

# THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RELIGION AND ANXIETY: A STUDY AMONG ANGLICAN CLERGYMEN AND CLERGYWOMEN

SUSAN H. JONES and LESLIE J. FRANCIS

*University of Wales*

CHRIS JACKSON

*University of Queensland*

The 20-item anxiety scale proposed by the Eysenck Personality Profiler (EPP) was completed by 1,148 Anglican male clergy and 523 Anglican female clergy during their first year in ordained ministry. The data demonstrate that male clergy recorded higher scores on the index of anxiety than men in general. Female clergy recorded lower levels on the index of anxiety than women in general. These findings are consistent with the findings from earlier studies that male clergy tend to project a characteristically feminine personality profile while female clergy tend to project a characteristically masculine personality profile.

The relationship between religious faith and anxiety has for a long time been of interest both to theologians and to psychologists. On the face of the matter, Christian theologians and certain psychological theories seem to propose diametrically opposed hypotheses about the relationship.

On the one hand, biblical theology may seem to suggest that religious people who put their faith in God should show a lower level of anxiety or worry. For example, the Psalmist in the Old Testament promises that those who dwell in the shadow of the most high will live without fear (Psalm 91, RSV).

You will not fear the terror of the night,  
or the arrow that flies by day,  
or the pestilence that stalks in the darkness,  
or the destruction that wastes at noonday.

Correspondence concerning this article may be addressed to Leslie J. Francis, Director, Welsh National Centre for Religious Education, University of Wales, Bangor, Normal Site, Bangor, Gwynedd, LL57 2PX, UK. Email address: l.j.francis@bangor.ac.uk

In the sermon on the mount in Matthew 6, Jesus teaches his followers that faith displaces anxiety.

Do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you shall put on.... Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them.

Certainly, according to this theological perspective, the hypothesised relationship is a negative correlation between religion and anxiety.

On the other hand, certain psychological theories may seem to suggest that religious people who put their faith in God should show a higher level of anxiety or worry. For example, Freud construed religion as an attempt to resolve the father-child conflict. Religion was presumed to be an outgrowth of insecurity and God a personification of the father image who ultimately would provide for the needs of his children and punish them for their misdeeds. Freud (1957) attributed religion to a person's basic insecurity and religion was therefore considered to be a prime symptom of neurosis. Certainly, according to this psychological perspective, the hypothesised relationship is a positive correlation between religiosity and anxiety.

Empirical studies in the psychology of religion have so far failed to resolve this divergence of opinion. On the one hand, it is far from difficult to identify studies which report a positive association between religion and anxiety, including Wilson and Miller (1968), Hassan and Khaliq (1981), and Luyten, Corveleyn and Fontaine (1998). On the other hand, it is equally easy to identify studies which report a negative association between religion and anxiety, including Williams and Cole (1968), Stur-

geon and Hamley (1979), Hertsgaard and Light (1984), Morris (1982), and Peterson and Roy (1985). A third group of studies failed to find any association at all, either negative or positive between religion and anxiety, including Heintzelman and Fehr (1976), Fehr and Heintzelman (1977), Frenz and Carey (1989), and Gilk (1990).

One interesting development of this line of enquiry is to examine the levels of anxiety within a particular group of people who can be reasonably considered to be particularly committed to religion. From Galton's (1872) pioneering study on the efficacy of prayer, ordained clergy have been identified as representing just such a group. Unfortunately, empirical studies concerned with assessing anxiety among clergy also generate conflicting results.

On the one hand, there is one set of studies which report that people in ordained ministry are more anxious than people in the general population. For example, Wilson (1974) administered the 16PF (Cattell, Eber, & Tatsuoka, 1970) to 100 Roman Catholic priests in the United States. The results showed that these Roman Catholic priests score higher on the factor Q4 and are more worried, tense, and anxious than men in general. Similar results were reported by Scordato (1975) who administered the 16PF to 129 seminary persisters in the United States, by Stewart (1990) who administered the 16PF to 54 Protestant ministers in the United States, and by Musson (1998) who administered the 16PF to 441 male Anglican clergy in the Church of England.

On the other hand, there is a second set of studies which report that people in ordained ministry are less anxious than people in the general population. For example, Pallone and Banks (1968) administered the 16PF to 21 Seventh-day Adventists from a seminary in North America. The results showed that these Seventh-day Adventists score lower on the factor Q4 and are more relaxed and calm. Similar results were reported by Nauss (1972b) who administered the 16PF to 242 graduating seminarians from Springfield, Illinois, and by Godwin (1989) who administered the 16PF to 252 new staff applicants for the Campus Crusade for Christ in the United States.

At the same time, there is a third set of studies, also employing the 16PF among different groups of clergy, which find clergy scores of anxiety clearly coming within the population norms. These studies include Childers and White (1966) among 72 students at a southern theological institution; Chalmers (1969) among 70 Seventh-day Adventist ministers;

Cattell, Eber and Tatsuoka (1970) among 1,707 Roman Catholic priests; and Nauss (1972a) among 255 persisting seminarians from Springfield, Illinois.

Building on the tradition of assessing anxiety levels among clergy against anxiety levels in the general population, the present study extends existing research in three ways. First, the present study proposes to use a much larger and more representative sample of clergy than available to previous studies in the field. Second, while previous studies have concentrated exclusively on male clergy and seminarians, the present study proposes to undertake separate analyses among clergymen and clergywomen. Third, while previous studies have focussed on Cattell's personality factor Q4, the present study proposes to deploy a relatively new and robust index of anxiety included in the Eysenck Personality Profiler, developed by Eysenck, Barrett, Wilson and Jackson (1992). The 20-item measure of anxiety proposed by the Eysenck Personality Profiler is located alongside 20 other personality traits and modelled within the context of Eysenck's three-dimensional model of personality. Drawing on the earlier work of Eysenck and Wilson (1976), the construct assessed by this measure of anxiety is defined in the following terms:

high scorers on the anxiety sub-factor are people who are easily upset by things that go wrong and are inclined to worry unnecessarily about things that may or may not happen. Such people account for a high proportion of the consumption of minor tranquillizers like Librium and Valium. Low scorers are placid, serene and resistant to irrational fears and anxieties. (p. 84)

The scale is characterised by items like: 'Are you inclined to get yourself all worked up over nothing?'; 'Do you worry unreasonably over things that do not really matter?'; 'Are you anxious about something or somebody most of the time?'

Eysenck et al. (1992) reported an alpha coefficient of .83 for the male sample and .85 for the female sample. Further evidence of the reliability of this scale is provided by Muris, Schmidt, Merckelbach and Raassin (2000) who reported an alpha coefficient of .80. The Eysenck Personality Profiler has been used in a series of studies, including Marchant-Haycox and Wilson (1992); Jackson and Wilson (1993, 1994), Wilson and Jackson (1994); Jackson and Corr (1998); Furnham, Forde and Cotter, (1998a, 1998b), Furnham, Forde and Ferrari (1999); Francis, Robbins, Jackson, and Jones (2000); Muris, Schmidt, Merckelbach and Raassin (2000); and Jackson (2001).

Table 1

*Mean scale scores (for men and women compared with population norms)*

sex	clergy		norms	
	mean	sd	mean	sd
Male	11.82	7.82	9.85	7.87
Female	12.32	7.59	13.45	8.94
Male clergy/female clergy	$t = 1.223$		$p < NS$	
Male clergy/male norms	$t = 5.234$		$p < .001$	
Female clergy/female norms	$t = 2.329$		$p < .01$	
Male norms/female norms	$t = 7.980$		$p < .001$	

Against this background, the aim of the present study is to test the theory that clergy record higher levels of anxiety in comparison with men and women in general by comparing the mean scores recorded by male and female Anglican clergy on the anxiety scale proposed by the Eysenck Personality Profiler with the population norms established for the instrument by the test constructors.

## METHOD

The Eysenck Personality Profiler Questionnaire was mailed during December 1992, 1993, 1994, 1995, and 1996 to all clergy ordained during that year into the Anglican Church in England, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales. The names and addresses of the respondents were obtained from the Church of England Church Commissioners.

Each year achieved a response rate between 62% and 72%. In 1992, 568 questionnaires were successfully mailed and 353 returned their questionnaires completed, making a response rate of 62.1%. In 1993, 565 questionnaires were successfully mailed and 386 were returned completed, making a response rate of 68.3%. In 1994, 508 questionnaires were successfully mailed and 316 were completed making a response rate of 62.1%. In 1995, 449 questionnaires were successfully mailed and 321 returned making a response rate of 71.5%. In 1996, 484 were successfully mailed and 299 completed, making a response rate of 61.8%. The completed returns for male clergy was 1,148, and the completed returns for female clergy was 523.

Of the male respondents 18% were in their twenties, 38% in their thirties, 26% in their forties, 13% in their fifties, and 4% were sixty or over. Of the female

respondents 8% were in their twenties, 20% in their thirties, 42% in their forties, 25% in their fifties, and 4% were sixty or over.

The data were analysed by the SPSS package, using the reliability, frequency and t-test routines (SPSS Inc, 1988).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The anxiety scale achieved an alpha coefficient of .83 for male clergy and .81 for female clergy. Both alpha coefficients are above the .70 marker given by Kline (1993) as indicating a unidimensional and homogeneous psychometric instrument.

Table 1 presents the mean scale scores on the index of anxiety for male and female clergy separately and compares the scores with the norms provided in the test manual. In light of the use of multiple *t*-tests, necessary to examine the relationships between the mean scale scores recorded by the male and female clergy, and the population means, the Bonferroni correction was employed, establishing a *p*-value of .0125. These data demonstrate that male clergy record significantly higher scores on the scale of anxiety than men in the normal population. Women in the normal population, however, record significantly higher scores on the scale of anxiety than female clergy. Women in the normal population record significantly higher scores on the scale of anxiety than men in the normal population. There was no significant difference between male and female clergy on the scale of anxiety. These data, therefore, demonstrate that male clergy are more anxious than the men in the normal population, that female clergy are less anxious than the women in the normal population, and that there is no significant difference

Table 2

*Percentage Endorsement of the Twenty Items of the Index of Anxiety (Anxious/Calm) for Male and Female Clergy*

	Male %	Female %
Are you inclined to get yourself all worked up over nothing?	21	21
Are you easily embarrassed in a social situation?	25	28
Is life often a strain for you?	20	25
Do you often worry unreasonably over things that do not really matter?	29	28
Are you often afraid of things and people that you know would not really hurt you?	6	9
Are you inclined to tremble and perspire if you are faced with a difficult task ahead?	16	21
Are you usually calm and not easily upset?	81	76
Do you worry unnecessarily over things that might happen?	28	29
Do you worry too long over humiliating experiences?	45	56
Do you sometimes get into a state of tension and turmoil when thinking over your difficulties?	47	58
Do you find it difficult to sit still without fidgeting?	33	20
Have you ever felt you needed to take a very long holiday?	65	64
Does your voice get shaky if you are talking to someone you particularly want to impress?	14	12
Do you sometimes feel that you have so many difficulties that you cannot possibly overcome them?	11	11
Do you often wake up sweating after having a bad dream?	6	7
Are you easily annoyed if things don't go according to plan?	46	34
Do you blush more often than most people?	11	19
Do you often feel restless as though you want something but do not really know what?	29	29
Are you anxious about something or somebody most of the time?	19	23
Are you a nervous person?	13	12

Note: items © Psi-Press, 2001

between the anxiety levels displayed by male and female clergy. Table 2 penetrates behind the overall mean scores recorded on the index of anxiety to examine the percentage of male and female clergy who endorse the individual items.

On the face of the matter these data appear to provide some support for both of the contradictory hypotheses advanced from the perspectives of biblical theology and Freudian psychology. Support for the perspective proposed by Freudian psychology is found among the sample of clergymen. Support for the perspective proposed by biblical theology is found among the sample of clergywomen.

The denouement from this puzzle of contradictions can be offered by consideration of what is

known about sex differences in anxiety levels and by what is known about sex differences among Anglican clergy. First, it is clear from the data presented in Table 1 that, within the general population, women record higher levels of anxiety than men. In other words, higher levels of anxiety are consonant with a feminine personality profile, while lower levels of anxiety are consonant with a masculine personality profile. Second, there is evidence from a series of earlier studies among Anglican ordinands (Francis, 1991), Anglican priests (Robbins, Francis, & Rutledge, 1997), and Methodist Ministers (Robbins, Francis, Haley, & Kay, 2001) that male clergy tend to portray, in some senses, a characteristically feminine personality profile, while female clergy

tend to portray, in some senses, a characteristically masculine personality profile. Men who are attracted to ministry may be attracted to work within a predominantly feminised environment. Women who are attracted to ministry may be attracted to enter what they (mistakenly) perceive to be essentially a preserve of male identity. If higher levels of anxiety are, indeed, associated with a feminine personality profile and if male Anglican clergy tend to portray a characteristically feminine personality profile, these two observations would account for why it is that male clergy record anxiety scores significantly higher than the norms established for men in general. Similarly, if lower levels of anxiety are, indeed, associated with a masculine personality profile and if female Anglican clergy tend to portray a characteristically masculine personality profile, these two observations would account for why it is that female clergy record anxiety scores significantly lower than the norms established for women in general.

Following Galton's (1872) pioneering suggestion, namely that clergy should be seen as primary exemplars of religious people, the present study set out to examine a general problem in the psychology of religion among a sample of clergy. The conflict between the findings among clergymen and clergywomen has been explained in light of a research tradition which has established how the personality profile of clergymen differs from the profile of men in general and how the personality profile of clergywomen differs from the profile of women in general. It would be unwise, therefore, to generalise these findings from clergy to religious people in general without knowing a great deal more about the relationship between the personality profile of clergymen and religious men in general and about the relationship between the personality profile of clergywomen and religious women in general. Future research on the relationships between anxiety and religion should focus on other groups of people.

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## AUTHORS

JONES, SUSAN H. *Address*: Centre for Ministry Studies, University of Wales, Bangor, Normal Site, Bangor, LL57 2PX, UK. *Title*: Director of the Ministry Course at Bangor. *Degrees*: BEd, MPhil, PhD, University of Wales. *Specializations*: Personality and religion, clergy studies, psychology of religion, empirical theology.

FRANCIS, LESLIE J. *Address*: Centre for Ministry Studies, University of Wales, Bangor, Normal Site, Bangor, LL57 2PX, UK. *Title*: Professor of Practical Theology. *Degrees*: MA, BD, DD, University of Oxford, PhD, ScD, University of Cambridge. *Specializations*: Psychology of religion, empirical theology, clergy stress, burnout and personality, psychological type.

JACKSON, CHRIS. *Address*: School of Psychology, University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia. *Degrees*: BSc, MPhil, PhD, University of Coventry. *Specializations*: Structure and theory of personality and its applications.