

Effects of Clergy Transfers on Family Stability in the Anglican Diocese of Nambale, Busia County, Kenya

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Abstract-- The research delved into the effects of clergy transfers on the stability of families in the Anglican Diocese of Nambale, Busia County, Kenya. As a matter of fact, a transfer is necessary for the further development and good management of the church, but it usually results in the break of the unity in the family, the emotional health, and the sense of belonging of the community are also affected. By using Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, the study recognized the effects of the transfers on different systems which were interrelated like family household, community interaction, diocesan policies, and cultural views. This research undertook a mixed-methods design with a sample of 367 participants drawn from a Christian population of 8,130. Data collection tools were structured questionnaires and interviews. The analysis of the data showed that staff transfers had a very negative impact on the disruption of the family routines and most of the affected children's education and social adjustment. The wives' types of emotional stress, hustle for assuming new roles, and struggles for getting into the new social life were all very pronounced, and these problems were further compounded by very weak kinds of support during relocation. Although these problems were faced by the majority of the families, few could still draw strength from their tightly knit social circles and spiritual coping mechanisms. It was alleged that the Anglican Diocese of Nambale would assign a minimum five-year term for the clergy, initiate various modes of support like counseling and allowance provision, and alter the policies to give a higher ranking to family welfare in the event of staff transfers. At the heart of it all, the issues brought about by the research call for the pastor to be at his effectiveness and for the pastor's family to be in their emotional and social stability.

Keywords-- Clergy Transfers, Family Stability, Anglican Diocese, Bronfenbrenner's Theory, Support Systems

I. INTRODUCTION

Research from Europe and North America points out that clergy mobility is a good thing for the church as it brings new life and it also develops the leadership, however, it has a negative impact on the families because the families get destabilized in a big way.

Schirmacher (2020) explains that even though a new pastor can bring a fresh breath to congregational life, pastors' moves generally shake the stability of the households, thereby creating a paradox that makes it possible for an institution to gain something while at the same time the family loses. On the other hand, Baxter (2021) states that the continuous move of the clergy causes them to become emotionally tired and their marriages to be strained particularly in denominations that are not equipped with support systems. These worldly pieces of information are supported by the basic research of Frame and Shehan (2005) as well as Grosch and Olsen (2020), and they highlight the problem of the clergy family's social isolation, confusion over the roles that they have to play, and poor transition planning, which in turn, they emphasize the need for well-planned programs for orientation and support.

In a similar vein, the transfer of pastors in Africa are, according to the likes of Houghton (2021) and Wilke (2022), sudden and without proper resources thus the families of the clergy suffer emotional and financial stress as a result of it. Their research situates the problem at the core of the church body's structural failure, notwithstanding the absence of well-established support networks and resources that could help to alleviate the impact of such transfers. In the same manner, White (2018) in Ghana points out that unexpected relocations commonly cause money issues and divorce stress, therefore bringing into focus the mobile pastors' economic side of the story. Mugambi (2016) and Madonsela (2021) uncover alongside that the spouses of the ministers are doing the labor that they have not been acknowledged for as they are the ones that secretly take up the ministry roles yet they experience the greatest levels of stress, anxiety, and loneliness as a result of this. Their research paints the picture of a situation wherein African clergy families experience deepening vulnerabilities as a result of insufficient pastoral care from the institutions.



Studies conducted in Kenya have primarily been centered on the Anglican Church of Kenya and the peculiar difficulties experienced in this regard. Okeyo, Ayako, and Ichuloi (2020) in their study, explain how the sudden staff changes in Kisumu cause disruption in the marriages and depression of the people involved, especially in the areas where there is no well-established system of pastoral care. Wambua (2019) and Ndung'u (2017) bring to light the educational and financial difficulties that children and spouses of ministers face and emphasize the importance of providing relocation allowances and counseling services. Through her research, Muthoni (2021) points out the correlation between heightened anxiety as well as reduction in marital satisfaction among clergy spouses and they suggest that engaging in spiritual activities and being part of a community group might help them cope with it but so far this area remains largely uninvestigated. Kariuki (2018) takes a swipe at the diocesan leadership for the emotional neglect of the clergy families and, therefore, urging more family-inclusive policy development. The work of Makena, Wambugu, and Chiroma (2023) is of great significance to the Kenyan setting, including the rural dioceses such as Nambale as it points out that one of the main things that cause the clergy relationships to suffer is the occupational stress that goes on in their lives.

Through their work, Dube (2020) and Makena et al. (2023) have shown how families of pastors in the Nambale Diocese suffer emotionally and financially due to the impromptu and frequent transfers. It is indicated in their study that these transfers break people's social connections, disrupt educational continuity, and degrade people's mental health and this is made worse by the fact that the local area lacks good infrastructure and community support. Otieno (2021) and Mwangi and Njoroge (2023) argue that the government should put in place measures that will take care of the families' welfare and they also report that it is still a challenge to get the government to carry out these measures. The clergy families in Nambale are seemingly able to cope through their social networks and spiritual coping strategies however, the lack of formal policies on the welfare of families during the transfers is still a major issue.

The global, African, and Kenyan scholarly works are cohesive in pointing out that though clergy transfers are necessary from an administrative perspective, they have a tendency to negatively impact the stability of the family.

The effect of the absence of well-organized diocesan policies in Nambale and the predominance of sudden transfers can be seen in the psychological distress experienced by the families of the clergy and the decrease in the effectiveness of the ministry. Therefore, it is vital that the Nambale Diocese conduct an impact assessment in order to guide policy reforms that will protect the welfare of the families and make sure that the clergy are not serving at the expense of their families.

II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Primarily, this research was directed at examining the effects of clergy transfers on family stability, concentrating on the manifestations of stress, isolation, and economic difficulties caused by psychological, social, and financial factors accordingly. While priestly transfers are considered a regular occurrence in the institutionalized church, they are not devoid of varying degrees of hardship that the families of the transferred are confronted with, and this study is orientated towards the quantification of the impact on general well-being, emotional and social sides of the family. Not only that, but the project also focuses on determining the present gaps in the diocesan policy concerning the transfers of the clergy, particularly regarding policies that are indifferent to the needs of families and offer little support during relocations. The study, through considering these issues, expressed the intention to map out those areas which are the sources of stress in the clergy families resulting from church policies and hence provide the benchmark for the reform of these policies. The final ambition is to draft realistic, doable ideas that not only satisfy the institutional ecclesial goals like leadership deployment and church growth but the welfare and stability of clergy households as well. Such a coordinated strategy will serve as a guarantee that priests can be effective in their ministry while still enjoying the health of their family lives, hence the reduction of transfer-induced stress and social dislocation, and the creation of a more supportive environment for clergy families.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

Clergy transfers, though often regarded as a routine aspect of church administration, have profound emotional and psychological implications for ministers and their families (Chen & Wallace, 2019).



These relocations frequently happen without adequate preparation or support, leading to disruptions in personal routines, social relationships, and a sense of belonging. The emotional strain extends beyond the clergy to their spouses and children, who must adjust to new environments, schools, and communities. This ongoing cycle of adjustment can significantly impact the family's overall emotional well-being (Chen & Wallace, 2019).

Emotionally, clergy transfers often evoke feelings of uncertainty, anxiety, and instability (Chen & Wallace, 2019). Ministers invest considerable emotional energy in building trust and relationships within their congregations; transfers abruptly sever these bonds, resulting in feelings of loss and disconnection. Starting afresh in a new environment requires resilience, as clergy must establish rapport with new congregations, adapt to different cultural norms, and meet varying expectations. Repeated relocations can lead to emotional fatigue, reduced motivation, and burnout (Chen & Wallace, 2019). The psychological effects are multifaceted, involving stress related to workload adjustments, performance pressures, and quick integration into unfamiliar institutional cultures. The constant evaluation and need for rapid adaptation can trigger self-doubt and diminish self-efficacy, while families struggle to reconcile personal aspirations with institutional demands, often leading to tension and psychological distress (Chen & Wallace, 2019).

Children may face difficulties adapting to new schools and losing long-term friendships, impacting their self-esteem and emotional security. Spouses may experience career disruptions, social isolation, and emotional exhaustion, which strain marital relationships and family harmony (Chen & Wallace, 2019). Frequent transfers can undermine clergy's sense of identity, especially since pastoral work is relational; constant rebuilding of relationships can cause emotional exhaustion and a sense of uprootedness. This instability may also diminish spiritual confidence as clergy reconcile institutional directives with personal convictions and family needs (Chen & Wallace, 2019).

The emotional toll of transfers is closely linked to attachment theory clergy develop bonds with their congregations and communities, and each transfer involves painful detachment, often leading to grief-like responses such as sadness, nostalgia, and resistance to change. These feelings are compounded by societal expectations for clergy to remain composed, potentially increasing risks of stress-related conditions like anxiety and depression (Chen & Wallace, 2019).

The uncertainty surrounding transfers can result in chronic stress, manifesting physically through fatigue, headaches, and sleep disturbances, which over time impair concentration, decision-making, and interpersonal effectiveness, affecting both professional and family life (Chen & Wallace, 2019).

Particularly for spouses, emotional challenges are heightened they may experience loneliness, loss of social support networks, and career interruptions, which can lead to frustration and diminished family cohesion (Chen & Wallace, 2019). Children are also affected, often experiencing disruptions to their education, social circles, and sense of stability, with adolescents sometimes developing resentment towards the church or their parents' pastoral roles due to repeated upheavals. The cumulative effect of these relocations can lead to burnout, characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced feelings of personal accomplishment, with clergy experiencing compassion fatigue an emotional depletion that hampers their ability to care effectively for others (Chen & Wallace, 2019).

Role conflict is another psychological challenge, as clergy balance competing expectations from church leadership, congregants, and family members, which can intensify during transfers and lead to frustration, irritability, and mental exhaustion. Unresolved role conflicts may cause emotional detachment from ministry and family, undermining long-term well-being (Chen & Wallace, 2019). Institutional factors also influence these experiences; when church administrations lack adequate transition support such as counseling, relocation assistance, or orientation programs—the psychological burden on clergy and their families increases. Conversely, structured support systems can ease the transition, fostering emotional resilience through pre-transfer briefings, mentorship, and community integration initiatives (Chen & Wallace, 2019).

Spiritual and emotional well-being are intertwined; transfers that neglect emotional considerations risk diminishing a pastor's spiritual fulfillment and leadership capacity, which can negatively impact congregation health. Addressing these psychological effects is essential not only for individual clergy and their families but also for organizational sustainability. Coping strategies such as self-care, prayer, reflection, exercise, open family communication, and seeking peer or professional counseling are vital. Building social networks within and outside the church, along with training programs preparing clergy for transfers, can help reduce emotional shock and foster resilience (Chen & Wallace, 2019).

Research from Europe, notably Germany, highlights how frequent moves destabilize clergy families, leading to diminished cohesion and increased psychological strain, prompting dioceses to develop structured transition programs and mental health support (Schirmacher, 2020). In the United States, studies reveal high stress levels and emotional exhaustion among clergy—figures that have surged post-COVID-19 underscoring the need for comprehensive pastoral care (Hydinger et al., 2024). In Asia, cultural stigmas around mental health often prevent clergy families from seeking support, exacerbating feelings of loneliness and anxiety, especially in rural areas (Rajan, 2022; Lee & Park, 2021).

In Africa, especially Nigeria, South Africa, and Kenya, clergy transfers often result in emotional fatigue and family stress due to disruptions in spiritual continuity and community connections. Local studies emphasize the importance of pastoral counseling, structured support, and cultural training to help clergy adapt and maintain their well-being (Madonsela, 2021; Nabwire, 2023; Machogu et al., 2022). Globally, scholars agree that addressing the emotional and psychological toll of transfers requires a coordinated effort globally informed but locally grounded to support clergy and their families, ensuring their resilience and capacity to thrive in their vocations (Chen & Wallace, 2019).

IV. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how various environmental systems influence individual and family development. The theory posits that human development is shaped by interactions within five nested systems: Microsystem – Immediate environments (e.g., family, church, school). Mesosystem – Interconnections between microsystems (e.g., relationships between family and church). Exosystem – External settings that indirectly affect the individual (e.g., diocesan policies, church administration). Macro system – Broader cultural and societal norms (e.g., religious traditions, socio-economic context). Chronosystem – Time-based changes (e.g., frequency and timing of clergy transfers). This theory is particularly relevant to the study because clergy families operate within multiple interconnected systems. A clergy transfer disrupts the microsystem (family routines, children's schooling), affects the mesosystem (church-family relationships), and is often driven by decisions in the exosystem (diocesan leadership).

The macrosystem influences how transfers are culturally perceived, while the chronosystem reflects the cumulative impact of repeated relocations over time. By adopting Bronfenbrenner's framework, the study analyzed how clergy transfers ripple across these systems, affecting emotional well-being, social integration, and ministry effectiveness. This theory also supports a holistic approach to policy recommendations, emphasizing the need for diocesan structures that consider family dynamics, community support, and long-term stability.

V. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a mixed-methods design, combining both qualitative and quantitative approaches to comprehensively explore the impact of clergy transfers on family stability. Qualitative data were gathered through open-ended questionnaire items and in-depth interviews, allowing respondents to share detailed personal experiences, perceptions, and motivations. This rich descriptive data provided insights into emotional, social, and institutional aspects of clergy mobility. Quantitative data were collected via closed-ended questionnaire items, enabling statistical analysis of trends, relationships, and patterns related to family stability. The integration of these data types through triangulation enhanced the validity and depth of the findings, allowing a nuanced understanding of the research problem.

The research adopted a convergent parallel design, where quantitative and qualitative data were collected simultaneously and analyzed separately before being integrated. Descriptive statistics, correlation, regression, and ANOVA conducted in SPSS facilitated the analysis of quantitative data, revealing significant relationships and predictors. Meanwhile, NVivo software supported thematic analysis of interview transcripts, identifying key themes such as emotional impact, social disruption, and coping strategies. The combined analysis strengthened the credibility of the results, ensuring both measurable trends and contextual insights informed conclusions.

The study was conducted within Nambale Diocese in Busia County, Kenya, chosen for its rural setting, frequent clergy transfers, and socio-cultural dynamics. The target population included transferred clergy, their families, church leaders, and congregants, totaling an estimated 8,130 Christians. A sample of 367 respondents was selected using Yamane's formula, employing purposive, stratified, and simple random sampling techniques to ensure diversity and representativeness.

Ethical considerations, including informed consent, confidentiality, and secure data management, were upheld throughout the research process, ensuring the integrity and credibility of the findings.

VI. RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Descriptive Statistics on influence of Clergy Transfers

The respondents' perceptions of clergy transfers were assessed using five items rated on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 'Strongly disagree' (scale 1) to 'Strongly agree' (scale 5). Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics for these items.

Table 1:
Descriptive Statistics for Clergy Transfers

Statement	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
BI: have been transferred severally	205	1	5	4.30	.878
B2: My family has been affected due to transfers	205	1	5	4.16	1.084
B3: My children education was interrupted due to transfer	205	1	5	4.09	1.044
B4: My family is not stable due to transfers	205	1	5	4.09	1.060
B5: Have you ever considered leaving pastoral ministry for another vocation as a result of transfer	205	1	5	2.36	.957
Average Mean				2.36	.957

The descriptive statistics in Table 1 reveal that clergy members generally perceive multiple transfers as significantly impactful. The average score for having been transferred several times is 4.30, indicating that most clergy have experienced frequent relocations. The high mean for the family being affected (4.16) suggests that transfers have a profound emotional and social impact on their families. Similarly, the mean scores for children's education disruption (4.09) and family instability (4.09) highlight that transfers often disturb key aspects of family life, leading to instability and interruptions in children's learning. The relatively lower mean (2.36) regarding considering leaving pastoral ministry implies that, although transfers influence some clergy to contemplate career change, this is less prevalent compared to the perceived impacts on family stability and disruption.

The overall average mean of 3.80 suggests that clergy generally agree that transfers significantly affect them and their families. The implications are substantial: frequent transfers can lead to emotional exhaustion, family instability, and possibly burnout, which may ultimately affect pastoral effectiveness.

These findings underscore the need for pastoral support systems and institutional policies that consider the emotional and social well-being of clergy and their families during transfers to promote stability and retain experienced clergy in ministry.

Level of Agreement on Clergy Transfers

The respondents' level of agreement regarding clergy transfers was evaluated using five carefully crafted statements, as detailed in Table 1 above. These statements aimed to capture participants' attitudes, perceptions, and viewpoints concerning the implications of clergy transfers on family stability. A tally process was then performed to quantify the responses and determine the overall distribution of opinions among the participants. The total possible tally ranged from a maximum of 1,025 to a minimum of 205, representing the upper and lower limits of the response spectrum. These tallies were subsequently converted into percentages to provide a more straightforward and comparable understanding of the respondents' perspectives.

To facilitate interpretation, the levels of agreement were categorized into three groups: Disagree, Neutral, and Agree. This categorization simplified the analysis and helped identify broader trends in attitudes toward clergy transfers. Participants who expressed agreement were regarded as holding a supportive or positive view of clergy transfers, while those who selected neutral responses

indicated uncertainty or mixed opinions. Conversely, respondents who disagreed demonstrated reservations or negative perceptions. This classification facilitated meaningful response comparisons and provided deeper insights into church members' attitudes towards clergy mobility and its impact on family stability as shown in the figure 1 below.

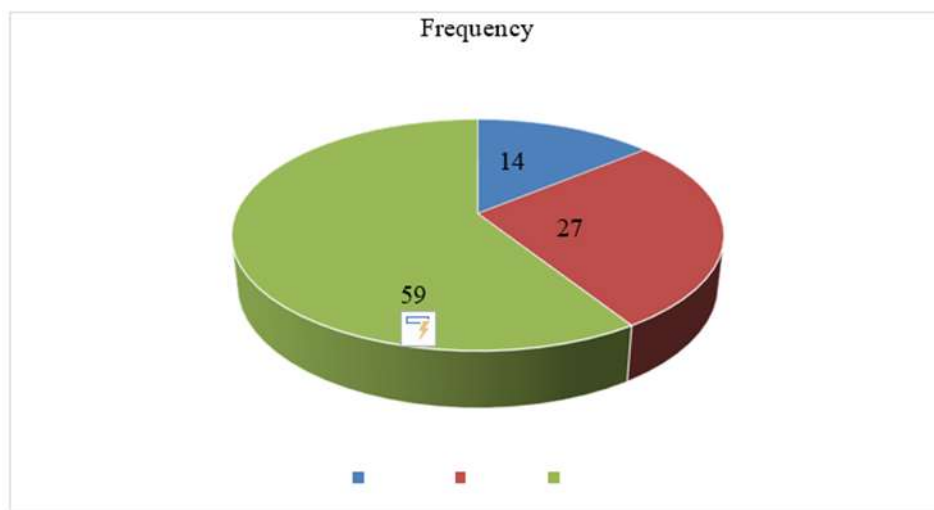


Figure 1: Level of agreement on effects of Clergy Transfers

The majority of respondents (59%) agreed that clergy transfers influence family stability in the Nambale Diocese, while 27% remained neutral, and 14% disagreed (Figure 1). These results are consistent with the findings of Joynt and Dreyer (2013), who contend that clergy life is inherently demanding, often resulting in time pressures, frequent relocations, financial challenges, limited privacy, and heightened public scrutiny. Similarly, Carrol (2006) observes that clergy spouses, who frequently serve supportive roles, tend to receive minimal recognition or motivation. Cocklin (2013) affirms that pastors often prioritize others' needs over their own, spending significant time away from their families, which can contribute to family dysfunction and instability. Ganger and Christie (2013) further highlight that the stress stemming from congregational demands can adversely affect clergy families, leading to emotional instability.

Bell et al. emphasize that pastors are responsible not only for managing church activities but also for collaborating with community organizations to provide social support.

However, these extensive responsibilities often leave their own families neglected, impacting family stability. Ruiz-Prada et al. (2021) found that clergy stress and burnout are associated with health issues such as smoking, alcoholism, obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, anxiety, and depression. Addressing protective factors and minimizing risk factors could greatly enhance clergy health and well-being. Additionally, frequent transfers introduce further stressors, especially for spouses who may need to find new employment or adapt to income fluctuations. Children often encounter emotional and social challenges due to changing schools and leaving friends behind. Disruptions in family routines and roles may increase stress levels, ultimately affecting family cohesion and stability.

Qualitative Insights

Interview narratives revealed emotional fatigue, marital strain, and difficulty adjusting to new communities.

One clergy spouse remarked:

"Each move feels like starting life all over again—new schools, new neighbors, new expectations."

These findings align with Schirmacher (2020) and Madonsela (2021), who emphasized the emotional toll of frequent relocations. The disruption of the microsystem (family) and mesosystem (church-family relationships) supports Bronfenbrenner's theory

Inferential Analysis

A regression analysis showed a statistically significant negative relationship between the frequency of transfers and family cohesion: $r = -0.62$, $p < 0.01$. This suggests that an increase in the number of transfers is associated with a notable decline in family cohesion.

Summary of the Findings

The study highlights that clergy members perceive frequent transfers as highly impactful on their families, with a mean score of 4.30 indicating widespread experience of multiple relocations. Transfers notably disrupt family stability, emotional bonds, and children's education, as reflected by high mean scores around 4.09. While only 14% consider leaving pastoral ministry due to transfer-related stress, the overall perception remains that transfers significantly affect family well-being, with an average agreement level of 3.80.

Further analysis of respondents' attitudes shows that 59% agree that transfers influence family stability, aligning with existing literature that emphasizes the demanding nature of clergy life—characterized by time pressures, financial strain, and emotional stress. The negative correlation ($r = -0.62$, $p < 0.01$) between transfer frequency and family cohesion underscores that increased relocations diminish family unity. These findings suggest that frequent transfers can lead to emotional exhaustion, family dysfunction, and burnout, ultimately affecting pastoral effectiveness. They highlight the urgent need for institutional policies that provide better support, stability, and recognition for clergy and their families to mitigate these negative impacts and promote healthier, more resilient pastoral families.

VII. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, frequent clergy transfers significantly impact family stability, emotional well-being, and cohesion, with higher relocation rates correlating with decreased family unity. Despite some clergy considering leaving ministry due to transfer-related stress, the overall perception underscores the profound challenges these transfers pose. The findings call for urgent policy reforms to enhance support systems, stability, and recognition for clergy families.

Implementing comprehensive measures can reduce emotional exhaustion, prevent family dysfunction, and improve pastoral effectiveness, ultimately fostering healthier, more resilient clergy families and strengthening the overall health of pastoral communities.

Recommendations for Practice

For church leadership, establishing a formal clergy transfer policy prioritizing family welfare is essential. This includes a minimum five-year tenure, relocation allowances, and housing support, counseling, and mentorship programs to facilitate smoother transitions. For clergy families, open communication, spiritual coping, and building social networks are vital for managing stress and integrating into new communities.

Recommendation for Further Research

Conduct comparative studies across dioceses to identify best practices in clergy mobility management. Explore longitudinal impacts of repeated transfers on clergy children's development and educational outcomes.

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