

## Role Stress – Experiences of Swedish Non-Lutheran Clergy

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### Abstract

**Background:** About fifty percent of Swedish Non-Lutheran Clergy leave the vocation before retirement resulting in huge personal, financial, psychological, emotional, spiritual and social costs. The factors behind this substantial flood out has scarcely been researched. From the multifaceted problematic aspects of pastoral work, the aim of this study was to explore the clergy's experiences of work stressors with the focus on Role-stress. **Method:** A qualitative approach with 19 open ended interviews was used and the interview material underwent qualitative content analysis. **Results:** Multiple external role-senders together with the individual pastor's experienced, internal expectations and demands, generated different types of Clergy role-categories that surfaced during the analysis. These roles were accompanied by several role-stressors as apparent with the roles Servants of men and Servants of God and the presence of Vision Conflict. Further the pastor as the Church's ultimately responsible person is plagued by Role-ambiguity and Role-confusion, and as the Proven trustworthy administrator struggling with Role-conflict. Family-work and Work-family conflicts, especially for female pastors, contributed to Work overload, this consequence also effecting the male colleagues during the generic attempts to meet as many of the Church members' expectations as possible. The accumulated Work overload, together with a lowered level of Work Satisfaction, boosted the Turnover intentions. **Conclusions:** Mutual succinct information between employer and employee, active continuous communication and refined and updated organizational structure need to be coordinated in order to lower the level of experienced role stress and thus reduce the present substantial number of Clergy leaving the vocation prematurely.

**Keywords.** Clergy, exit from ministry, pastor, qualitative, role stressors, turnover intentions

### Introduction

This study is focusing on the working climate for pastors today working in churches within the Free-church denominations. Sweden which 2019 has a population of 10 million (SCB, 2019), has 1000 years of being an officially Christian country - first Roman Catholic for 600 years and then Lutheran Protestant for another 400 years. The five Denominations in focus of this study are Non-Lutheran and belong to the Free-church tradition. The Free-church concept has its origin in the fact that the Swedish Evangelical-Lutheran Church a.k.a. the Swedish State Church, was connected to the State from the Reformation period (1527-1593) when Sweden became Lutheran by leaving the Roman Catholic Church a departure which became definite in 1593. Through the abolishment of the Conventicle Act 1858 the Swedish people was free to form new denominations without the church-state connection – the Free Church movement was born. In the year 2000, 1 January the Swedish State and the Lutheran Church through a “drawn-out process which finally led to a change of status for the Church of Sweden in relation to the state” parted ways after nearly 400 years of the State-Church cooperation (Gustafsson, 2003).

The leader of the congregation is the pastor, who in this study is interchangeable with clergy or minister, representing the person hired by a church or congregation. A Free-church pastor is expected to lead the congregation in the worship of the Triune God of the Christian Faith; the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. This is done by exemplifying the Christian way of relating to fellow humans, showing what the Gospel is all about in practical daily living, in the Swedish contemporary society. The pastor has sought this position and role often due to an internal conviction of having a Divine calling to function

in this capacity, during the process of training and practice acknowledged by the local body of believers, i.e. the local church and in the applicable context by the Denomination (large group of local Churches of the same belief system) by being ordained, i.e. officially given the pastoral authority in that Denomination. The Churches in this research are all Non-profit organizations. However, Swedish Free-Church Pastors are leaving the ministry and even the vocation in large numbers. In the absence of official statistics from the Denominations in focus of this study, the first author contacted persons with experience, knowledge and insight into the conditions of the current situation for Swedish Free-church pastors and they confirmed that an estimated 50% of the pastors will leave before retirement, and the question is why?

A common and reoccurring factor according to earlier studies, is the experienced high levels of pastoral role stress. Research in the USA conducted by Spencer, Winston, & Bocarnea (2012) found that two factors stood out; vision conflict and compassion fatigue. Spencer, (2010) who discovered vision conflict, defines this role stressor as “the disparity between a minister’s positive anticipation regarding ministry involvement and the actual experience itself. Compassion fatigue is a term used frequently in the context of burnout according to Flannely, Roberts, & Weaver, (2005) and Joinson (1992). Joinson (1992) also points out that compassion fatigue is a unique form of burnout affecting people in caregiving professions. Krejcir (2007) reports that besides burnout, conflict in their church and moral failure are also reasons why pastors leave the vocation, and that 80% of seminary and Bible school graduates who enter the ministry will leave the ministry within the first five years. This might lead to the conclusion that these pastors are unfit and therefore need to leave, but to the contrary Crowell (1989) states concerning the argument in support of forced exits, that studies of ex-pastors since 1923 show that it is not the unfit, but more qualified and self-motivated pastors that are forced out due to maltreatment by the church.

From prior additional international studies conducted in Australia by Francis, Kaldor, Shevlin, and Lewis (2004) finding that, senior male and female clergy were equally vulnerable to emotional exhaustion, and that younger clergy were significantly more vulnerable to emotional exhaustion than older colleagues. Emotional exhaustion raised the levels of the intention to leave the ministry whereas job satisfaction lowers the level of the same, according to an Asian study conducted by Ngo, Foley, & Loi (2005). Their study also found role stressors such as role conflict, role ambiguity and role overload to raise the intentions to leave the ministry. The presence of high levels of stress and feeling overworked being in risk of experience burnout were reported by two international studies; from South Africa (Joynt & Dreyer, 2013) and the United Kingdom (Randall, 2004). Both Randall (2004) and Francis et al. (2004) contend that the first years of being a pastor are especially trying which indicates that this is when support and mentoring is needed the most. In the British study by Randall (2004), it was also found that by using the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) (Maslach & Jackson, 1986), it is possible to identify pastors that are prone to experience burnout and risk leaving the ministry, before they in fact exit the ministry.

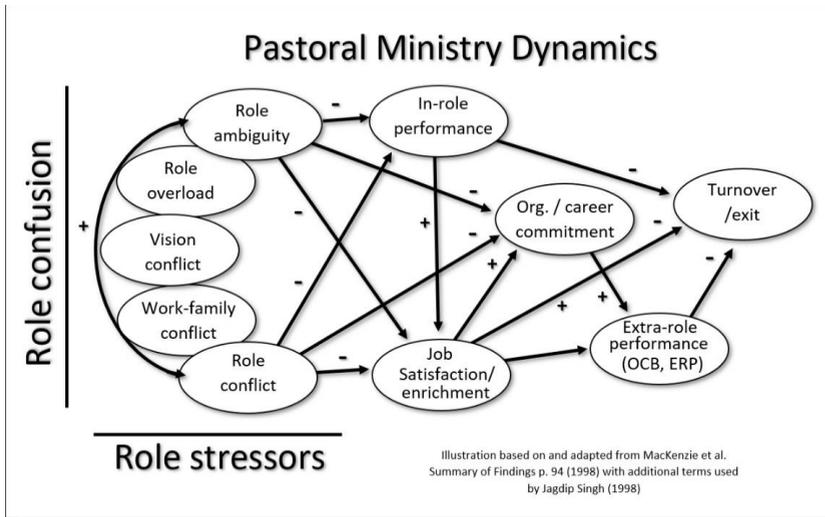
### **Theoretical Frame**

Since the Church in this study is the employer and the Pastor an employee, we considered it valid to view the working conditions from an Organizational vantage point. The pastoral job position has similarities with what is labelled secondary labor markets (SLAMs). McDuff and Mueller (2000) point to the fact that pastors’ wages are generally low, there is no significant investment by employers, entry requirements are fairly general, there are no mechanisms promoting firm-specific tenure (i.e., there is little job security with a particular church), turnover is expected, and there is no potential for promotion within a particular church. All these factors naturally do not promote a secure employment but rather gives the impression that the pastor is easily expendable (turnover is expected) as pastors come easy without any significant costs and are easily disposed of only to be replaced with the next candidate on the same terms (Rosendahl, 2019).

The role of the pastor resembles, perhaps surprisingly, that of a salesperson in the field of marketing and that the role performance as explained by MacKenzie, Podsakoff & Ahearne, (1998) is closely tied to the organizational success (read: the success of the church) as well as being an important forerunner of job satisfaction, organizational commitment and turnover, aspects which are effecting the pastor’s work experience. The pastor’s experiences of stress while working in the pastoral role is thus considered experiences of role stress and this study investigates the preceding causes leading up to the existence of this stress in order to find possible preventive measures that might make longer tenure possible for the effected pastors. The role stressors described in the text below can be found in the following illustration and the way they negatively influence the level of Job characteristics such as Job satisfaction/ enrichment, Organization and career commitment as well as extra roll performance. These role stressors also increase the likelihood of turnover; that the pastor

exits the ministry on his/her own initiative or is forced out. The presence of role stressors in the pastors work situation constitutes the experienced role confusion.

**Figure 1 - Pastoral Ministry Dynamics**



The following described role stressors are shown in the Figure 1 - "Pastoral Ministry Dynamics". Role Stress which is central in this study was first made known through the work of Kahn (1964) that presented two stressors; role conflict and role ambiguity. The aspect of Role ambiguity is by Singh (1998) identified as the experienced uncertainty due to a lack of information as to what actions to implement in order to fulfill a role. When role ambiguity is prevalent, and contradicting information is given by persons with opinions on the pastor's job duties, role conflicts easily arises which according to Peterson, Smith, Akande, Ayestaran, & al., (1995) is the incompatibility between the expectations of parties or according to Sing (1998) between aspects of a single role.

Later a third stressor, role overload was added by Peterson et al. (1995). With many different bids on what the pastor should be working with, and with the cumulative role demands, the pastor most likely experiences a "lack of the personal resources needed to fulfill commitments obligations, or requirements". A fourth stressor in the realm of pastoral work, that of work-family conflict was added by Ngo, Foley and Loi (2005). This demand-based kind of stress is more destructive than the stress of lacking resources according to Perrewé, Ferris, Frink & Anthony (2000) pointing out that when the employee is trying to meet the increased demands without accompanying increased resources this can result in ambiguity, loss of control and stress. The fifth role stressor is Vision Conflict discovered by Spencer (2010) which signifies the gap that exists between the pastor's positive presentiment of what work in the ministry will be like and the practical experience of it.

All these five role stressors are placed to the left in Figure 1, and the minus (-) signs show that their effects are decimating the functions of the receiving features e.g. In-role performance. Even though arrows only show this from Role ambiguity and Role conflict we assert that all five role stressors have the same negative effect on the receiving features. The plus signs show that the effect is strengthening the receiving features e.g. Extra-role performance being strengthened by Job Satisfaction.

In the pastoral ministry, the lack of clearness and distinctness as to what roles are requested, represented by the five role stressors presented in the previous paragraphs, results in perplexity and bewilderment as to what roles to take on, which is experienced as Role confusion. Job Descriptions and Role descriptions are important as noted by Strickland (2013) asserting that when there is no agreement stating what to prioritize, this constitutes vocational dissonance, even though few detect it as such. This causes depletion in job satisfaction which in turn lower life satisfaction (Carlson & Kacmar, 2000); (Ngo, Foley, & Loi, 2005) There are neither generally recognized standards defining what exemplary pastoral work consists of (Ngo et al. (2005). Especially for female pastors Work-family conflict constitutes an added burden according to (Ibidem)

“a form of inter-role conflict in which the role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible or incongruous in some respect”.

There are huge costs associated with a termination of a pastor or when the pastor feels forced to resign from the ministry, both financial, psychological, emotional, spiritual and social. Everyone; the pastor, the spouse, the children of the pastor, the members of the church, the community, the denomination, the kingdom of God, as it is presented in the New Testament of the Bible, suffer loss. Why so many pastors leave the vocation has not been researched in Sweden which is why this study focuses on finding possible causes to this substantial drainage from the pastoral workforce.

#### Aim of the study

The aim of this study was to explore the Swedish clergy's experiences of work stressors with the focus on Role-stress.

#### Method

This project is a part of a larger research project consisting of two empirical studies called “Causes, Consequences and Cures of Role Stress Among Swedish Free-church Pastors” (Rosendahl, 2019) The current study uses a qualitative method in order to get access to the personal experiences of role stress by the pastors, since according to Bruce Berg (2009) quoting Mills (1959) there is a risk that mere statistical calculations may misrepresent reality although being arithmetically correct. The expectation motivating this choice of approach being to discover the underlying reasons for the stressful or problematic experiences, since in qualitative research according to Creswell (2003) the “researcher collects open-ended, emerging data with the primary intent of developing themes from the data,” and where the researcher collects participants meanings, focuses on a single concept or phenomenon (in this study the problematic aspects of pastoral ministry in Swedish Free-churches), bring personal values into the study, studies the context or setting of participants, validates the accuracy of findings, makes interpretations of the data, creates an agenda for change or reform and collaborates with the participants.

#### Study context

The five Free-church denominations in which the participating pastors are working are; the Interact (EFK) (Sw. Evangeliska Frikyrkan), the Pentecostal Movement (Pingst FFS), the Swedish branch (FA) of the London based international Salvation Army (Sw. Frälsningsarmén), the Swedish Alliance Mission (SAM), and the Uniting Church of Sweden (EQ) (Sw. Equmeniakyrkan).

#### Participants

After being granted approval to do research on human subjects by the Regional Ethical Review Board at Linköping (Dnr. 2016/106-31) 19 participants were chosen, motivated by strategic choice; 9 female and 10 male pastors. These all had heightened accumulative scores in the four problem areas extracted from the results from the PaRI Questionnaire; Self-doubt and motivation deficiency; Work overload; Role confusion and conflict; and Growing sense of empathetic indifference and loss of work satisfaction. The participants ages ranged from the mid-twenties to the mid-sixties, some were in their first church while others had worked in several churches already and the church sizes were from small to mid-sized. These participants were therefore a valid source to draw from in finding out more about the circumstances behind one of the four extracted problem areas, that of role-stress (Rosendahl, 2019).

#### Data Collection

The participants were given written information and asked while doing the questionnaire if they were interested in participating in an open-ended interview. Those who announced that they were willing to participate in an interview, were contacted by a phone call setting up time and place for the interviews. The interviews were conducted at a place chosen by the participant, mostly at the participant's home or at the participants' church. One exception was when one of the participants could not meet in person wherefore a telephone interview was conducted instead. The geographical distribution of the participants was from west-coast to east-coast in the southern third of Sweden where most of Sweden's population reside.

The interviews were audio-recorded, and each interview lasted for approximately one hour. After an introductory question asking how it came about that the person choose to become a pastor, several follow-up questions, such as what pastoral

training the participant has, how the present work situation is perceived were asked, asking the participant to elaborate on the aspect at hand. The researcher also had the results from the questionnaire available indicating which aspects were the most troublesome for the participants and could thus ask what underlying experiences triggered the high score on this or these items.

### Analysis of the data

The recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim after which the material was analyzed with qualitative content analysis inspired by Graneheim and Lundman (2004) and Krippendorff, (2004a); Krippendorff (2004b). With the purpose and question formulation as starting point, meaning units related to the purpose of the study were extracted from the text-material. A meaning unit can be part of a sentence, one or several sentences or paragraphs which in content or context can be related to the aim of the study. The meaning units are condensed and coded and thereafter categorized in subcategories, categories and themes. The process can be illustrated thus:

Table 1 - Categories of the Analysis

#### Ethical considerations

The study was conducted by the permission of the Regional Ethical Review Board at Linköping (Dnr. 2016/106-31). The participants received information in writing about the purpose of this study, how the interviews were going to be conducted, that it was voluntary and that their participation could be terminated by the participant at any stage without having to give a reason for so doing, and that their personal information also was going to be concealed by random change of gender, names (if applicable), and geographical descriptions in the reporting of the interviews in order to protect their true identity. This information was also repeated by word of mouth at the time of the interview.

### Findings

In pastoral work several different roles can be experienced as the building blocks of the pastoral roles. Among the interviewed pastors no less than 43 different roles were named, 47 with the family roles included which proved to be of

MEANING UNIT	CONDENSED MEANING UNIT	CODE	SUB-CATEGORY	MAIN CATEGORY
One lives in relationships and in well, with people in, one must give of oneself very much as pastor which can be very laborious, it strains a lot.	To give very much of oneself can be laborious, it strains a lot.	Straining and laborious work	Heavy Workload	Work Overload

importance since the work and family combination proved to be stressful to some of the participants. In addition to the uncertain content of the job title 'pastor', many pastors get very sketchy job descriptions from the employer. The destructive effects of role stress are confirmed as the participant report unclear role descriptions, to many aspects to a single role, difficulties with the work and family balance. The reason behind the existence of these role stressors is in this study derived from the uncertain job descriptions and role definitions provided for the pastor. The qualitative content analysis generated three main categories with seven sub-categories (table 2).

Table 2 - Qualitative Analysis Findings

Main Categories	Sub-categories
5.1. Complexity of Interrelated Roles	5.1.1. Servants of Men and Servants of God 5.1.2. The Church's Ultimately Responsible Person 5.1.3. The Proven Trustworthy Administrator
5.2. Deficient Congregational Consensus	5.2.1. Wanting Pastoral Job Description 5.2.2. External and Internal Demands and Expectations
5.3. Consequences of Role Stress	5.3.1. Beneficial Role stress 5.3.2. Deteriorating Role distress

### Complexity of Interrelated Roles

Out of the 47 roles identified among the participating pastors, three sub-categories with different aspects of pastoral roles were extracted, highlighting the vast variety of roles that pastors take on or are given to be contained in one coherent vocational role. In all three sub-categories the issue of the double-sided responsibility is present; responsibility towards the

hiring congregation and the felt responsibility towards God whom the pastor often consider to be both the ultimate task-giver and the one before whom the pastor is ultimately accountable.

### ***Servants of Men and Servants of God***

Serving the members of the Congregation is the first and obvious task for the pastor. But there are many needs and expectations and the sheer volume of possible things-to-do can be overwhelming; "One cannot meet all needs and naturally I feel an insufficiency all the time and this; being able to say NO – it is always easy to want to be accommodating as pastor." (Participant 6). The reason for the massive list of things to do and expectations to try to live up to seemed to stem from the fact that there was not just one church representative giving a frame for the pastoral work, but many wanted to have a say as to what the pastor ought to work with. The reason for this seemed to be that there was no finalized and agreed upon Declaration of Intent produced by the body of church members leaving it up to anyone with an opinion to speak freely and add to the pastoral work-order. The pastoral response most likely being the objective to be accommodating to these requests in order to be doing a good pastoral job. And then, a very important extra source of expectations; the conviction of having a Divine assignment. A balance was sought after so that the pastor's area of responsibility could be distinguished as separate from the area of God's responsibility;

"Previously I believed, and I think that there are many that do, the feeling that you carry the whole responsibility for the church! But now it is like; "No, it is God's church!" I believe it is easier for me now to let that go!" (Participant #1)

### **The Church's Ultimately Responsible Person**

As the *Church's Ultimately Responsible Person* the problematic position consisted of the fact that often the Church Board took a decision but left the ultimate responsibility to the pastor, being the shepherd of the flock. It becomes problematic when the shepherd has one conception of the situation and the flock, the members of the congregation, obviously have a different conception;

I didn't quite understand the direction or how they were thinking, I believe, because I was thinking that we are headed in one direction but seeing the decisions they took I concluded that they are not heading that way! (Participant #14)

It seemed hard to the participants to both be the servant, meeting the demands and expectations of the employer *and* at the same time, be ultimately responsible to challenge the status quo and lead a needed congregational change-work.

### **The Proven Trustworthy Administrator**

As the *Proven Trustworthy Administrator*, the pastor oversees the order of things. This is a demanding position and as one experienced pastor emphasized not something one should do fresh out of seminary; "I would not recommend, as first pastoral experience, to take on the role of Church Administrator" (Participant #12) Being in charge also presupposes that the pastor is worthy of the trust of the people in the church. How this trust is established and determined is not clear, creating a stressful expectation that is hard to know what to do about. "One is very dependent on the Board and on the members, because if they withdraw their trust, it's like having the rug pulled away from under you. Then it is impossible to work!" (Participant #6)

Pastoral work is not always easy to measure, as one participant points out; "If by result you mean members, number of baptized and the likes, then I have worked for many years and not seen much! Soft values, it is hard to point to much of what you do." (Participant #6) For many pastors the above role stress resulted in too many duties connected to the role and thus to much work accumulating lacking available resources needed to meet commitments, obligations, and requirements of the assigned pastoral role.

### **Deficient Congregational Consensus**

The pastor typically perceive demands and/or expectations, as to what tasks and roles are asked for in the congregation, from several different sources. That the signal is not one unison, clear and well-expressed message from the employer's side seems to stem from the fact that the congregation has not gone through the process of producing a consensus concerning the reason for its existence and the objective for its ministry. This could be expressed in a Declaration of Intent, expressing a consensus concerning the congregational identity and reason for its existence. Without this document and broad backing from the body of members, there is no collective starting-point for the board to use as grounds for creating

a job- and role description for the hired pastor. It is then up to one and all that feel the urge to share views on the pastors work tasks and roles to express this, resulting in a barrage of role and task demands for the pastor to sort out.

### **Wanting Pastoral Job Description**

As testified by the participants the incidence of sketchy, incomplete or even all together missing job descriptions causes problems. It is up to the pastor to interpret the intentions and practical consequences that this job description expresses since the Declaration of Intent is missing, which otherwise could have served as a frame for the understanding of the content of the job description. Left to the pastor is the chore of trying to sort out and make a mental list of all the demands and expectations that the he/she registers. *"That's what I consider burdensome, and if there is something which is hard and stressful it is that one is supposed to be everywhere and that it covers such vast spectrum!"* (Participant #4)

### **External and Internal Demands and Expectations**

The demands and expectations pertaining to the pastoral role comes from different sources – individuals that can be labelled "role-senders" people holding expectations about the pastor's role behavior, individuals that also among themselves can have ambiguous expectations adding to the confusion experienced by the pastor. For starters, directions come from the employer, usually the Board through the chair-person or appointed contact person of the Board, as to what tasks the pastor is supposed to concentrate on are expected, but if this has not been discussed within the board of the church, the assumed unison message might not be so unison but have many varying ideas that the members of the board are not aware of.

Informal leadership, also known as emergent leadership, is another group of Role sender that usually have opinions and make sure they are noted. *"It has to do with people with a need of being in control, and some wants to be on center-stage themselves. The members are rather aware of them."* (Participant #13) And as to who these are, participants comment that they are the ones who have been there a long time, who have been there during different phases of the church's life, former board members and former chair-persons of the board and people related to several of the leading families. Surprisingly, even former pastors can be troublesome as one participating pastor testified; *"I feel that it is hard to come forward with new ideas because so far they have been obstructed"* (Participant #15)

The interviewed pastors related the fact that, not only was there expectations from the members of the congregation and the employer's representatives; but in addition to these *external* demands, the pastor had *internal* demands originating in his/her own conscience and conviction of having a Divine calling to function as pastor;

*And that is, I suppose, because somewhere there is this picture of what the pastoral vocation consists of, I mean, even if I think that I don't want it to be this way all of the time, it still is a life-long calling.* (Participant #15)

In contrast to being accommodating to needs and demands of the members, the participants also felt it to be part of the God-given responsibility to be questioning the Status Quo of the state in which the church was at the present. What lurks beneath the surface, and what is really needed, not just what is presented as needs?

### **Consequences of Role Stress**

#### *Beneficial Role stress*

The presence of Role stress in and of itself does not necessary constitute a problem since some forms of stress can be beneficial – eustress, but too high levels or being of a destructive kind – distress, will be of hindrance to the pastoral work. The participants did not find all aspects of pastoral work plagued by distress, but instead were many challenges exciting and invigorating. Some of the challenges were suitable to the participant's giftedness and could be handled where demands and resources match at a level preferable to the individual pastor.

#### *Deteriorating Role distress*

As mentioned previously, female participants particularly testified to experiencing conflicts between family and work interests as an added burden since expectations from the work and family domains not always were mutually compatible, creating a stressful situation demanding thought-through prioritizing trying to find a win-win solution.

The different kinds of other stressful aspects were given account for in the two first categories of this analysis; *Complexity of Interrelated Roles* and *Deficient Congregational Consensus*.

At first the process is as expected; the work tasks and how much work efforts are expected both by the employer, the church, and the employee, the pastor seems to be corresponding. Stress is present but mostly in the form of invigorating eustress. The challenges of the new job and position are substantial but positive. The pastor is happy to be in this particular church and feels like this is a work worth continuing in. So enthused is the pastor over the inspiring work situation that he/she contributes with efforts that are over and above what can be expected under the employment – sometimes even a little bit too much; *"We say yes to way too many things, we are thankful that we even have the chance to have a job like this!"* (Participant #3) This naturally leads up to the next stage.

Next, Role stress is forming, since it is becoming clear that, in spite of good intentions and taking for granted that there is a consensus, a discrepancy between what the Pastor had in mind and what the Church thought was agreed upon becomes perceptible. When the pastor senses that not all are pleased with the work effort, this triggers the attempt to take on supplementary roles to cover what is experienced as missed opportunity of service with too many roles as the consequence.

*When I have had periods of feeling low during these six years, I have asked myself 'What did they hire me for? Is it that they want me to run around and work the copy-machine and get coffee-groups together and put in lots of time on calling around trying to get hold of people, is that what they want?'* (Participant #12)

This role stressor can be either that the participant felt that the necessary skills were missing making it hard to do the expected tasks or that instead the volume of the assigned work was too vast to be accomplished within the administered time frame. Since pastoral work is partly taking place outside of the work hours for spouse and children's school hours, there is an added stressful aspect forming.

When this is not resulting in positive feedback and the additional work is becoming burdensome, the first to go are the extra efforts done out of thankfulness. The process that was positive up to this point, is now starting to be reversed. As time goes by and the positive feedback is still missing, the stressful situation unchanged, the pastor starts wondering if this is a situation that one wants to stay working under indefinitely, the conviction of staying on at the church indefinitely is getting weaker. When it is going away the joy of the pastoral work goes away as well.

Sooner or later the only thing remaining is the duty which is becoming a burden, without the feeling of satisfaction over work accomplished, no longer inspired to stay on at the present church and for some even to continue as pastor and lacking motivation to contribute over and above what is formally requested in the employment. What makes it still running is sheer work moral and the conviction that one is doing important work in line with the sense of the Divine calling. The motivation to exit the employment grows stronger and for many of Swedish clergy this is the final decision.

## Discussion

The aim of this study was to explore the Swedish clergy's experiences of work stressors with the focus on Role-stress, and the findings of this study showed that the Swedish clergy's experiences were in parity with earlier studies describing role-stress (Singh, 1998; Perrewé et al. 2000; Peterson et al. 1995 and Ngo et al. et al. 2005). Similar to the research conducted by Spencer et al (2012), vision conflict and compassion fatigue were also identified in this Swedish study, but not as predominant role stressors. It is not clear why this difference between the American and the Swedish results exists. A possible reason may be linked to the differences between the cultures and especially between the church cultures. Comparative studies between Sweden and the USA might shed some light on the matter.

The Complexity of Interrelated roles as reported here and the balancing act of being both employee and in charge of the ministry of the church is highlighted. The pastor has the added dimension of being ultimately responsible to God as his servant, which is represented by the pastor's internal demands and expectations. In the relationship to the Board of the church, this is difficult since the pastor needs to prove him/herself trustworthy, which is complicated since it is not clear how this trust is established and upheld.

The fact that the experienced demands and expectations comes from two, external and internal main sources complicate things even further, as the external source consists of a mixed group of people violating the two principles of classical organizational theory, that of chain of command and unity of command (Rizzo, House, & Lirtzman, 1970) (Blau & Scott, 1962) i.e. role senders that have either an organizational position e.g. deacons, board members, elders, and informal

leaders such as regular church members with a recognized say in these matters, all holding a stake in what the pastor works with. The sum of these role demands contains an incompatibility between the different opposing expectations which then causes *role conflict* and *role overload* as the pastor experiences a deficit in resources needed to fulfill the felt demands and expectations (Peterson et al. 1995; Perrewé et al. 2000). Especially female clergy in this study, but also male clergy, suffer from yet another conflict i.e. the work-family conflict, finding it hard to balance the needed family attention with the work duties (Ngo et al. 2005).

In addition, the findings of this study seem to point to an unclear or absent job description as another cause to role stress (Strickland, 2013). The findings seem to indicate that an antecedent process is missing; that of the employing Church producing a Declaration of Intent for its ministries. If the employing Church has not formulated the necessary questions like; 'What is the reason for our existence? What is the objective of our continued work effort? Where are we situated in this process? Where do we want to go from here?' and has gone through the process of answering these questions as to make clear to a consensus over what the Church is all about, i.e. what its purpose and objectives are; it has no foundation for creating a job description for the one hired to lead the necessary change work in order to accomplish an agreed agenda.

Consequences of external/internal demands and unclear or absent job descriptions are different forms of role-stress. (The following description is illustrated in Figure 1) However, the findings in this study show that the consequences of role stress are not described only in negative terms. Initially in the pastor's work situation role stress can be beneficial in the form of motivational eustress since performance is believed to be peaking at intermediate role stress levels (Singh, 1998). Stress can be handled if it is experienced as triggering the joy of doing the assigned duties of the *in-role performance*, when these, in content and level of performance, are what is expected both by the employer, the church, and the employee, the pastor. Stress is present but mostly in the form of invigorating eustress. The challenges of the new job and position are substantial but positive. The pastor is experiencing *Job Satisfaction* and *Job enrichment* causing the pastor to sense a willingness to *commit to both the organization – the church and to the career – to continue working as pastor*. So enthused is the pastor over the inspiring work situation that he/she contributes with efforts that are over and above what can be expected under the employment, i.e. contributing with *Extra-role performance* or *Organization Citizen Behavior*.

But if there are too many sources and the demands are unclear and/or contradicting the situation becomes complicated for the pastor as noted by Strickland et al (2013). The negative motion is triggered by the *indecisiveness* (See Figure 2\* below) of the hiring church and since the church has not formulated a Declaration of intent, the much-needed *Job description\** cannot be produced in the sense and to the extent needed. Due to these circumstances the pastors experience *role confusion\** and the pressure from several role stressors which causes Role overload with accompanying Work Overload\*.

The first to go from the initially so positive experience is the *Extra-role performance* or *Organization Citizen Behavior*. There is no incentive to do even more since the signals from the congregation are unclear and not all member seems satisfied with the work effort. This causes the pastor to doubt that this is the place he/she wants to stay on working at, and the *commitment to both the organization –and to the career* is depleted. Without *Extra-role performance* and *organization and career commitment* there is little job satisfaction left and soon the only aspect left is the *in-role performance* which is performed out of sheer sense of duty. When the energy is depleted, exiting the ministry seems to be the only conceivable option.

The process as seen in the rear-view mirror from the Pastor's vantage point resembles the proverbial Domino-effect;

Figure 2 - The Devastating Domino-effect of Pastoral Role Stress\*



## Limitations

The participants of this study all had heightened accumulative scores in the four problem areas extracted from the results of the PaRI Questionnaire; Self-doubt and motivation deficiency; Work overload; Role confusion and conflict; and Growing sense of empathetic indifference and loss of work satisfaction, and can thus be expected to represent the various reasons for experiencing these symptoms, although there might be other reasons behind the heightened scores of those not interviewed. The reason for not conducting even more interviews was that the number of given answers was becoming saturated – no new reasons were surfacing at the end of the planned and conducted series of interviews.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

From the cause-and-effect reasoning above concerning role-stress among Free-church pastors follows the conclusion that the reasons for role-stress was caused by internal and external demands in combination with unclear job and role descriptions. From this follows that both employing church and the employed pastor has work to do involving information, communication and organization. What seems to be the first step for a successful cooperation between church and pastor is for the church to go through the process of establishing a Declaration of Intent stating the reason for its existence, the objectives for its ministries and the direction in which it wants to evolve in the future. Having done this, the church can now put together a job description for the pastor stating which roles the pastor is expected to fill. But it is not the pastor alone that needs a job description; the other roles such as the Chairperson of the Board, the Elders or Deacons and other officers of the Church, hired or volunteering staff, need similarly clear descriptions delineating the extent of the area of responsibility but also where cooperation will be needed for the sum total of all incumbents to become one functioning unit pulling in the same direction in unison.

Since this research study was focused on the pastor's experiences of role stress, the effects of the malfunction on others in the role-set are important to examine in order to get more of an all-encompassing picture of the dynamics of the life of a local church and what role the pastor needs to fill.

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