

Behind The Pulpit: Emotional Challenges And Coping Mechanisms Among Pastors' Wives In Ibadan

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Abstract: *This study explored the emotional stability of pastors' wives in the Ibadan metropolis, with a focus on the emotional challenges they encounter in their roles and the coping strategies they adopt. Guided by a qualitative research design, in-depth interviews were conducted with nine pastors' wives across five Local Government Areas. The findings revealed that emotional stability is a dynamic process, shaped by personal growth, marital support, and spiritual discipline. Participants reported that their emotional challenges stemmed largely from exclusion in ministry decision-making, congregational expectations, and public scrutiny, often resulting in internalised emotional strain. Despite these pressures, respondents demonstrated adaptive coping mechanisms, including self-talk, prayer, singing, and spousal modelling of emotional regulation. While family and spousal support emerged as crucial to emotional well-being, most participants expressed disappointment at the perceived lack of emotional care from the church. The study concludes that pastors' wives must continually develop emotional resilience to balance spiritual expectations, marital roles, and societal demands. Recommendations are offered for faith-based institutions to better support the emotional health of clergy spouses through inclusive, psychological, and pastoral care initiatives.*

Keywords: Emotional stability, emotional challenges, coping strategies

INTRODUCTION

The emotional well-being of individuals in caregiving and leadership roles has gained increasing global attention in recent years, particularly within professions involving high levels of interpersonal interaction and moral responsibility. Among these, spouses of religious leaders occupy a unique and complex space, often sharing in the burdens of ministry without formal recognition or structured support. Studies from the United States, Europe, and Asia reveal that clergy spouses especially women face elevated levels of emotional stress due to expectations of moral perfection, emotional restraint, and public availability (Lee, Worthington, and McDaniel, 2018; Knox, 2021). These roles demand emotional labour, self-sacrifice, and the suppression of personal struggles, which can lead to internal conflict and psychological exhaustion if not managed effectively (Park and Smith, 2020).

In many African societies, including Kenya, Ghana, and South Africa, the role of a pastor's wife carries not only spiritual significance but also intense socio-cultural expectations. These women are often viewed as moral exemplars and co-labourers in the ministry, responsible for counselling church members, leading women's groups, and supporting their husbands' pastoral vision (Chitando, 2022). Yet, despite their centrality to congregational life, their emotional needs are rarely prioritised within the institutional framework of the church. African studies highlight issues such as social isolation, lack of emotional boundaries, and silent suffering among clergy spouses (Kgatle, 2019; Otieno, 2021), raising concerns about how these women manage the dual burden of spiritual expectations and personal emotional struggles.

Within the Nigerian context, the position of a pastor's wife is not merely symbolic—it is socially and spiritually active, often entrenched in patriarchal religious structures that emphasise submission, moral rectitude, and service. Pastors' wives in Nigeria are frequently expected to model ideal Christian womanhood while providing emotional and spiritual support to congregants, often without the benefit of training or formal support systems (Adeboye, 2020). The emotional weight of this role is compounded by limited spousal communication in some cases, poor congregational empathy, and the challenge of maintaining emotional composure amidst continuous scrutiny (Eze, 2021). Despite growing interest in clergy well-being, most studies in Nigeria have focused on pastors themselves, with little attention paid to the psychosocial experiences of their spouses.

In South-West Nigeria, particularly among Pentecostal and Orthodox churches in urban centres like Lagos and Ibadan, pastors' wives are highly visible figures within religious life. These women often balance multiple roles as wives, mothers, professionals, and ministry partners—while navigating the demands of church leadership and societal expectations. Yet, there remains a paucity of empirical research exploring how they cope emotionally with these intersecting pressures. Existing studies tend to treat pastoral ministry as a singular male-led experience, neglecting the lived realities of the women who serve beside them (Ogundipe and Adelakun, 2019). This oversight not only distorts the full picture of ministry life but also leaves the emotional struggles of pastors' wives unaddressed.

In Ibadan metropolis, the socio-religious landscape is characterised by a blend of tradition, modernity, and vibrant Christian expression. Churches across the five major Local Government Areas - Ibadan North, North-East, North-West, South-East, and South-West rely heavily on the unacknowledged emotional labour of pastors' wives. These women are often caught between private marital

roles and public ministry expectations, with limited emotional outlets. Given the cultural emphasis on appearance and spirituality, they are frequently discouraged from expressing emotional distress, resulting in internalised stress and compromised well-being. Yet, scholarly investigations into their emotional experiences remain scarce, leaving a critical knowledge gap regarding the psychological and social factors that shape their emotional stability.

This study, therefore, seeks to explore the emotional stability of pastors' wives in the Ibadan metropolis, with specific attention to the emotional challenges they face and the coping strategies they adopt. It aims to understand how spiritual expectations, marital dynamics, and congregational relationships influence their emotional well-being. In doing so, the study addresses a notable gap in Nigerian and African literature by centring the voices and lived experiences of clergy spouses. The study also provides evidence-based insights that could inform pastoral care policies, denominational support systems, and mental health interventions tailored to women in ministry.

Ultimately, this research is guided by three core questions: How do pastors' wives in Ibadan metropolis experience and maintain emotional stability? What specific emotional challenges do they encounter in their pastoral and domestic roles? And what coping strategies do they employ to manage these emotional demands? By answering these questions through a qualitative lens, the study contributes to a more inclusive understanding of ministry life, one that acknowledges the unseen emotional burdens of women who support religious leadership from behind the scenes.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the emotional well-being of pastors' wives within the Ibadan metropolis, with particular attention to how they experience, describe, and manage their emotional states in the context of pastoral ministry. The study aims to explore how these women perceive their emotional roles, the specific emotional challenges they face, the strategies they employ to cope with these pressures, and the role of social and relational support systems in promoting their emotional stability. Specific objectives are:

1. To explore how pastors' wives perceive and describe their emotional well-being in relation to their roles in ministry.
2. To identify the major emotional challenges pastors' wives face and examine the coping mechanisms they adopt to address these challenges.
3. To examine the influence of social and relational support systems on the emotional stability of pastors' wives in Ibadan metropolis.

Research Questions

The following questions were raised for the study:

1. How do pastors' wives perceive and describe their emotional well-being in relation to their roles in ministry?
2. What are the major emotional challenges pastors' wives face, and how do they cope with these challenges?
3. What role do social and relational support systems play in the emotional stability of pastors' wives in the Ibadan metropolis?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is guided by Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), which provides a useful lens for examining the intentional and socially influenced behaviours of pastors' wives in the context of emotional regulation. According to TPB, human behaviour is primarily driven by behavioural intention, which is shaped by three interconnected factors: attitudes toward the behaviour, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control. In the context of this study, the emotional expressions and coping strategies employed by pastors' wives—such as emotional restraint, silence during conflict, or withdrawal for self-regulation—can be understood as planned responses rather than spontaneous actions. These women's intentions to behave in emotionally stable ways are shaped by their internal evaluations of emotional control (attitude), their perception of what others expect from them (subjective norms), and their belief in their capacity to manage such behaviours (perceived control). As women deeply embedded in religious and communal life, pastors' wives make intentional emotional decisions within a structured web of expectations, moral values, and social visibility. Their behaviour is not only about individual emotional needs but also about upholding family, religious, and communal ideals.

The TPB framework is especially relevant to the study because it accounts for how external pressures and social expectations influence internal emotional choices. Pastors' wives in the Ibadan metropolis are frequently subjected to societal scrutiny and held to higher moral and emotional standards due to their association with ministry leadership. Subjective norms, such as congregational expectations regarding modesty, composure, and public conduct, often weigh heavily on how these women manage their emotional well-being. The theory also highlights the importance of perceived behavioural control, which relates to each wife's sense of empowerment or limitation in regulating her emotions under pressure. When pastors' wives believe they have the internal or external

resources such as prayer, spousal support, or personal reflection to cope effectively, they are more likely to exhibit emotional resilience. Conversely, when control is perceived as limited, emotional distress may increase. By applying TPB, this study is able to explain not just the observable behaviours of pastors' wives, but also the psychosocial and spiritual reasoning behind those behaviours, thus offering a nuanced understanding of emotional well-being in religiously demanding roles.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design to investigate the emotional well-being and coping experiences of pastors' wives within their ministerial roles in Ibadan Metropolis, Southwest Nigeria. The phenomenological approach was appropriate for capturing the lived emotional realities of participants who navigate unique psychosocial demands in faith-based settings. A total of nine pastors' wives, drawn purposively from both Pentecostal and Orthodox denominations, were selected across five Local Government Areas: Ibadan North (IBN), Ibadan South-West (IBSW), Ibadan South-East (IBSE), Ibadan North-East (IBNE), and Ibadan North-West (IBNW). Participants met the inclusion criteria of being legally married to full-time pastors and actively involved in ministry work. In-depth interviews (IDIs) were used to collect rich, descriptive narratives of their emotional experiences, with each interview lasting between 45 minutes and one hour. Ethical protocols such as informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary withdrawal were strictly observed throughout the process.

The data collection instrument consisted of a semi-structured interview guide developed in line with the research questions and validated by professionals in counselling and pastoral care. All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and anonymised using coded identifiers. The transcribed data were analysed using thematic analysis. This involved familiarisation with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. Patterns of meaning were identified through inductive coding, allowing key themes to emerge from the participants' lived experiences without relying on pre-existing theoretical constructs. Thematic analysis enabled a nuanced interpretation of how pastors' wives construct meaning around emotional well-being, challenges, and relational support within ministry contexts. Rigour and trustworthiness were enhanced through peer debriefing, member checking, and an audit trail, ensuring the credibility and transferability of the findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This chapter presents the findings from in-depth interviews conducted with ten pastors' wives in the Ibadan Metropolis. The responses were thematically organised around the three research questions guiding the study. Each section opens with an overview, followed by anonymised interview excerpts (identified by metadata), and is subsequently discussed using empirical literature and theoretical justification. The transcripts are labelled by: IDI (In-depth Interview), gender (F), age, location, and year of data collection.

Demographic Representations of Participants

The demographic data of the participants are displayed in Table 1

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Pastors' Wives Interviewed in the Ibadan Metropolis (N = 9)

Participant ID	Age (Years)	LGA Location	Years in Ministry	Denomination	Occupation
P1	43	Ibadan North (IBN)	9	Pentecostal	Civil Servant
P2	51	Ibadan South West (ISW)	13	Pentecostal	Businesswoman
P3	46	Ibadan South East (IBSE)	15	Orthodox	Civil Servant
P4	50	Ibadan North East (IBNE)	18	Pentecostal	Full-time Ministry
P5	48	Ibadan North West (IBNW)	10	Pentecostal	Trader
P6	39	Ibadan North (IBN)	7	Pentecostal	Civil Servant
P7	41	Ibadan North West (IBNW)	12	Orthodox	Businesswoman
P8	37	Ibadan South West (ISW)	5	Pentecostal	Trader
P9	45	Ibadan North (IBN)	11	Pentecostal	Civil Servant

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the nine pastors' wives interviewed in Ibadan Metropolis. The participants, aged between 37 and 51 years, represent a mature group with substantial life and ministry experience. Their years in ministry range from 5 to 18, offering insights from both mid-career and long-serving clergy spouses. They are drawn from five Local Government Areas - Ibadan North, Ibadan South West, Ibadan South East, Ibadan North East, and Ibadan North West, ensuring a broad geographic spread. Most participants are affiliated with Pentecostal denominations, reflecting the dominant religious trend in the region, while two are from Orthodox churches. The occupational profile is diverse: four are civil servants, two are traders, two are businesswomen,

and one is engaged in full-time ministry. This occupational and denominational variety highlights the socio-economic and spiritual contexts within which these women navigate their emotional well-being, making the data rich and representative for understanding the psychosocial dynamics of pastors' wives in the Ibadan metropolis.

Answers to Research Questions

Research Question One: How do pastors' wives perceive and describe their emotional well-being in relation to their roles in ministry?

Pastors' wives described their emotional well-being as being deeply influenced by their spiritual and ministerial responsibilities. Their emotional state is not static; instead, it is constantly evolving with the challenges and roles they assume. Respondents emphasised the significance of emotional mastery, particularly in dealing with both spiritual expectations and societal scrutiny. Emotional intelligence, growth in self-awareness, and deliberate restraint were recurring descriptors.

One participant explained how becoming a pastor's wife transformed her understanding of emotional control, revealing the ongoing demand for emotional discipline under public and spiritual observation:

Before I became a pastor's wife, I felt I had emotional control. But in this role, I learnt that emotional stability is not automatic. Every day comes with a new demand – someone to please, someone to pray for, someone watching you. You have to keep learning how to manage what you feel versus how you're expected to act. It's like being under spiritual and emotional surveillance (IDI, F, 43, IBN, 2024)

Another participant highlighted the constant social monitoring associated with the pastoral role, explaining how it compelled her to develop emotional maturity through prayer, self-talk, and behavioural restraint.

I realised that being a pastor's wife means more than being married to a pastor. Your feelings can't just be expressed as they come. You're watched all the time – by members, by leaders, by neighbours. I had to grow emotionally, pray more, and learn to speak to myself positively before reacting. Emotional stability became a necessity, not a choice (IDI, F, 51, IBSW, 2024)

A third participant described emotional balance as a painful but necessary journey, shaped by spiritual wisdom, personal restraint, and a shift from emotional reactivity to reflective silence.

The truth is, I am more emotionally balanced now than I was before ministry. But that balance came with many tears and lessons. I've learnt that silence is sometimes more powerful than reacting. It's a journey of learning patience and understanding spiritual timing. I can't afford emotional outbursts, even when I'm hurt deeply (IDI, F, 46, IBSE, 2024).

The respondents' narratives reveal that emotional well-being in pastoral marriage is both a product and a continuous process of emotional regulation shaped by religious roles and social demands. Pastors' wives described emotional equilibrium not as a static trait, but as one cultivated through daily experiences, ministerial challenges, and evolving relational expectations. Emotional regulation, in this sense, becomes a skill honed through spiritual reflection, social awareness, and self-discipline. Participants often indicated that their emotional responses had matured since assuming their roles, suggesting that emotional development in pastoral contexts is longitudinal and context-sensitive. The heightened visibility of their position demands that they adopt strategies to control emotional expressions, especially when under public scrutiny. Emotional labour emerges as a critical facet of their experience, where private struggles must be subordinated to maintain a calm, nurturing, and spiritually supportive persona. This process of adaptation reinforces the notion that emotional resilience is socially constructed within the pastoral marriage, shaped by lived realities, rather than being entirely intrinsic. The wives acknowledged becoming more self-aware and emotionally attuned, particularly due to the burden of meeting congregational expectations and internalising their roles as moral exemplars. The dynamic nature of their emotional adjustment points to a deliberate internal reconfiguration, one that balances personal authenticity with religious responsibility.

This finding is justified by the increasing demand placed on clergy spouses to model ideal spiritual and emotional conduct within their churches and larger communities. Their emotional restraint becomes essential in mediating conflict, encouraging others, and sustaining ministry operations without disintegration. The expectation that they must serve as paragons of spiritual strength, even under duress, often leaves them without room for vulnerability or open emotional expression. These role-specific stressors reflect what Hochschild (2012) defines as "deep acting" in emotional labour, where individuals must not only perform emotional control but internalise it for authenticity. In the context of African Christianity, where pastors and their families are often held to rigorous spiritual standards, the emotional discipline demanded from clergy wives can become psychologically taxing (Okon, 2020). Moreover, emotional expectations go beyond the church to include public appearances, interpersonal relationships, and marital

dynamics, thereby increasing the cognitive and emotional load. The social construction of perfection in pastoral homes further reduces the margin for emotional authenticity, compelling these women to prioritise harmony over personal disclosure. Consequently, the ministry becomes a site of simultaneous affirmation and emotional constraint. As a result, the role not only consumes emotional energy but also reorganises emotional expression to meet public expectations.

These outcomes align with contemporary emotional intelligence (EI) theory, especially Goleman's (1995) foundational work and subsequent refinements by scholars such as Schutte et al. (2018), who argue that EI enhances one's capacity to manage stress, improve interpersonal functioning, and adapt to social pressures. Salovey and Mayer's (1990) model of emotional intelligence later refined by Brackett, Rivers, and Salovey (2016) also supports the view that emotionally intelligent individuals are better able to regulate their emotions in high-demand social contexts. Frame and Shehan (2005) earlier emphasised that clergy wives frequently adapt their emotional reactions to fit community expectations, and recent empirical work by Osei-Tutu et al. (2021) confirms this emotional dualism among clergy spouses in sub-Saharan Africa. Moreover, research by Siew (2020) on spiritual leaders' spouses in Malaysia highlights that emotional self-regulation is positively linked to psychological well-being and successful role integration. These studies converge on the understanding that the ability to perceive, understand, and regulate emotions is a critical adaptive mechanism for clergy wives navigating spiritual, relational, and community pressures.

Research Question Two: What are the major emotional challenges pastors' wives face, and how do they cope with these challenges?

The participants reported several emotional challenges ranging from feeling emotionally excluded by their husbands to excessive public scrutiny and internal emotional conflicts. These emotional triggers were intensified by the expectation to display self-control and godliness at all times. Despite these challenges, respondents also identified cognitive and spiritual coping strategies such as self-talk, singing, and spousal support.

This participant expressed deep emotional pain stemming from spousal exclusion in ministry-related communication, describing a persistent sense of alienation and suppressed emotional responses:

It hurts when my husband shares church decisions I'm unaware of. I hear it in church like everyone else – and I'm his wife! I feel disconnected, like I don't matter in the ministry. Sometimes, I want to react, but I keep quiet to avoid scandal. The pain is internalised, and it keeps building up if not handled (IDI, F, 50, IBNE, 2024)

A participant detailed the emotional toll of living under continuous congregational scrutiny, where minor actions are judged harshly, leading to anxiety and emotional restraint:

Church members want me to look and act perfect all the time. They complain if I wear earrings, if I laugh too loud, or even if I look tired. I am constantly checking myself, second-guessing everything I do or say. I feel like I'm walking on eggshells emotionally (IDI, F, 48, IBNW, 2024).

In discussing coping strategies, this participant described using self-directed encouragement and singing as therapeutic outlets for stress management and emotional healing.

I've learnt to cope through self-talk. I tell myself, 'You are stronger than this. God has equipped you.' Singing also helps me. It lifts my spirit, reminds me of my calling, and helps me forgive. I sing alone, especially when I'm overwhelmed. That has become my therapy (IDI, F, 39, IBN, 2024)

The accounts from the respondents vividly highlight the psychological burden experienced by pastors' wives as a result of their complex roles. These women often find themselves emotionally isolated, particularly when they are excluded from important ministerial decisions by their spouses, despite being deeply embedded in the life of the church. Such exclusion fosters a sense of marginalisation, emotional disconnect, and diminished self-worth. Furthermore, the heightened visibility of their role as clergy spouses subjects them to intense public scrutiny, where every behavior from appearance to expression is closely monitored and interpreted through spiritual lenses. This persistent surveillance creates a sense of emotional performance, where authenticity may be sacrificed for perceived spiritual propriety. The overlapping responsibilities of being a supportive wife, spiritual leader's partner, and community figure impose a dual emotional strain. These tensions are not just occasional; they are chronic, shaping how pastors' wives view themselves and their place within their marital and congregational settings. The emotional demands reported point to an invisible burden where expectations outweigh personal expression. The weight of this psychological pressure ultimately compounds emotional fatigue and can result in chronic stress or withdrawal if not mitigated.

This outcome is justified by the concept of emotional labour originally described by Hochschild (1983) which remains relevant in religious contexts where image maintenance and emotional suppression are expected. In the case of pastors' wives, the emotional

labour involves managing public impressions, preserving harmony, and suppressing authentic reactions in favour of socially acceptable ones. Unlike in secular professions, this emotional work is often spiritualised, with expectations that God-given strength should supersede personal struggle. The perceived communication gap between spouses reflects a structural and relational imbalance within clergy marriages. When pastors' wives are not seen as full partners in ministry, their emotional needs are often devalued or overlooked. This has direct consequences on their ability to cope and function effectively, particularly when their contributions are expected but not formally acknowledged. The emotional exclusion described can lead to a loss of voice, agency, and relational intimacy, all of which are critical for healthy psychological well-being and marital stability. These emotional disconnects suggest a wider systemic issue in how ministry partnerships are conceived and operationalised in many church settings.

These findings are consistent with studies such as Osei-Tutu et al. (2021), who found that Ghanaian clergy spouses frequently experience emotional exclusion and overload, especially when their contributions are invisible. More recent literature, such as Mutale and Muleya (2020), also indicates that clergy wives in African contexts often feel overburdened by expectations and under-supported in decision-making processes. Similarly, Nyamhanga et al. (2019) revealed that clergy spouses in Tanzanian churches suffer from psychological exhaustion due to role ambiguity and inadequate spousal communication. The reported use of coping strategies like positive self-talk, prayer, and singing echoes the findings of Folkman and Moskowitz (2004), as well as more recent works by Thomas and Uwah (2022), which found that meaning-based coping and spiritual expression are frequently adopted in religious roles to manage emotional distress. These studies confirm that while the burden is real, clergy wives often adopt adaptive coping strategies grounded in spirituality and emotional intelligence to maintain their well-being.

Research Question Three: What role do social and relational support systems play in the emotional stability of pastors' wives?

The interviewees provided diverse perspectives on the support available to them. Some reported that support came from family and fellow pastors' wives, while others lamented the lack of empathy from the church community. Emotional support from husbands was often cited as instrumental in emotional adjustment and self-restraint.

This participant described her husband as a consistent source of emotional calm, illustrating how emotional stability was learned through observation and mutual relational influence:

My husband is the calm in my storm. When I'm angry, he reminds me of who I am. He doesn't shout or argue; he just stays composed. That has taught me to also slow down. His reactions inspire mine. I now handle stress better than before. Emotional stability, for me, started by observing him
(IDI, F, 41, IBNW, 2024)

This participant shared her sense of abandonment by the church community, highlighting the emotional fatigue caused by unmet expectations and the need for self-directed emotional care:

The church? They don't care. They think I'm superwoman. Nobody ever asks, 'How are you feeling?' It's just work, work, work, and expectations. I've stopped expecting comfort from the church; I find peace by making myself happy. Sometimes, I just withdraw to recharge emotionally
(IDI, F, 37, IBSW, 2024)

Another participant emphasised the emotional relief and strength she receives from her extended family, identifying them as her core source of encouragement and spiritual resilience:

My parents are everything. They check on me, pray with me, and always speak encouragement. Even when I can't tell them the full story, their words are healing. I also have a cousin I talk to when I'm overwhelmed. Family has been my safety net in all this (IDI, F, 45, IBN, 2024)

The emotional stability of pastors' wives is largely sustained through informal relational support systems, particularly the emotional presence and understanding of spouses, close family ties, and occasionally peer support from fellow clergy wives. Respondents in the study repeatedly described how the emotional reassurance, verbal affirmation, and behavioural modelling provided by their husbands served as buffers against the unique pressures they face. Many also found strength in family members such as parents or siblings who offered encouragement, prayer, and validation. These relationships not only met practical needs but also provided safe spaces for emotional expression that were absent in formal church structures. In contrast, the church community which participants expected would provide spiritual and emotional comfort was often experienced as emotionally distant, critical, or overly demanding. This paradox between public affirmation and private neglect left several participants emotionally strained and spiritually isolated. Instead of being a sanctuary, the church became a space of continuous judgment where pastoral spouses were expected to serve, smile, and sacrifice without complaint. Such unmet expectations contributed to a growing sense of emotional imbalance and

disappointment in the very institution they devoted their lives to supporting. Consequently, pastors' wives increasingly turned inward or to family units to access support, distancing themselves emotionally from their church communities.

This outcome is justified by the unique nature of spiritual leadership, which frequently elevates clergy and their families into symbolic roles of perfection, inadvertently denying them emotional vulnerability. Clergy spouses are expected to embody ideals of unwavering faith, strength, and grace under pressure, even when dealing with deep personal or relational challenges. Within this idealisation lies an often-unacknowledged emotional cost: their struggles are either ignored or minimised under the weight of spiritual expectations. When support is not forthcoming from the institutional church, they are left to manage emotional crises on their own or through informal systems. The dissonance between high public expectations and the lack of behind-the-scenes support creates cognitive and emotional strain, fuelling burnout, resentment, or spiritual detachment. This imbalance also affects marital satisfaction and family dynamics, especially when pastoral spouses feel isolated in their emotional labour. The reliance on family and spouse-based support emerges not from preference, but from the emotional vacuum created by institutional neglect. As a result, informal relationships fill the gap that should otherwise be bridged by the religious community. This phenomenon is indicative of an organisational culture that values spiritual productivity but overlooks the emotional cost of continuous public service.

These findings align with Cutrona and Russell's (1990) typology of social support, which underscores the importance of emotional, informational, and tangible assistance in coping with stress. The accounts of emotional validation through family and spousal relationships support Cohen and Wills' (1985) stress-buffering hypothesis, which posits that social support systems mitigate the effects of psychological distress. More recent studies, such as Amoateng et al. (2017), confirm that emotional support from intimate networks positively influences psychological resilience among clergy spouses in African religious contexts. Likewise, the work of Kyei and Asiedu (2020) on Ghanaian clergy families highlights the emotional toll of unmet communal expectations and the compensatory role played by family support. Darling et al. (2004) similarly documented that clergy spouses are often left to rely on peer and familial ties when formal religious institutions fail to offer care. More recently, Wimberly and Shon (2022) observed that African-American clergy spouses leaned significantly on marital dynamics and familial affirmation to maintain their emotional health amidst unsupportive congregational environments. These converging insights reinforce the argument that sustainable emotional well-being for clergy spouses hinges not solely on spiritual practices but on the strength and availability of trusted relational support systems.

Alignment of the Findings with the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB)

The findings from this study strongly align with Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), particularly in how the emotional conduct of pastors' wives is shaped by their attitudes, perceived behavioural control, and subjective norms. Participants consistently expressed the importance of emotional restraint and behavioural regulation in response to the expectations of their ministerial roles. Their intention to act in emotionally composed ways such as avoiding public outbursts, using self-talk to manage distress, and maintaining a spiritual persona demonstrates how behavioural intentions are influenced by the belief that emotional stability is both necessary and expected. Their positive attitude towards emotional self-regulation, even in the face of personal pain, aligns with TPB's first construct attitude toward the behavior suggesting that these women internalise composure as a valued response within their role identities.

Moreover, the concept of subjective norms is vividly reflected in the pressure felt from church members, fellow clergy, and community observers who hold clergy wives to high moral and emotional standards. The participants' narratives show that their behavioural intentions are not formed in isolation but are strongly shaped by communal expectations about how a pastor's wife should behave. Additionally, perceived behavioural control, a key component of TPB is evident in how the women described gaining emotional resilience over time, learning strategies such as prayer, self-reflection, and familial support to better regulate their emotions. This increasing sense of agency illustrates their belief in their capacity to manage emotions despite situational challenges. Overall, the alignment between the participants' behavioural regulation and the TPB framework reinforces the theory's applicability in understanding the emotional and psychosocial adjustments made by clergy spouses in religious leadership contexts.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the psycho-social factors influencing the emotional well-being of pastors' wives in the Ibadan metropolis, revealing a complex interplay between spiritual expectations, emotional labour, marital dynamics, and social support systems. The findings indicate that emotional stability in pastoral marriage is not innate but developed through personal growth, spiritual resilience, and relational coping strategies. While spousal support and extended family networks serve as buffers against emotional strain, many participants expressed a sense of neglect and emotional fatigue from the church community, which often prioritises performance over pastoral care. Overall, the role of a pastor's wife demands a high level of emotional intelligence, self-regulation, and adaptability to spiritual, marital, and societal expectations.

Limitations

Although this qualitative study offers rich insights into the emotional lives of pastors' wives, it is limited by its small sample size and regional scope, which restrict generalisability to other socio-cultural or denominational contexts beyond the Ibadan metropolis. The reliance on self-reported data may also introduce subjectivity or social desirability bias, as participants might downplay negative experiences or exaggerate coping abilities. Furthermore, the absence of male clergy perspectives and triangulated data from church leadership may limit a holistic understanding of systemic church dynamics affecting pastors' wives.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made to promote emotional well-being and resilience among pastors' wives:

1. Church leadership should implement emotional support systems such as counselling units, peer support groups, and periodic mental health workshops for clergy spouses.
2. Pastors' wives should be intentionally included in ministry communication and leadership decision-making to enhance emotional partnership and reduce feelings of exclusion.
3. Denominational bodies should integrate emotional intelligence and stress management training into clergy family orientation programmes.
4. Faith-based organisations and seminaries should create resources tailored for pastoral families, including literature and seminars addressing emotional strain and marital communication.
5. Further investment in social welfare and empowerment programmes for clergy spouses particularly those in unpaid or informal roles would foster socio-economic stability and reduce emotional vulnerability.

Suggestions for Further Studies

Future research should adopt a mixed-method approach to quantitatively measure the relationship between emotional well-being and variables such as marital communication, denomination, and years in ministry among pastors' wives. Comparative studies involving pastors' husbands in female-led ministries could also offer a gendered perspective on emotional labour in religious settings. In addition, cross-regional or cross-national studies would help establish broader patterns of psycho-social experiences among clergy spouses across cultural and denominational divides. Finally, longitudinal studies could track emotional changes over time and identify critical turning points in the emotional development of pastors' wives.

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