

The Perceptions of Terminated Ministers Scale—Revised

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Abstract The Perceptions of Terminated Ministers Scale—Revised (PTM-R), a 15-item measure of perceptions of termination appropriate to members of clergy, was developed for use among researchers studying how clergypersons perceive the effects of forced termination events. To examine the reliability and validity of the measure, three samples of clergy were assessed using the PTM and PTM-R. The three samples used Barfoot et al.'s (2005) working definition of forced pastoral exits. Their definition does not distinguish between being fired or forced to resign. Each participant was asked to specify whether they were fired or forced to resign. Recently, Tanner et al. (2012) offered a new definition of forced termination: “Forced termination is the result of a process of involuntary removal of paid and non-paid clergypersons that results from a period of traumatic and demeaning psychological and emotional abuse” (p. 14). Data analysis among all three samples supports the reliability and validity of the scale and commends it for further use among clergy who have experienced forced termination.

Keywords Forced termination · Clergy · Perceptions of termination

Introduction

The ministry work environment is different from other working environments. Assumptions made by clergy about the people they serve seem to influence their perceptions about the ministry work environment. One of these assumptions is that because clergy are interacting mainly with those who profess to be Christians, they will be treated with love and respect.

A phenomenon that exists among clergy but that has received little attention by researchers is that of forced termination. Forced termination occurs in other professions, but its effects on clergy and their family is dissimilar from those on other professionals and their families. One main difference of concern is the often nearly total loss of resources when a minister has been forcibly terminated. For ministers, forced termination often comes in the form of a personal psychological attack by the members of the church (Barfoot et al. 2005).

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Barfoot et al. give this working definition of forced pastoral exits: “A pastor may abdicate his post due to the constant negativity found in personal attacks and criticism from a small faction within the congregation from whom the minister feels psychologically pressured to step down from his or her service of ministry” (p. 2). This definition does not distinguish between being fired or forced to resign. In our survey, we asked participants to specify whether they were fired or forced to resign. Ultimately Tanner et al. (2012) provided a new definition of forced termination: “Forced termination is the result of a process of involuntary removal of paid and non-paid clergy-persons that results from a period of traumatic and demeaning psychological and emotional abuse” (p. 14). Guy Greenfield (2001) identified descriptions of how the process of forced termination typically occurs for ministers and labels the attackers as “clergy killers.” Currently no measure exists to determine the perceptions of the minister when attacked and forced to leave a ministry position. The development of the PTM scale is intended to meet this need.

The Perceptions of Terminated Ministers Scale (PTM) was developed to aid researchers concerned with how clergypersons perceive the effects of forced termination events. The original scale was an 11-item self-report measure concerned with *feelings about the termination experience* (i.e., embarrassment, anger, and faith), *responses to termination* (i.e., difficulty facing responsible party, forgiving responsible party, and speaking with responsible party), *trauma* (i.e., reminders of the event are stressful), and *hurt* (i.e., my family was deeply hurt), scored on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Scores can range from 11 to 55, with higher scores indicating a more negative perception of termination.

The PTM was revised in a third study designed to consider how distressing clergy found the event to create the PTM-R. Five questions related to symptoms of Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) were added to create the PTM-R scale, for a total of 16 items. Those questions were developed from the description of PTSD in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders-Fourth Edition* (American Psychiatric Association 1994). A sample item reads, “Reminders of the event are stressful.” The rationale for the included items derives from previous research and non-empirical writings on the subject of forced termination (Campbell 1998; Faulkner 1986; Onley 1994; Tanner and Zvonkovic 2011). A total possible score was calculated by multiplying the number of items by five. A mid-range score is 40. A score above 40 would indicate increasingly negative perceptions of forced termination and symptoms of PTSD.

Two studies have employed the PTM. First, Tanner and Zvonkovic (2011) report data from 227 ministers. The first principal factor of an unrotated solution estimated by principal component analysis accounted for 55 % of the variance, with individual loadings ranging from 0.41 to 0.72. Further, the alpha coefficient was 0.70, with individual corrected correlation items ranging between 0.09 and 0.62. In the second study, Tanner et al. (2012) surveyed clergy from thirty-nine denominations who were asked about forced termination. Those who had been forcibly terminated were asked to complete the PTM. The first principal factor of an unrotated solution estimated by principal component analysis accounted for 61 % of the variance, with individual loadings ranging between 0.40 and 0.87. Further, the alpha coefficient was 0.83, with individual corrected correlation items ranging between 0.45 and 0.77. In a third study (Tanner et al. 2012), clergy were asked to complete the PTM-R. The first principal factor of an unrotated solution estimated by principal component analysis accounted for 70 % of the variance, with individual loadings ranging between 0.52 and 0.81. Further, the alpha coefficient was 0.90, with individual corrected correlation items ranging between 0.45 and 0.77. The aim of the present study is to examine the reliability and validity of the Perceptions of Terminated Ministers Scale—Revised.

Method

Participants

Sample one consisted of 227 Assemblies of God ministers, 86 % of whom were male and 14 % female. Of these, 60 % were age 46 or over, 95 % were married, 51 % held the position of senior or solo pastor, and 89 (41 %) had experienced a forced termination. Sample two consisted of 582 Protestant ministers from more than thirty-nine denominations in the United States, of whom 70 % were male and 30 % female. The age of the participants was mainly clustered in the range of 26–35 years old (24.5 %), 36–45 years old (28.6 %), and 46–55 years old (28 %). Over half of the participants were senior or solo pastors, while 14 % were associate pastors, 9 % were youth pastors, and 3 % were children's pastors. The respondents were primarily Presbyterians (21.9 %), Assembly of God (15.2 %), Baptist (15.3 %), Non-Denominational (14.8 %) and Church of Christ (9 %). Twenty-eight percent of the sample had been forcibly terminated at least once during their ministry.

There were 55 participants in the third sample, all of whom had been forced out of a ministry position. Of these, 67 % were males and 33 % females. The respondents varied in age, with the largest group (47 %) representing the 45 to 54 age group. Eighty-two percent were married. Eighty-seven percent of the sample identified their race as white or Caucasian, while 11 % identified themselves as African American. Twenty-six percent of the sample held a Bachelor's degree while 47 % of the sample held a Master's degree. Participants from Assemblies of God made up 21 % of the sample, 17 % were Baptist, 15 % were non-denominational, 21 % identified as other, 9 % were Methodist, and 8 % were Lutheran. Thirty-six percent of the respondents were senior or solo pastors at the time of their forced termination, 16 % were associate pastors, 7 % were youth pastors, 2 % were children's or worship pastors, and another 9 % fell in the category of other.

Scale construction

Several statements representing perceptions of terminated ministers were culled from the empirical and anecdotal literature and the researchers' knowledge of clergy termination (Barfoot et al. 2005; Barna 1993; Blanton and Morris 1999; Campbell 1998; Greenfield 2001; Hoge and Wenger 2005; Lehr 2006; London and Wiseman 2003; Schmidt n.d.). The PTM was administered as part of a larger survey. In all of the samples, one item was dropped (*There was something I could have done different to stop my resignation or termination*) because it was not significantly correlated with any other item in the scale and its inclusion lowered the coefficient alpha. Dropping the item resulted in a 9-item scale. In sample one, questions 3 and 6 were stated as a positive and reverse coded (*My family was not deeply hurt by the circumstances of my resignation or termination from a ministry position*); in sample two, the questions were stated as a negative (*my family was deeply hurt. . .*). The change in the statement positively affected both the correlation and the coefficient alpha in sample two. Therefore, we recommend leaving the statements as negative and not reverse coding them.

In sample two, a statement was added to the scale: *I have been embarrassed to talk about my termination experience with anyone*. Adding this statement to sample two resulted in a 10-item scale with a coefficient alpha of 0.85, with individual corrected correlation items ranging between 0.44 and 0.72. The first principal factor of an unrotated solution estimated by principal component analysis accounted for 56 % of the variance, with individual loadings ranging between 0.32 and 0.88.

In sample three, five questions were added to the scale, which resulted in the revised 15-item scale with a coefficient alpha of 0.92 with individual corrected correlation items ranging between 0.45 and 0.80. The first principal factor of an unrotated solution estimated by principal component analysis accounted for 66 % of the variance, with individual loadings ranging between 0.45 and 0.79.

Results

The PTM and PTM-R was subjected to principal components analysis and varimax rotation to determine how, if at all, the perceptions of termination might be classified into categories. Four interpretable factors were extracted with eigenvalues greater than 1 and accounted for 75 % of the total variance. The factor loadings for the revised 15-item scale are reported in Table 1. The number of factors are justified by two criteria, eigenvalues greater than 1 and total percent of variance explained by the extracted factors (Yeomans and Golder 1982). Although sensible cutoffs for variance explained is in the 60 % range, very often 70–90 % is the criterion (Jolliffe 2002; Kaiser 1974). These factors can be identified as feelings of termination (FT), responses to termination (RT), trauma (TR), and hurt (HT).

Table 1 Factor loadings for revised PTM items

Item #	Item	Factor			
		1	2	3	4
1	I have feelings of anger towards people at a church I was forced from.	0.743			
3	I have had trouble forgiving the people I believe to be directly responsible for my resignation/termination.	0.804			
4	I rarely think positively about the day I was forced to resign or terminated from a ministry position.	0.649			
8	If I had the opportunity to say how I really felt about the people responsible for my family's sudden move, it would not be pleasant.	0.804			
2	I have found it difficult to speak with anyone at a church I was forced from.		0.826		
5	I could never face the people responsible for my resignation or termination from a ministry position in a positive way.		0.626		
9	I have felt a decrease in my faith.		0.765		
10	I have been embarrassed to talk about my termination experience with anyone.		0.793		
6	I was deeply hurt by the circumstances of my resignation or termination from a ministry position.			0.903	
7	My family was deeply hurt by the circumstances of my resignation or termination from a ministry position.			0.911	
11	I have painful memories of my termination				0.669
12	Reminders of the event are physically distressing				0.813
13	I have disturbing dreams about my forced termination				0.543
14	Negative thoughts about the event occur				0.683
15	Reminders of the event are stressful				0.839

Only loadings of 0.40 or higher allowed

Conclusion

The PTM-R scale was developed to be used as a tool to determine the perceptions clergy hold of their forced termination. Forced termination of clergy is unique and different from job loss. The assumption that ministers are serving Christians who ought to love one another can influence the perceptions of the terminated and perhaps their future employment. The scale measures the participants' responses to forced termination, feelings of termination, trauma, and sense of being hurt. The immediate effects of termination may also have an effect on the perception of termination. It will be important for future revisions of the scale to include some measure of the influence of the immediate effects of forced termination.

The aim of the present study was to examine the reliability and validity of the PTM scale. The reliability and validity data reported from three samples are generally consistent with one another. One item was found to have the lowest item-total correlations and factor loadings in all three samples and was deleted from the scale. Five items related to PTSD were added to the scale, resulting in the revised 15-item PTM-R. It will be important for future research to establish normative means and standard deviations for this instrument and to test its use among other professional human service organizations. On the basis of these findings, the PTM-R can be recommended for use among clergy.

Perceptions of Terminated Ministers Scale—Revised scale items

Each Item is scored on a 5-point Likert-type scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

- 1) I have feelings of anger towards people at a church I was forced from.
- 2) I have had trouble forgiving the people I believe to be directly responsible for my resignation/termination.
- 3) I rarely think positively about the day I was forced to resign or terminated from a ministry position.
- 4) I have felt a decrease in my faith.
- 5) I could never face the people responsible for my resignation or termination from a ministry position in a positive way.
- 6) I was deeply hurt by the circumstances of my resignation or termination from a ministry position.
- 7) My family was deeply hurt by the circumstances of my resignation or termination from a ministry position.
- 8) If I had the opportunity to say how I really felt about the people responsible for my family's sudden move, it would not be pleasant.
- 9) I have found it difficult to speak with anyone at a church I was forced from.
- 10) I have been embarrassed to talk about my termination experience with anyone.
- 11) I have painful memories of my termination.
- 12) Reminders of the event are physically distressing.
- 13) I have distressing dreams about my forced termination.
- 14) Negative thoughts about the event occur.
- 15) Reminders of the event are stressful.

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