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Francis, L.J., Crea, G., McKenna, U. and Laycock, P. (2026) *A Replication Study Testing the Construct Validity and Internal Consistency Reliability of the Francis Burnout Inventory Revised Among Catholic Priests in Italy*. Pastoral Psychology. ISSN 0031 2789

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Accepted 2.9.2026: *Pastoral Psychology*

A replication study testing the construct validity and internal consistency reliability of the

Francis Burnout Inventory Revised among Catholic priests in Italy

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Abstract

This replication study draws on data provided by a snowball sample of 264 Catholic priests serving in Italy to test the construct validity of the operationalisation of the balanced affect conceptualisation of good work-related psychological wellbeing among clergy proposed by the Francis Burnout Inventory Revised. According to this conceptualisation the detrimental effects of negative affect, as assessed by the Scale of Emotional Exhaustion in Ministry (SEEM), are mitigated by positive affect, as assessed by the Satisfaction in Ministry Scale (SIMS). These replication data confirmed that there was a significant interaction between the effects of SEEM and SIMS scores on scores recorded on the Purpose in Life Scale (PILS), demonstrating that the mitigating effects of satisfaction in ministry on purpose in life scores increased with increasing levels of emotional exhaustion.

Keywords: balanced affect, Catholic priests, exhaustion, satisfaction, purpose in life, burnout

Introduction

The replication crisis in psychology erupted during the early 2010s as efforts to test classic and contemporary quantitative studies revealed the disturbing finding that replication studies yielded weaker or null results. Subsequent discussion of the implications of this phenomenon, as discussed, for example, by Fradera (2015), Maxwell et al. (2015), Fletcher (2021), Plucker and Makel (2021), Pennington (2023), and Bogdan (2025), has underscored the importance of careful and systematic replication studies designed to establish theoretical perspectives within psychological research from which practical stances on intervention or prevention may be built. Against this background, a small set of studies was reported to test the theoretical basis for the model of balanced affect that underpinned the Francis Burnout Inventory (Francis, Kaldor, et al., 2025). A revised version of the Francis Burnout Inventory was proposed and validated by Francis, Crea, and Laycock (2021). The present study was designed to replicate that original study among a different group of participants. The context for this replication study is set by discussion of the conceptualisation and operationalisation of burnout among clergy and by consideration of the validation of the balanced affect approach to burnout.

Conceptualisation and measurement of burnout among clergy

Work-related psychological wellbeing and burnout among clergy are matters of both academic and pastoral concern (Hoover, 2024; Hydinger et al., 2024; Picornell-Gallar & González-Fraile, 2004; Proeschold-Bell & Byassee, 2018; Ruiz-Prada et al., 2021). **Academic concern invests in conceptualising, assessing and predicting individual differences in vulnerability to poor work-related psychological wellbeing and burnout among clergy. Pastoral concern invests in preventative and therapeutic strategies to alleviate burnout. Both academic and pastoral investment** within this field need to be alert to the variations in the conceptualisation and assessment of burnout implied by the different measures employed in

developing this body of research. Different conceptualisations of the psychological phenomenon of burnout inevitably lead to different pastoral strategies implemented for remedial or preventative interventions.

Among the range of psychological tools available for assessing work-related psychological burnout among clergy, the two most often currently appearing in the literatures are the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI; Maslach & Jackson, 1996) and the Francis Burnout Inventory (FBI; Francis, Kaldor, et al., 2005). The conceptualisation of burnout proposed by the MBI is operationalised through three scales: the nine-item scale of emotional exhaustion, the five-item scale of depersonalisation, and the eight-item scale of personal accomplishment. The theory connecting these three scales is rooted in developmental progression: emotional exhaustion leads to depersonalisation and depersonalisation leads to a reduced sense of personal accomplishment. In principle this theoretical framework could lead to an assessment of the incremental progression of burnout, although this principle has not been well documented and tested in the literature. From this theoretical framework it is difficult to distil clear recommendations for therapeutic or preventative interventions.

The conceptualisation proposed by the FBI is operationalised through two scales: the eleven-item scale of emotional exhaustion in ministry and the eleven-item scale of satisfaction in ministry. The theory connecting these two scales is rooted in the model of balanced affect as originally proposed by Bradburn (1969). This model contests the assumption that positive affect and negative affect comprise opposite poles of a single continuum, and hypothesises instead that positive affect and negative affect operate as partially independent systems, with the consequence, for example, that some individuals may hold together high levels of negative affect and high levels of positive affect. In principle this theoretical framework leads to a more nuanced assessment of the level of experienced burnout and of the strength of the likely detrimental consequences of burnout. In proposing

the balanced affect approach to clergy work-related psychological wellbeing, Francis has emphasised the partial independence of the two systems of positive affect and negative affect, and drawn attention to the capacity for positive affect to mitigate the deleterious consequences of negative affect. In turn, from the theoretical framework it is possible to distil recommendations for therapeutic and preventative interventions. The case is argued that it is more realistic to implement strategies that may enhance positive affect (satisfaction in ministry) than to remove the embedded triggers of negative affect (emotional exhaustion in ministry).

Validating the balanced affect approach

Since the claims made for the balanced affect conceptualisation model of clergy psychological wellbeing and burnout carry practical implications for therapeutic and preventative interventions, it is important to invest in research designed to test this model. In particular two strands of research have examined different aspects of the claims implied by the balanced affect model. The first strand of research has supported the construct validity of the independence of the two measures of positive affect and negative affect by demonstrating that individual differences in the two measures may be explained by different predictor variables. For example, one trend emerging from these studies concerns the different associations with age. While scores on the measure of positive affect (satisfaction in ministry) are not related with age, scores on the measure of negative affect (emotional exhaustion) decrease with age. This is evidenced by recent studies among Catholic priests in Italy (Crea & Francis, 2022), Methodist ministers in Britain (Francis, Village, & Haley, 2023), and Catholic priests in Portugal (Fabri et al., 2025). A second example of different associations is provided by Crea and Bampoyiki (2026) who found that religious coping strategies were associated with enhanced positive affect (satisfaction in ministry) but were unrelated with negative affect (emotional exhaustion in ministry). A third example is provided by

examination against the three subclinical pathologies of Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy as operationalised by the Short Dark Triad (SDT; Jones & Paulhus, 2014). The intriguing finding is that Narcissism is positively correlated with both negative affect and positive affect. In other words higher narcissism scores are associated with higher scores of emotional exhaustion in ministry and higher scores of satisfaction in ministry, a clear indication that positive affect and negative affect are not functioning as opposite poles of a single continuum (Francis & Crea, 2021).

The second, and possibly more important strand of research has supported the core theory that increased levels of positive affect mitigate the deleterious consequences of negative affect. This third strand of research requires the identification of an outcome (dependent) variable (or set of variables) that may approximate an hypothesised deleterious consequence of poor work-related psychological wellbeing or burnout. Multiple regression is then employed to examine the cumulative effects of negative affect (SEEM), positive affect (SIMS), and the interaction of negative affect and positive affect on that dependent variable. The regression model may also take into account potential contaminants (for example sex and age) that may in turn account for variance in the designated dependent variable. An initial study designed to test this theory was reported by Francis, Village, et al. (2011) among 744 clergy serving in the Presbyterian Church (USA). This initial study identified two dependent variables to assess the deleterious consequences of poor work-related psychological wellbeing or burnout: self-perceived health and self-perceived burnout. Self-perceived physical health was assessed by the question: ‘How would you rate your overall health at the present time?’ with the following four response options: excellent, good, fair, and poor. Self-perceived burnout was assessed by the question: ‘To what extent do you think you are suffering from burnout in your current call?’ with the following four response options: to a great extent, to some extent, to a small extent, and not at all.

Subsequent to that initial study seven further studies have tested the same issue among different groups of clergy and employing different dependent variables. These studies have drawn on samples of: 658 Anglican clergy serving in the Church of England (Francis, Laycock, & Brewster, 2017); 155 Catholic priests serving in Italy (Francis, Laycock, & Crea, 2017); 95 Catholic priests and 61 Catholic religious sisters serving in Italy (Francis, Crea, & Laycock, 2017); 358 Anglican clergy serving in the Church in Wales (Village, Payne, & Francis, 2018); 90 Anglican clergy serving in the Church of England (Francis, Laycock, & Ratter, 2019); 803 Methodist ministers serving in Great Britain (Francis, Village, & Haley, 2023); and 266 Catholic priests serving in Portugal (Fabri et al., 2025). Collectively these seven studies have each supported the balanced affect approach to assessing clergy work-related psychological wellbeing or burnout, and have done so in relation to a range of dependent variables.

In terms of dependent variables, Francis, Laycock, & Brewster (2017) employed thoughts of leaving ministry since ordination, count of psychosomatic ailments, and count of psychological distress. Thoughts of leaving ministry were assessed by the question, 'Have you since ordination considered leaving the priesthood?' rated against four responses (no, once or twice, several times, frequently). Psychosomatic ailments were assessed by a list of five conditions (chronic indigestion, frequent headaches, insomnia, migraines, stomach complaints), prefaced by the question: 'Since ordination have you experienced any of the following?' Psychological distress was assessed by a list of four conditions (acute anxiety, depression, nervous breakdown, suicidal thoughts) prefaced by the question, 'Since ordination have you experienced any of the following?'. Village et al. (2018) employed a single-item index of thoughts of leaving ministry since ordination with four response options (no, once or twice, several times, and frequently). Francis, Village, and Haley (2023) employed two items: satisfaction with your present appointment was rated on a five-point

scale (very dissatisfied, dissatisfied, undecided, satisfied, and very satisfied); thoughts of leaving ministry was rated on a four-point scale (no, once or twice, several times, and frequently). Fabri et al. (2025) also employed a single-item thoughts of leaving ministry, rated on a four-point scale (never, once or twice, several times, often).

The other three studies designed to test the balanced affect model employed recognised scales as their preferred dependent measures: Francis, Laycock, & Ratter (2019) employed the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (Tennant et al., 2007). This is a 14-item instrument employing positively-worded items covering different aspects of eudaimonic and hedonic wellbeing. Each item is rated on a five-point Likert scale: none of the time, rarely, some of the time, often, and all of the time. Francis, Laycock, and Crea (2017), and Francis, Crea, and Laycock (2017), employed the Purpose in Life Scale developed by Robbins and Francis (2000). This is a 12-item instrument designed to assess a unidimensional construct related to meaning and purpose in life. Each item is rated on a five-point Likert scale: disagree strongly, disagree, not certain, agree, and agree strongly. Set within the broader context of logotherapy as stimulated by the pioneering work of Victor Frankl (1955, 1969, 1978, 2004, 2010) the exploration of the connections between work-related psychological wellbeing or burnout and purpose in life may be a particularly pertinent test for the effectiveness of the balanced affect approach to clergy burnout (see further, Francis & Crea, 2021).

Research questions

Although the two original 11-item scales proposed by the Francis Burnout Inventory generally reported good levels of internal consistency reliability, one item within each scale frequently performed less well than the other items. Reviewing this feature, Francis, Crea, and Laycock (2021) demonstrated that stronger scales can be generated by omitting one item from each scale and proposed the Francis Burnout Inventory Revised, comprising two ten-

item scales. In this study conducted among 287 Catholic priests serving in Italy, Francis, Crea, and Laycock (2021) validated the construct validity of the balanced affect model against purpose in life scores recorded on the Purpose in Life Scale (Robbins & Francis, 2000). Against this background, the present study was designed as the first replication study focused on the Francis Burnout Inventory Revised. The two precise questions addressed concern:

- the internal consistency reliability of the two ten-item scales: SEEM and SIMS;
- the construct validity of the balanced affect model employing those two ten-item scales, against purpose in life scores as the dependent measure.

Method

Procedure

A team of trainee psychologists working within the Pontifical Salesian University in Rome employed the snowball sampling technique to recruit a diverse sample of practising Catholic priests in Italy to participate in the project. Participation in completing the survey was voluntary and unrewarded, and responses were confidential and anonymous.

Participants

Fully completed surveys were returned by 264 priests, ranging in age from 25 to 84 years: 130 were under the age of forty, 73 were in their forties, 36 were in their fifties, 13 were in their sixties, 11 were aged seventy or over, and one failed to record his age; 150 served as diocesan priests and 114 as religious priests; in terms of nationality, 117 were Italian and 147 were not.

Measures

Professional burnout was assessed by the Francis Burnout Inventory Revised (FBIR; Francis, Crea, & Laycock, 2021). This 20-item instrument comprises the 10-item Scale of Emotional Exhaustion in Ministry (SEEM) and the 10-item Satisfaction in Ministry Scale (SIMS). Each

item was assessed on a five-point scale: agree strongly (5), agree (4), not certain (3), disagree (2), and disagree strongly (1). For the Italian translation of this measure, Francis, Crea, and Laycock (2021) reported alpha coefficients of .84 for SIMS and .78 for SEEM.

Purpose in life was assessed by the Purpose in Life Scale (PILS; Robbins & Francis, 2000). This 12-item instrument was assessed on a five-point scale: agree strongly (5), agree (4), not certain (3), disagree (2), and disagree strongly (1). For the Italian translation of this measure, Francis, Crea, and McKenna (2019) reported an alpha coefficient of .90.

Data analysis

The data were analysed by means of the SPSS statistical package, using the reliability, correlation, and regression routines.

Results and discussion

- insert table 1 about here -

The first step in data analysis examined the psychometric properties of the three scales employed in this study in terms of internal consistency reliability, means and standard deviations, and the bivariate correlations between these variables. The data presented in table 1 demonstrate satisfactory internal consistency reliability with good alpha coefficients (Cronbach, 1951) for all three scales. Purpose in life scores are correlated positively with satisfaction in ministry and negatively with emotional exhaustion in ministry, and there is a clear negative correlation between satisfaction in ministry and emotional exhaustion in ministry. The hypothesis is supported that purpose in life is significantly associated with both positive work-related affect and negative work-related affect. This commends the appropriateness of employing purpose in life as the dependent variable against which to test the balanced affect model of work-related psychological wellbeing and professional burnout.

- insert table 2 about here -

The second step in data analysis explored the structure of the two scales proposed by the Francis Burnout Inventory in greater detail by examining the correlations between the individual items and the sum of the other ten items in the scale and the item endorsement in terms of the sum of the agree and agree strongly responses (see table 2). The *Scale of Emotional Exhaustion in Ministry* achieved a satisfactory level of internal consistency reliability ($\alpha = .82$). The item rest of scale correlations were all in the range of .39 to .62, showing homogeneity among the items. The level of item endorsement suggests that up to one in seven of these priests recognised signs of burnout in their experience: 16.3% reported fatigue and irritation as part of their daily experience; 14.8% reported feeling drained by fulfilling their ministry role; 14.4% were less patient with those among whom they minister than they used to be. The *Satisfaction in Ministry Scale* achieved a satisfactory level of internal consistency reliability ($\alpha = .84$). The item rest of scale correlations were all in the range of .41 to .62, showing homogeneity among the items. The level of item endorsement suggests that the majority of these priests recognised high levels of work-related satisfaction: 88.7% were really glad that they had entered the ministry; 85.8% gain a lot of personal satisfaction from fulfilling their ministry roles; 81.8% feel very positive about their current ministry.

- insert table 3 about here -

The third step in data analysis tested the balanced affect model of work-related psychological wellbeing and burnout by examining the independent and interaction effects of scores recorded on the Scale of Emotional Exhaustion in Ministry (SEEM) and the Satisfaction in Ministry Scale (SIMS) on scores recorded on the Purpose in Life Scale (PILS) as the dependent variable in a series of multiple regression models. The first model entered age, SEEM and SIMS in that order. Since age was statistically non-significant, age was omitted from the second model that entered SEEM, SIMS and the interaction term. Since the

effect of SIMS on PILS with the interaction term included in the model was statistically non-significant, SIMS no longer appears in the third model as presented in table 3. The data presented in table 3 demonstrated a highly significant interaction between SEEM and SIMS scores. This significant interaction term suggested that the mitigating effect of satisfaction in ministry on purpose in life scores was greater when the level of emotional exhaustion was higher. This finding is clearly illustrated in figure 1 by the sequence of three regression lines plotted in Figure 1. In particular it can be seen that this fitted model implies that the negative effects of exhaustion could, in the mean, be completely eliminated by the highest scores for satisfaction. For example, in our sample of 264 priests, amongst the ten priests with the highest observed satisfaction in ministry score of 50, that priest with the highest emotional exhaustion score of 23 in that group also had the highest possible Purpose in Life score of 60.

Conclusion

Taking seriously the importance attributed to replication studies in psychological research (Bogdan, 2025; Fletcher, 2021; Fradera, 2015; Maxwell et al., 2015; Pennington, 2023; Plucker & Makel, 2021), the present study was designed to build on the developing body of research testing the Francis Burnout Inventory (as reviewed in the introduction to this paper) and specifically to replicate the one previous study focusing on the Francis Burnout Inventory Revised, as reported by Francis, Crea, and Laycock (2021) and drawing on the Purpose in Life Scale (Robbins & Francis, 2000) as the dependent variable. Two precise questions were addressed in the analysis.

The first question concerned the internal consistency reliability of the two scales proposed by the Francis Burnout Inventory Revised: the Scale of Emotional Exhaustion in Ministry (SEEM) and the Satisfaction in Ministry Scale (SIMS). The data reported satisfactory alpha coefficients for both measures, confirming good reliability among Catholic priests serving in Italy.

The second research question concerned testing the construct validity of the balanced affect approach to clergy work-related psychological wellbeing and burnout as operationalised by the Francis Burnout Inventory Revised, among Catholic priests serving in Italy. Employing the Purpose in Life Scale as the dependent variable, these new data confirmed the hypothesis that positive affect mitigates the deleterious consequences of negative affect. The finding is of importance for enhancing clergy work-related psychological wellbeing and for reducing experienced burnout. While it may be difficult to protect clergy from the work-related experiences that generate emotional exhaustion, it may be more viable for programmes of continuing personal and professional development to enable clergy to identify and to maximise opportunities for generating the sense of satisfaction in ministry.

There are three main limitations with the present study that need to be acknowledged and taken into account when designing further replication studies concerned with testing the construct validity and internal consistency reliability of the Francis Burnout Inventory. The first limitation concerns the reliance on the snowball sampling technique to recruit a diverse sample of practising Catholic priests in Italy to participate in the project. While the technique is appropriate for testing within the sample the association among the variables, it is not possible to generalise from this sample to the wider population of Catholic priests in Italy. This is made clear by the younger age profile of the participants. For this reason, caution is needed in extending the pastoral implications of the findings among older priests.

The second limitation concerns the inclusion of only one relevant dependent measure in the validation study. Although the addition of multiple dependent measures would lengthen the survey, the security of the findings would be strengthened by multiple indicators. The third limitation concerns specifically the choice of the Purpose in Life Scale as the one dependent measure. While this scale has been designed to measure *personal*

purpose in life, the measure of positive affect (Satisfaction in Ministry Scale) contains reference to a sense of *work-related* purpose.

Funding

The research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, nor not-for-profit sector.

Conflict of interest

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Data availability

Data are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Informed consent

All participants were priests over the age of 18 who gave informed consent by participation in the project.

Ethical approval

The research was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Salesian Pontifical University, Rome.

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Table 1

Mean scale scores and correlation matrix

	Alpha	Mean	SD	SIMS	SEEM
Purpose in Life (PILS)	.90	52.60	5.34	.58***	-.49***
Emotional Exhaustion (SEEM)	.82	21.36	6.02	-.57***	
Satisfaction in Ministry (SIMS)	.84	44.80	4.75		

N = 264; *** $p < .001$

Table 2

Francis Burnout Inventory: Scale properties

	<i>r</i>	%
<i>Scale of Emotional Exhaustion in Ministry</i> ($\alpha = .82$)		
I feel drained by fulfilling my ministry roles	.39	14.8
Fatigue and irritation are part of my daily experience	.60	16.3
I am invaded by sadness I can't explain	.62	7.2
I am feeling negative or cynical about the people with whom I work	.50	6.1
My humour has a cynical and biting tone	.55	4.5
I find myself spending less and less time with those among whom I minister	.46	9.1
I have been discouraged by the lack of personal support for me here	.42	19.4
I find myself frustrated in my attempts to accomplish tasks important to me	.52	14.7
I am less patient with those among whom I minister than I used to be	.51	14.4
I am becoming less flexible in my dealings with those among whom I minister	.50	12.5
<i>Satisfaction in Ministry Scale</i> ($\alpha = .84$)		
I have accomplished many worthwhile things in my current ministry	.44	75.3
I gain a lot of personal satisfaction from working with people in my current ministry	.53	80.7
I deal very effectively with the problems of the people in my current ministry	.41	70.5
I feel very positive about my current ministry	.64	81.8
I feel that my pastoral ministry has a positive influence on people's lives	.57	85.2
I feel that my teaching ministry has a positive influence on people's faith	.58	85.3
I feel that my ministry is really appreciated by people	.46	74.2
I am really glad that I entered the ministry	.62	88.7
The ministry here gives real purpose and meaning to my life	.53	92.4
I gain a lot of personal satisfaction from fulfilling my ministry roles	.62	85.8

Note: r = correlation between individual items and the sum of the remaining items

% = sum of agree strongly and agree responses

Table 3

Multiple regression on PILS of SEEM and interaction between SEEM and SIMS

	B	SE	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i> <
Constant	56.644	1.116	50.76	.001
SEEM	-1.187	0.102	-11.61	.001
SEEM*SIMS	0.025	0.003	8.34	.001

N = 264

Figure 1

