

**THE RELATIONSHIP OF STRESS TO MARITAL ADJUSTMENT,
SPIRITUALITY, AND MISSION AMONG SEMINARY
STUDENTS AND THEIR SPOUSES**

A Report on a Research Study

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by

Roger L Dudley and Margaret G. Dudley

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The Problem and Purpose of the Study

Leaders and educators of the Seventh-day Adventist church are rightly concerned about the preparation of the church's professional ministry since the future shape of the denomination rests to a great extent on the quality of the men and women who will pastor congregations and assume leadership positions in the various layers of administrative units. While ministerial preparation occurs at various levels, perhaps the most crucial is at the Theological Seminary at Andrews University. Here the approved pathway to ministry in the North American Division requires candidates for the ministry to complete the Master of Divinity degree--a nine-quarter program combining theoretical knowledge with practical experience.

While the academic and ministerial-skills components of this program are continuously under evaluation, recent concern has been directed toward the personal and interpersonal aspects of the seminarians. In 1991, a faculty committee gave special study

to this area, and the topic occupied a major share of the discussion at the Ministerial Training Advisory Committee of the North American Division, held on July 31, 1991.

Concerns have revolved around the stress associated with the M.Div. program in view of the intensive program of nine quarters of study in a row, inadequate income, escalating student loans, and the pressures of family life. Questions have been raised as to how all this may impact on the spirituality, marital adjustment, sense of well-being, and commitment to mission of the seminarians and their spouses.

Therefore this research sought to survey the Master of Divinity (M.Div.) students at the Andrews University Seminary and their spouses. It collected information on a variety of measures in an attempt to discover relationships between sources of stress, methods of coping with stress, marital adjustment, spirituality, commitment to the mission of the church, and certainty of the call to ministry.

The principal researchers were Roger L. Dudley of the Institute of Church Ministry and Margaret G. Dudley of the Andrews University Counseling Center. They utilized the research facilities of the Institute of Church Ministry. Special note should be made of the aid provided by seminarian Jeff Gang who served as research assistant to the project with assignments in data collection, data entry, analysis of free-response questions, and literature research. Appreciation is extended for the support from Dean Werner Vyhmeister and Associate Dean Ben Schoun of the Seminary administration. Strong support was also extended by each of the student organizations through their presidents: John Peters of the Seminary Student Forum, James Watkins of the Black Seminary Student Forum, Lori Little of the Women's Guild, and Andrea Smith of the African American Women's Association.

The project was supported by a research grant from the Office of Scholarly Research at Andrews University and by financial support from the North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists.

Methodology of the Project

A questionnaire was constructed which employed either the full or an abbreviated version of several existing scales, as follows:

1. The Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment Test to measure marital harmony and satisfaction
2. The Ellison-Paloutzian Spiritual Well-being Scale to measure spirituality with subscales for religious well-being and existential well-being
3. The Holmes & Rahe Social Readjustment Rating Scale to quantify stressful events
4. The Lazarus & Folkman Ways of Coping Checklist to ascertain the extent to which various styles of coping with stress are employed. Eight ways are identified and will be described below.

In addition to the existing scales items were constructed to determine commitment to the mission of the church and certainty of call to the ministry. Other questions probed the extent to which students work, the extent to which spouses work outside of the home or are students, denominational sponsorship at the Seminary, indebtedness for student loans, number of dependent children, and whether or not children are in church school. Standard demographic questions were also included. The questionnaire was labeled Seminary-Life Stress Inventory (SLSI).

All M.Div. students enrolled during the 1992-1993 academic year and their spouses (for married students) were invited to participate. Preliminary publicity was given through announcements and in cooperation with the various Seminary student organizations, including those for spouses. Questionnaires and letters of appeal and instruction were placed in the mail boxes of all M.Div. students in November 1992. Each packet contained two instruments which were color-coded--yellow for the student and green for the spouse. Envelopes for return were also included. Students were requested to give the green surveys to their spouses and return them for them in the sealed envelopes.

A collection box was placed in the lobby of the Seminary building. Each return envelope contained a code number so that it could be determined if a given subject had returned his/her questionnaire. However, a blind procedure was employed so that representatives from the student body checked in the code number on the outside envelope and then delivered only the uncoded inside envelopes to the researchers. Thus those examining the data were not able to connect the contents to the individual students, and complete confidentiality was maintained. Second and third mailings were sent to those who did not respond to the first invitation, appeals were made in chapel, and finally non-respondents were contacted by telephone or in person. Data collection was terminated in April.

While enrollment figures shift somewhat during the year, Seminary records indicate 207 M.Div. students were enrolled at the beginning of the spring quarter. Questionnaires were finally collected from 172 students yielding an 83% response rate. One of these was discarded because of the large number of missing responses. Forty of the students reported

being not married leaving the possibility of surveying 132 spouses. Of these 127 returned questionnaires for a 96% response rate. Eight of these were discarded because of the large number of missing responses.

Indicators of Stress

The Holmes & Rahe Social Readjustment Rating Scale awards points for various stressful events occurring within the previous two years ranging from 70 for marital separation or divorce to 11 for minor violations of the law. Twenty-one events were presented on the SLSI (questions 1-21 on the attached copy). The points for each event were totaled to obtain a stress score. Total scores ranged from 0 (6%) to 472 (.7%) with an average score of 159. Arranged in descending order of frequency, the percentages of respondents that experienced the various stressful events were as follows:

Change in financial state	72%
Change in living conditions	69%
Change in church activities	54%
Change in work hours or conditions	54%
Change in social and/or recreational activities	52%
Change in sleeping habits	48%
Change in responsibilities at work	38%
Change in eating habits	37%
Gain of new family member	22%
Pregnancy	20%
Marital problems	17%

Trouble with boss	14%
Marriage	13%
Major injury or illness (family member)	13%
Death of close family member	12%
Trouble with in-laws	10%
Major injury or illness (personal)	10%
Minor violations of the law	8%
Death of a close friend	5%
Fired at work	4%
Marital separation or divorce (7 persons)	2%

In addition to the events listed on the Holmes & Rahe, information was gathered about other possible stressors. Nearly half (46%) of the respondents had worked in a different type of occupation or career before coming to the Seminary so that career shift made adjustments necessary. Less than half (44%) were sponsored by a conference, indicating additional financial strains. Time and money pressures were assessed by several direct questions (#24-#33).

Average number of hours per week working for income

Students average = 12.3 hours; 46 = 0 hours; 1 = 50 hours; 50 (29%) = 20 or more hours.

For married students, 40% of spouses have full-time and 28% part-time jobs outside the home.

Spouses average = 21.9 hours; 42 = 0 hours; 68 (54%) = 20 or more hours; 14 (11%) = more than 40 hours; 7 (5.5%) = 50 or more hours.

Average number of hours per week studying outside of class

Students average = 22.8 hours; 9 = 0 hours; 2 = 60 hours; 82 (48%) = more than 20 hours per week; 36 (21%) more than 30 hours per week.

For married students: 12% of spouses are full-time students; 12% are part-time students.

36 spouses spend from 1 to 40 hours per week studying for an average of 14.4 hours.

Average number of hours per week spent on family and household duties

Students average = 11.2 hours; 10 (5.8%) = 0 hours; 31 (18%) = 20 or more hours; 3 = 50 or more hours.

Spouses average = 26.9 hours; 12 (10.1%) = 0 hours; 72 (56.7%) = 20 or more hours; 33 (26%) = 40 or more hours; 19 (15%) = 60 or more hours; 6 = 80 hours; 5 = 84 hours; 1 = 90 hours.

Average number of hours per week spent on leisure and recreation

Students average = 5.9 hours; 19 (11%) = 0 hours; 40 (23.3%) = 10 or more hours; 8 (4.7%) = 20 or more hours.

Spouses average = 6.1 hours; 22 (18.5%) = 0 hours; 36 (28.3%) = 10 or more hours; 8 (6.3%) = 20 or more hours.

Student loans

Asked for the family's current indebtedness for student loans, 73 (42%) of the students reported no student loans while the remaining 99 (58%) reported student loans ranging from \$500 to \$60,000. The average indebtedness for a Seminary family was \$8432, including those students who had none. Sixty-two of the families (36%) owed more than \$10,000; one family each owed \$40,000, \$44,000, \$50,000, and \$60,000.

Other current indebtedness

Over and above student loans 77 families (45%) reported no other indebtedness while the remaining 95 (55%) reported debts ranging from \$250 to \$55,000. The average non-student-loan debt for all Seminary families was \$4013; 18 families (10.5%) owed more than \$10,000; and one family each owed \$41,000, \$50,000, and \$55,000.

Total indebtedness

Student responses to the two categories listed above may be added to obtain a measure of total family indebtedness. While 45 families (26%) reported no debt, the remaining 127 (74%) reported debt ranging from \$500 to \$68,000. The average total debt for Seminary families was \$12,445; 74 families (43%) owed more than \$10,000; 6 families (3.5%) owed \$50,000 or more.

Number of dependent children being financially supported

47% have none; 17% have one; 19% have two; 15% have three; and 2% have five.

Number of children being financially supported in Adventist schools

80% have none; 6% have one; 8% have two; 6% have three; one family has five.

Respondents were also asked to what extent the time spent in field work in their assigned churches contributed to pressure and stress in their Seminary experience.

For students:	not at all	27%
	somewhat	49%
	much	15%
	very much	9%
For spouses:	not at all	36%
	somewhat	47%
	much	11%
	very much	6%

Methods of Coping with Stress

Lazarus and Folkman developed a 66-item "Ways of Coping Checklist" to measure the broad range of coping and behavioral strategies that people use to manage internal and external demands in a stressful encounter. Factor analysis of the items produced eight scales--each describing a method of coping. While 66 items were too many for this survey, the authors have given two to four prime examples for each item. These 26 items were used in the SLSI.

To each item the respondent may choose one of four responses, ranging from "never use" to "use a great deal." In order to make clear what each scale is measuring, the items

composing it will be listed along with the average score for that scale. Comparing the means alone cannot determine the frequency of use since the scales do not have equal numbers of items, and scales with more items would naturally tend to have higher means. Therefore, a ranking has been determined by dividing the means by the maximum possible score (number of items times 4). The scales with their average scores are then listed in descending order of frequency of use as a coping device.

Positive reappraisal--average = 11.72 out of 16

I change or grow as a person in a good way

I come out of the experience better than I went in

I find new faith

I pray

Problem solving--average = 8.39 out of 12

I know what has to be done so I double my efforts to make things work

I make a plan of action and follow it

I come up with a couple of different solutions to the problem

Self-control--average = 7.66 out of 12

I try to keep my feelings to myself

I keep others from knowing how bad things are

I try not to burn my bridges but leave things open somewhat

Accepting responsibility--average = 7.63 out of 12

I criticize or lecture myself

I realize I brought the problem on myself

I apologize or do something to make up

Seeking social support--average = 4.85 out of 8

I talk to someone who can do something concrete about the problem

I accept sympathy and understanding from someone

Confrontive coping--average = 6.58 out of 12

I stand my ground and fight for what I want

I try to get the person responsible to change his/her mind

I express anger to the person(s) who caused the problem

Distancing--average = 8.41 out of 16

I go on as if nothing has happened

I don't let it get to me--refuse to think about it too much

I try to forget the whole thing

I make light of the situation; refuse to get too serious about it

Escape-avoidance--average = 7.41 out of 16

I wish that the situation would go away or somehow be over with

I try to make myself feel better by eating, using medications, etc.

I avoid being with people in general

I sleep more than usual

In addition to these items from Lazarus and Folkman, one additional item was added that is not a part of any of these scales:

"I take it out on my spouse/family"

The average was 1.73 with 42% saying "never"; 45%, "somewhat"; 11%, "quite a bit"; and 2% "a great deal."

Spirituality

The Ellison-Paloutzian Spiritual Well-Being Scale consists of twenty items to which response is made on a six-point scale ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree." The overall scale is divided into two subscales of ten items each. Sample items of the Religious Well-Being Subscale are: "I don't find much satisfaction in private prayer with God," "I have a personal meaningful relationship with God," and "I feel most fulfilled when I'm in close communion with God."

Sample items of the Existential Well-Being Subscale are: "I feel that life is a positive experience," "I don't enjoy much about life," and "I believe there is some real purpose for my life." Some of the items are written in a negative format. Reverse scoring has been done so that a high score on either subscale represents a greater sense of well-being. Scores on the Spiritual Well-Being Scale are the sum of the scores on the two subscales.

Since there are ten items on a six-point continuum for each subscale, the range of possible scores would be 10 (strongly disagree with all items) to 60 (strongly agree with all items). For M.Div. students and spouses the actual range on the Religious Well-Being Subscale was 23 to 60 with an average score of 51.6. On the average the group moderately agreed with all items. Only about 5% of the respondents scored on the "disagree" side of the scale (35 or less) while 18.4% scored at the maximum of 60.

For M.Div. students and spouses the actual range on the Existential Well-Being Subscale was 17 to 60 with an average score of 46.9, not quite as high as on Religious Well-

Being though still high. On the average the group placed between agree and moderately agree on all items. Only about 9% of the respondents scored on the "disagree" side of the scale (35 or less) while 4.3% scored at the maximum of 60.

With twenty items the Spiritual Well-Being Scale has a possible range of 20 to 120. For M.Div. students and spouses the actual range was 46 to 120 with an average score of 98.8. On the average the group was just slightly below moderately agreeing with all items. Only about 5% of the respondents scored on the "disagree" side of the scale (70 or less) while 4% scored at the maximum of 120.

Commitment to Ministry

Several questions measured commitment to ministry in relation to the Seminary experience.

How strong is your commitment to ministry?

	Students	Spouses
Very strong	58%	30%
Strong	30%	41%
Moderate	9%	24%
Weak	3%	5%

How does your present commitment to ministry compare to that before you entered the Seminary?

	Students	Spouses
Stronger today	44%	33%
About the same	39%	52%
Weaker today	17%	15%

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How does your present commitment to the mission of the Seventh-day Adventist church compare to that before you entered the Seminary?

	Students	Spouses
Stronger today	55%	30%
About the same	32%	54%
Weaker today	13%	16%

Both students and spouses were asked how much influence each of the following factors had on their decision to become a minister or the spouse of a minister. NI = no influence; SI = some influence; MI = much influence

<u>Students</u>	<u>NI</u>	<u>SI</u>	<u>MI</u>
A definite call from God	5%	14%	81%
Free tuition at the Seminary	84%	12%	4%
Enhance personal spirituality	22%	39%	39%
Interest in theological subjects	13%	38%	49%
Admiration of a minister(s)	47%	37%	16%
Desire to help people	4%	19%	77%
Leadership opportunities	51%	33%	16%
Parental influence/pressure	80%	16%	4%
Spouse influence/pressure	81%	13%	6%

<u>Spouses</u>	<u>NI</u>	<u>SI</u>	<u>MI</u>
A definite call from God	20%	31%	49
Free tuition at the Seminary	87%	9%	4%
Enhance personal spirituality	32%	38%	30%
Interest in theological subjects	48%	31%	21%
Admiration of a minister(s)	63%	29%	8%
Desire to help people	10%	31%	59%
Leadership opportunities	66%	27%	7%
Parental influence/pressure	80%	15%	5%
Spouse influence/pressure	51%	22%	27%

Was it your own choice to come to the Seminary?

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
Students	80%	20%
Spouses	54%	46%

Marital Satisfaction

Because it was one intention of this study to determine how the Seminary experience affects marital happiness and adjustment, several questions on marriage relationships were included. First the marital status of the students was determined:

Never married	20%
Married for the first time	72%
Remarried after divorce	4%
Separated	1%
Divorced/single	2%
Widowed/single	1%

By definition all of the spouses were married but five of them (4.2%) were remarried following a divorce. Married students and spouses were asked to rate the degree of happiness, everything considered, of their present marriages. Of the 128 students known to be married, 111 answered this question, while of the 119 spouses (8 questionnaires were rejected because of answering so few questions), 104 answered this question. The results were as follows:

Self-rated happiness of marriage (1-7)

Students:	very unhappy	4%
	quite unhappy	4%
	somewhat unhappy	7%
	happy	13%
	quite happy	22%
	very happy	31%
	perfectly happy	19%

Spouses:	very unhappy	3%
	quite unhappy	4%
	somewhat unhappy	5%
	happy	10%
	quite happy	27%
	very happy	32%
	perfectly happy	19%

This self-rating question was combined with fourteen other questions to form the Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment Test. The questions are numbers 87 to 101 on the attached survey form. The scoring on some questions has been reversed so that a high number indicates maximum happiness and adjustment in marriage. The possible range of scores is from 15 (low) to 76 (high). The actual range for all married respondents was 25 to 74 with 7% scoring 70 or higher.

Scores of 61 or higher indicate that positive responses were selected for all fifteen items. Scores of less than 61 indicate that negative choices were selected on at least some of the items. For the total group 45% scored less than 61. Scores of 46 or less indicate that negative choices were selected on all the items. Only about 9% had score of 46 or less (compare with the "unhappy" choices on the self-rating scale). A score of 15 would indicate the most negative choice on all items. No one scored that low although there was one 25 and six in the 30s. The total group average score was 60.1; for married students it was 59.7; for spouses it was 60.6. The difference between the average student and the average spouse is too slight to be significant.

A special question was directed only to spouses: "To what extent do you feel that your sacrifices for helping your student spouse through the Seminary are appreciated?"

Greatly appreciated	60%
Somewhat appreciated	34%
Not appreciated	6%

Personal Information

Several items of personal background information were included on the survey.

Age grouping

25 years or under	19%
26 to 35 years	55%
36 to 50 years	24%
Over 50 years	2%

Length of time as a baptized member of the Adventist church

Less than two years	2%
2 to 5 years	4%
6 to 10 years	20%
Over 10 years	74%

Ethnic background

Asian	17%
Black	26%
Hispanic	10%
White	46%

Other 1%

Gender

While most of the students are male, about 6% (10 students) identified themselves as female. Also four of the spouses (3.3%) were male.

Open Responses

Seminary and Marriage/Family

Each person was invited to reply to the question "How has being a seminarian or the spouse of a seminarian affected your marriage and family life?" Responses were received from 117 students and 92 spouses.

	<u>Students</u>	<u>Spouses</u>
Not Affected	11 (9%)	10 (11%)
Stressed/coping	23 (20%)	24 (26%)
Negative	59 (50%)	37 (40%)
Positive	<u>24</u> (21%)	<u>21</u> (23%)
TOTALS	117	92

The largest number of students and spouses wrote that Seminary life had a negative impact on their marriage and family life. The most often repeated complaints were that there was not enough time for spouse and/or children because of the need to study in an effort to keep up with the heavy academic load and/or the need to work because of the financial strain. Other stressors cited were racism, unChristian treatment, and thousands of pages of required reading. A typical comment: "The Seminary has put a definite strain on my family life. I try to balance time spent in study with time spent with my wife and

children, but I often feel I don't do well in either area. My greatest fear is that I will compromise my relationship with my family due to the large amount of time I feel I have to use to study." (White male)

On the other hand, those students who were positive generally held that the Seminary had taught them organization and discipline, thus allowing more time for the family. Things they had learned in their program enhanced their relationships with spouse and children. Also, as noted above, a number found the program to be very stressful but had learned to cope and survive. One student wrote: "The Seminary has shown me the need to support my wife more because of the heavy academic load. I spend a lot of time studying. We have learned to use our time together better." (Black male)

Seventeen single students opted to answer this question. Of these, nine rated it as a negative experience (not enough time to form new relationships or keep in contact with nuclear families), five rated it as a positive experience including two single parents (one male and one female), and three stated it had no effect.

Of the spouses who reported a negative impact, most felt that their husband/wife's study load was too stressful, and they were upset with the Seminary's academic program. Pastoral formation was the subject of many complaints. Spouses are often separated on Sabbath and neglected because of weekend requirements in addition to the heavy work and study load during the week. Others missed the environment in which they had lived previously. Many yearned for their extended families and were having a hard time adjusting to these new surroundings at the Seminary. Finances were also a major concern. Many spouses are the only bread-winners in the family. These spouses seemed to resent the added

stress while trying to manage a home. One spouse wrote: "It definitely has not helped in an earthly sense. We are struggling much more financially. My spouse always seems to be overwhelmed with school work and doesn't contribute much time to maintaining the household." (Black female)

Many spouses, however, did express a positive attitude toward the whole experience. They have found the program worthwhile, and through God's help they will endure. One spouse reported: "Through the stress and challenges of the Seminary we have grown much closer together." (White female)

The Seminary and Spiritual Life/Commitment to Ministry

The question was also asked: "How has being a seminarian or the spouse of a seminarian affected your personal spiritual life and commitment to ministry?"

Students were quite divided on this question. Thirty-seven students believed their experience at the Seminary had left them spiritually depleted. They noted that the Seminary has not enhanced their spiritual life or commitment to ministry; that the Seminary left them mentally, physically, spiritually, and emotionally exhausted; and that they have had no time for personal devotions. One wrote that: "The Seminary is more stressful than I imagined. There is no time for spirituality and personal growth. The Seminary is purely academic." (Black male) Two more believed the Seminary is the cause of their lack of spirituality and ministerial commitment and stated that they have become angry with the church.

Twelve students commented that it was not the Seminary's fault for their lack of spirituality and commitment to ministry, but their own personal problems. Eighteen students said that their spiritual life was better before the Seminary but that they are still committed

to ministry. Ten students reported that they were glad they had come but that the Seminary had done nothing to enhance their spiritual and ministerial commitment.

On the other hand fifty-six students believe that the Seminary has helped them grow spiritually and aided their commitment to ministry. Some sample statements: "My commitment has been reinforced." "Seminary has deepened my spiritual life." "It has been hard, but I've been better off." "Seminary has helped me see the need for true spirituality." One wrote: "The Seminary has greatly improved my spiritual life. It has helped me see where I need to grow and helped to increase my faith in Jesus and His power in my life." (White male) While six students said no change had occurred, many were positive. They said it was a stressful experience, but it had brought them closer to God.

Spouses responded quite similarly. Thirty-five spouses said the Seminary had not enhanced their spiritual lives or commitment to ministry. A typical comment was: "I am now the sole financial provider for our family. I must balance this with my taking care of my children and my husband. I am tired and I am frustrated. I have no time for God. I have no time to serve Him." (Oriental female)

Twenty-three spouses, however, believed Seminary was a positive experience. One wrote: "I am stronger now than ever before, thanks to the dedication of the Seminary to helping my husband grow spiritually. It has rubbed off on me." (White female)

Limitations of This Paper

This paper has had but a single purpose--to describe the responses to the items on the SLSI and, in some cases, the responses on scales created from combining various items.

As such, it serves as a basic source document upon which future work such as publications or presentations may be based.

At least two basic omissions will be noted. (1) No relationships between variables or scales are reported. For example, the paper does not reveal the extent to which amount and kind of stress may be correlated with marital happiness and adjustment or whether various methods of coping with stress may predict commitment to ministry. (2) The paper does not attempt to interpret or explain any of the findings. They are just presented for whatever they are worth.

Both of these omitted procedures are important and necessary for the maximum usefulness of this study. However, they are also the work of careful, painstaking analysis which takes many months of study and writing. Rather than delay the report until everything was completed, the researchers felt it would be helpful to release these basic statistics as soon as possible. Then additional interpretative pieces will follow as time allows.

Even with these limitations, the research team believes that this report will be valuable. It contains information that can guide church leaders, Seminary administration, seminarians, and spouses of seminarians in making the Seminary experience more positive and profitable. It reveals what is working well, and it hints at what needs to be improved. It will be the foundation for future releases that can help the Seminary chart a course for the 1990s and into the next millennium.