being, calling, religious coping, challenge/hindrance job stressors, and burnout among Thai Protestant pastors.

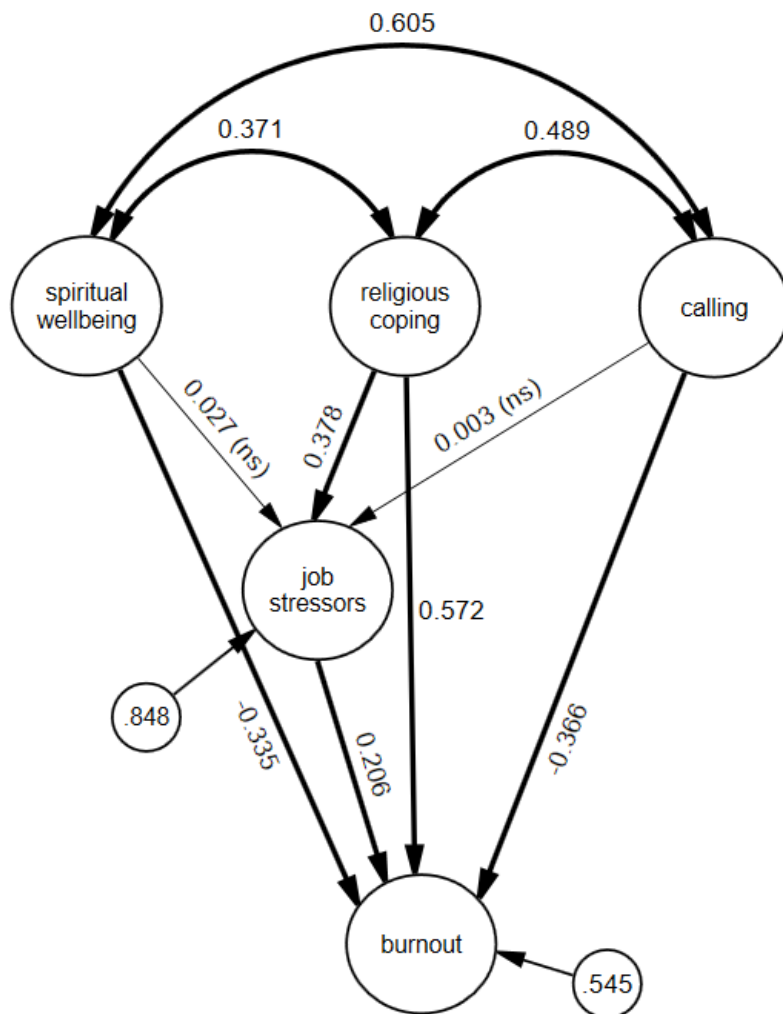
Two hierarchical models were posited and were evaluated and compared as to their efficacy in explaining the influence of the identified antecedent factors of spiritual well-being, calling, and religious coping on the participants' reported level of burnout, both directly and indirectly, being mediated by the factor of job stressor (challenge and hindrance). Evaluation and comparison of the 'fit' of these two 'nested' models were conducted systematically.

The fit of this path model posited to represent the indirect structural relationships between spiritual well-being, calling, and religious coping and the criterion variable of burnout, being mediated by the factor of job stressors was tested via structural equation modeling. Although the overall chi-square goodness-of-fit value was significant,  $\chi^2$  ( $df=83$ ) = 593.36,  $p < .001$ , the incremental fit indices (NFI, IFI, TLI, CFI) are all around 0.90 (range: 0.88 – 0.94). These fit indices indicated that the model provided a very good fit relative to a null or independence model (i.e. the posited model represented between 88% to 94% improvement in fit over the null or independence model) and support the hypothesized structure of the posited indirect path model. The RMSEA value of 0.11 is slightly outside the range suggested by Browne and Cudeck (1993) and indicates some minor error of approximation when compared to the population co-variance matrix. The model also yielded an Akaike Information Criterion (AIC) value of 667.36. The AIC is used for comparing the goodness-of-fit of competing models (Akaike, 1987).

**Table 3: Chi-Square Goodness-of-Fit Values, Incremental Fit Indices (NFI, IFI, TLI, CFI), Akaike Information Criterion (AIC), Parsimony Normed Fit Index (PNFI), and Model Comparison**

Model	$\chi^2$ ( $N=505$ )	$df$	$p$	NFI	IFI	TLI	CFI	AIC	RMSEA
<i>Model 1</i>									
Indirect Model	593.360	83	<.001	0.891	0.905	0.879	0.905	667.360	0.110
<i>Model 2</i>									
Full Path Model	427.447	80	<.001	0.922	0.935	0.915	0.935	507.447	0.093
<i>Model Comparison</i>									
Model 1 vs. Model 2	165.913	3	<.001						

The results from the multi-model path analysis showed that both models fitted the data set well, direct comparison of their goodness-of-fit indices clearly showed that the *full path model* is both significantly better fitting and more parsimonious than the indirect path model. In other words, a path model that incorporates the hypothesized direct and indirect influences of spiritual well-being, calling, and religious coping is a better representation of their influences on the participants' reported level of burnout than a model that incorporates only the hypothesized indirect influences (being mediated by job stressors.)



**Figure 2: Full Direct Path Model Showing the Hypothesized Direct and Indirect Relationships between Spiritual Well-Being, Calling, and Religious Coping and The DV of Burnout, Being Mediated by Job Stressor Factor**

The results revealed that the higher the participants' reported levels of spiritual well-being and calling, the lower their reported level of burnout. Alternatively, the higher their reported use of religious coping, the higher their reported level of burnout.

For indirect structural relationships, religious coping alone was found to have an indirect influence on the criterion variable of burnout. Thus, the higher their reported use of religious coping, the higher their reported level of challenge and hindrance job stressors. The higher their reported level of job stressors, the higher their reported level of burnout. The factors of spiritual well-being and calling were not found to have any significant indirect influences on the participants' reported level of burnout.

## Discussion

The results of Study I indicated that the Thai-translated measures of the CSWS, CVQ, Brief RCOPE, CHSS, and FBI were psychometrically sound; that is, reliable and valid. This confirms the hypothesis that the model is consistent with empirical data. The results also showed that the tools have theoretical and empirical efficacy, and that they have all been demonstrated to be valid and reliable instruments for subsequent use in Study 2 which aimed to investigate the direct and indirect structural relationships, being mediated by the factor of job stressor (challenge and hindrance), between spiritual well-being, calling, and religious coping and the criterion variable of burnout among Thai Protestant pastors.

The results of Study 2 are partly supported by those of Wachholtz and Rogoff (2013) who investigated the potential relationships among spiritual well-being, daily spiritual experiences, and reduced feelings of burnout, and found that spirituality may be a protective factor against burnout. Similarly, Peng Lian (2012) concluded that, on the whole, spiritual well-being has positive impact while burnout has negative impact on pastors. It can be said that the direct and positive relationship between spiritual well-being and calling and burnout confirmed previous findings. As confirmed by the literature, high levels of spiritual well-being and calling decreased the level of burnout among United Methodist clergy (Golden et al., 2004), Australian clergy (Miner et al., 2010), and Singapore Methodist pastors (Peng Lian, 2012). According to Jung's (1933) and Allport's (1950) theoretical perspectives on religion and mental health, religion is seen as an inner resource of strength and is conducive to positive psychological health and stability when dealing with uncertainty and chaos in one's personal life. This concept was also supported by Gomez and Fisher (2003) in that spiritual well-being provides the individual with a sense of identity, wholeness, satisfaction, joy, contentment, beauty, love, respect, positive attitudes, inner peace and harmony, and purpose and direction in life. Moreover, theorists on religion and mental health believe that calling is founded on a positive relationship with God and on a higher level of spirituality among pastors which leads them to a sense of purpose through the responsibility to serve others more than oneself (Scott, 2007). Carroll (2006) posited that through their sense of calling, pastors derive satisfaction and meaning despite feelings of emotional exhaustion when experiencing burnout.

Interestingly, one of the results of Study 2 was not in full agreement with this study's hypothesis that the higher the reported use of religious coping, the lower the reported level of burnout. This study's finding demonstrated a reverse effect in that the higher the degree of religious coping, the higher the level of burnout. Theories on religion and mental health support the hypothesis that high level of religious coping is related to positive psychological adjustment to stress, leading to lower level of burnout. Nonetheless, this study's surprising result on religious coping is partly supported by Mann (2012) who demonstrated that religious coping can predict characteristics of burnout, but not necessarily lower the level of burnout.

A thorough search of the literature revealed other theoretical perspectives, which could help explain this study's outcome: (1) professional protective emotional suppression, (2) expressive suppression, and (3) collectivistic culture. The following section presents some arguments in support of this study's unexpected finding.

### *1. Professional Protective Emotional Suppression*

According to Machell (1987), a *professional role* that may be one of the most immersively demanding professions is that of the *Roman Catholic priest*. With the priestly role, a person becomes “Father” with a great sense of authority, perfection, correctness, and holiness. Priests view themselves as needing to maintain this image of exclusiveness, being the representative of Christ on earth. This attitude detaches them from reality and protects them from their inner feelings. As human beings who are imperfect within the role of priest, the feelings of hurt, shame, pain, and guilt often could not be expressed. Thus, these feelings might lead to the creation of a state of high internal anxiety, high fear levels, and internal feelings of lack of worth. The priests might use alcohol in the short term to relieve stress and to hold these feelings within oneself to conform to the perceived expectations of their professional status. This form of disciplining of oneself involves a process of suppression of feelings which is called professional protective emotional suppression. Thus, professional protective emotional suppression is a mental process of emotional containment which is necessary to help a person to “hold together” under psychic battering. Alcoholism is a disease of emotional suppression, treated by cathartic release and resolution of feelings, notions certainly opposite to professional protective emotional suppression (Machell, 1987). Pastors are, like priests, religious people who would usually be expected to have not only a strong relationship with God but also a strong spiritual foundation of high religious coping to enable them to confront problems. Pastors are likely able to apply religious coping approaches and benefit from their use (Proffitt et al., 2007). But it can also happen that high religious coping may bring about higher level of stress and burnout due to the high expectations people have on pastors and clergy as in the case of alcoholic priests.

Scazzero (2003, 2006) reflected that Christians and pastors in the Protestant church often neglect their own needs either out of sense of dedication, altruism, or trying to emulate a Christ-like person. They may do this by focusing on the positive, strong, and successful parts of their life by covering the feelings of brokenness, weakness, and failure. They may also deny, avoid, and withdraw from painful realities. Scazzero shared insights from his own personal experience as a senior pastor who served 25 years in a large multiracial church in New York, serving more than 55 nationalities. To substitute for his loss, by hiding his own feelings and being strong for others, he felt stuck and powerless in his own ministry. In addition, he stated that he felt internal emptiness without energy to enjoy life and was unaware of the needs of his family.

In reviewing data from the current study where “*the thought of leaving the ministry*” is as high as 57% and “*facing higher than expected stress*” is 33.1% provides a good indicator that pastors are facing issues beyond their ability to handle. Required by their professional role, pastors have to put their congregation’s needs before their own and that of their family. They need to sacrifice their own pleasure and well-being to help address the emotional issues of their church members first and foremost. Scazzero’s iceberg metaphor that there is more below the surface than above can be used to explain the situation of some pastors. In order to feel strong and feel good among the congregation, most pastors become workaholics trying to do everything for God to cover up their own weaknesses, living without limits by

constantly giving and tending to others' needs so as not to be deemed as selfish. They consciously or unconsciously would never admit that they are overwhelmed with many stressful issues which may subsequently lead to burnout.

## *2. Expressive Suppression*

The psychological theory that pertains to and supports emotional expression among pastors is "emotion regulation". Emotion regulation has two main aspects: cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression (Gross & John, 1998). Cognitive reappraisal is the attempt to reinterpret an emotionally-eliciting situation in a way that alters its meaning and changes its emotional impact (Lazarus & Alfert, 1964). Expressive suppression is the attempt to hide, inhibit, or reduce ongoing emotion-expressive behavior (Gross & Levenson, 1993) or, alternatively, the act of masking facial giveaways in order to hide a current emotional state.

Expressive suppression may serve more of a social purpose than that of the individual. The idea of covering up an internal experience in front of observers could be the true reason why expressive suppression is utilized in social situations. According to Niedenthal (2006), in everyday life, suppression may serve to conform individuals' outward appearance to emotional norms in a given situation as well as facilitate social interaction. In this way, hiding negative emotions may induce more successful social relationships by preventing conflict, stifling the spread of negative emotions, and protecting an individual from negative judgments made by others. In the case of the pastors in this study, their use of expressive suppression in the form of excessive religious coping in order to suppress their true feelings of frustration or even anger may produce higher levels of emotional exhaustion, a sign of burnout.

According to Pargament (2007), an easy answer and simple explanation might not be what religious coping is looking for. It should be interpreted more cautiously and closely in terms of religious experience and cultural questions as to what extent are various religious coping methods well blended with the individual's needs, goals, situations, and social context. It had been demonstrated that religious coping does not always reduce threat or harm from stressors but it could probably relate to an increased awareness of positive opportunities in difficult situations. On the other hand, people are usually allowed to see stressors as an encouraging religious perspective by using religious coping. There are two sides to religious coping: positive religious coping activities reflect a secure relationship with God, a belief that there is a greater meaning in life and a sense of spiritual connectedness with others, while negative religious coping activities reflect an ominous view of the world, and a religious struggle to find and conserve significance in life. Thus faith, which is positive coping, is being used to evaluate the outcomes of how people cope with negative life situations, which trigger stressors and final burnout (Pargament, 2007).

## *3. Collectivistic Culture*

Yeo (2010) investigated the psychometric properties and factor structures of two religious instruments: The Attachment to God Inventory (AGI) and the Brief Religious Coping Scale (Brief RCOPE) in terms of whether both instruments could effectively measure religious coping. The study used a collectivist population of Taiwanese Christians from 11 churches and five Christian denominations, both

Protestant and Roman Catholic. The findings showed that the AGI was considered inapplicable to the Taiwanese Christians because too many negative emotional items had to be removed to gain a reasonable model fit for confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). However, the statistical analysis for the Brief RCOPE was more positive. Although the retest reliability of the Brief RCOPE was barely acceptable and the results of the goodness-of-fit test from the CFA were not perfect, the instrument still proved to be useful for Taiwanese Christians.

The Asian collectivistic culture, compared to individualistic societies, tends to be more reserved in the aspect of emotional expression. Negative emotional expression is considered ‘taboo’ because cooperation with other group members and putting group well-being above the individual’s is critical. Individuals who have difficulty expressing their emotions before God are not necessarily distant or avoidant of Him. Thus, items addressing aspects of emotional expression may not be an accurate indicator, as in the case of the Thai Protestant pastors in the present study.

In summary, professional protective emotional suppression could be considered as the main process of *suppression* of feelings among pastors. Besides, from the cultural point of view, especially in the Asian culture, pastors are expected to be strong, patient, and endure without ever making known to others how they feel, especially within their own church congregation. Otherwise, they fear losing respect from their members and, thus, find guilt within their own selves. In the worst-case scenario, they may even feel that God who has called them to serve could actually reject them. According to the results of the current study, Thai pastors have a high level of spiritual well-being, sense of calling, and religious coping but are still imperfect human beings. Thus, pastors are still faced with stress and burnout. As Scazzero (2015) opined, emotional health and spiritual maturity are inseparable; that it is not possible for a Christian to be spiritually mature while remaining emotionally immature.

### **Limitations and Recommendations**

While many issues have been explored in this study, still, a number of limitations need to be noted and considered when interpreting the results. Firstly, integrating religion and spirituality into mental health is rather new in the Thai Protestant setting. The approach raised the question of whether it is spiritually sound and accepted by the Christian community.

Secondly, the measures employed in the study, having been adopted from the Western perspective, might not be able to draw the same response from Thai respondents, having been a part of a collectivistic society. With the limited exposure of most pastors to worldly problems, having known only Thai culture and society since they were young, many might not be able to understand and accept global challenges and, worse, admit that they are experiencing stress and burnout in their pastoral work. In the future, a thorough review of the questionnaires may lead to the adaptation of more suitable factors or variables with a view to drawing better responses.

Lastly, this study was conducted in Thailand while most of the related studies were conducted in the West. Cultural differences may possibly explain different outcomes. This researcher acknowledges the lack of Thai-based theoretical

perspectives and related studies; thus, discussion relied heavily on Western views which may not necessarily reflect Thai culture and values.

Relative to the findings of this study, future research should explore the following avenues;

1. A comparative study between individualistic and collectivistic cultures in terms of how best to deal with job stressors and avoid the occurrence of burnout among religious workers.

2. A qualitative approach in investigating the same variables used in this study might allow for the research process to elicit unique and rich experiential data as most of the responses involve abstract constructs such as emotions and feelings. In-depth face-to-face interviewing would generate deeper and more open responses, although this approach might require more time and resources in order to be effective.

3. There is a great need for further research in the area of stress and burnout in order to build up and develop psychology-integrated theology in the aspect of the human experience within the framework of transpersonal psychology as a holistic approach. There is a close link between spirituality and emotionality which the study needs to focus on in order to help develop more effective emotional regulation among religious leaders in the community.

4. This same phenomenon might also occur in other professions with professionals who have to deal with people's problems such as counselors, medical doctors, police etc. Thus, research conducted among these groups utilizing a similar methodology and results from this study as well as examining other aspects such as collective culture may be of high value to promote wellness among them.

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