

Being a clergywoman isn't just a risk factor for occupational stress. It may also be a source of strength.

WHAT WE STUDIED

Using surveys of United Methodist church pastors in North Carolina, we set out to study health differences in clergymen and women.

It turns out clergywomen may show unique resiliency in their role as pastors.

WHAT WE FOUND

Clergywomen experience more on-the-job stress than clergymen. But as their stress increases, they're less likely to show depressive symptoms than men, suggesting that women may be particularly well-suited to cope with the challenges of the profession.

WHY IT MATTERS

Even a small mental health advantage for women relative to men in the pastorate is surprising given past research on disparities in their flourishing.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

Do you think women are particularly well-suited to the role of clergy? Why or why not?

Women still make up only a small percentage of solo or senior pastors. How could this study be used to bolster their numbers or change hiring practices?

What are the limits of celebrating women's resiliency? What would you like to see celebrated instead?

WHAT IT MEANS

One possible explanation? Clergywomen may better deal with stress because they feel more competent in the role's tasks, many of which overlap with skills often prized and socialized in women.

Another possibility? Women who are especially resilient select into male-dominated professions like the clergy and therefore are already equipped to rebound effectively from its demands.

*from Holleman, Anna, "The Resilience of Clergywomen? Gender and the Relationship between Occupational Distress and Health Among Congregational Leaders," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* (2022) 0(0):1-19.