**BURNOUT, COVID AND PASTORS**

**THE CONTEXT OF THE MODERN WORLD: THE COVID PANDEMIC**

* Asked to focus on burnout in pastors, thinking esp of context of Covid and impact on pastors
* Want to start out by thinking about the effect of Covid on mental health in general

**The effect of Covid on mental health:**

* Rely on research, WHO reports and on my own impressions
* Virtually every person reports spontaneously on effect of Covid: most negatively, some positively
* WHO has brought out many documents referring to the impact on MH
* Mental health impact:
	+ unequivocal increase in mental health problems
	+ described as a world-wide mental health crisis
	+ these are exaggerated normal responses to very abnormal situations
	+ estimate 25% population have MH effects, with anxiety as high as 37%
	+ high levels depression and loneliness
	+ increased domestic violence
* Seems to depend on premorbid personality:
	+ Some are finding isolation very difficult
	+ Others are thriving on isolation
	+ Importance of ability/inability to tolerant uncertainty

**The pathways by which Covid affects mental health**

* How and why is Covid affecting MH?
* Inundated with health risks and death, getting closer to home
* Stigmatization if self or family Covid +
* Lockdown in particular strong impact
* Unpredictability/uncertainty of the pandemic: how long will continue, how long lockdown, how long no alcohol, when will school return
* Lack of social contact: we are social animals: example of Val
* Boredom through loss of familiar routines and behaviour
* Loss of importance rites of passage: matric dances, funerals, weddings
* Secondary effects: loss of employment and income
* Stress of particular situations: working from home, and attempt to care for Cren and supervise online or at-home schooling
* Intolerance of uncertainty as particular effect

**Impact especially on front line workers & pastors**

* Dramatic effect on HCW: potential and actual infections
* Constant confrontation with death and trauma
* Very long work hours and demands
* Challenge of learning new technology and financial loss
* Danger of thinking you are weak or different if stressed

**Coping with Covid and lockdown:**

* To deal with unpredictability: control what is in personal control
* Especially est a personal routine: stick to with flexibility
* Inc various components: physical, mental, spiritual
* Beware of excess news about Covid
* Deliberately focus in good news about Covid e.g. recovery rate
* Meditation or mindfulness
* Dealing with uncertainty: faith aspect – Mystical Hope
* Keep social contact but physical distance: development of *social pods*
* See as the opportunity to reframe many aspects of life
* Social support to make sense of experience – an important role of the church
* Particular attention to vulnerable groups, e.g. children, elderly, homeless

**BURNOUT AND ITS RISKS**

**What is burnout?**

* Definition of burnout: a state of emotional, physical and mental exhaustion caused by prolonged and excessive stress. It occurs when one feels overwhelmed, emotionally drained and unable to meet routine demands of life or work. This may occur in different domains of life: work, family, other areas.
* Part of a triad:
	+ Stress, depression and burnout
	+ Not always easy to separate these three; significant overlap
	+ Clinically we tend to think of it as a variant of depression
* Stress: any state that makes excess demands on a person, beyond the normal coping ability
	+ Might be physical, mental, emotional: give some examples
	+ Many aspects of Covid are stressful
* Depression: a strong negative personal emotion or clinical condition
	+ Are many different types of depression:
		- Dysthymia, major depression, adjustment disorders
	+ Range of symptoms:
		- Mood: unhappiness, meaninglessness, etc
		- Physical symptoms:
			* Appetite, sleep, energy, motivation
		- Irritability and anger
		- Tearfulness
* Burnout: a stress related condition, often manifesting as depression, usually the loss of protracted stress and demand, often from excessive work demands, but may arise from personal situations:
	+ Caring for disabled, chronically ill, or dementing family members
	+ Sometimes burnout used as a euphemism for depression

**Distinctive triad of burnout**

* 3 distinctive features of burnout: occur in definite variations in different people
	+ Exhaustion: physical, mental, emotional, hopelessness and discouragement
	+ Ineffectiveness: feeling incompetent, useless, afraid to take on tasks
	+ Cynicism: loss of positive attitude, resentment to work or needs of others

**Case examples of burnout**

* a middle aged surgeon
* woman caring for her dementing husband
* a young teacher

**What predisposes people to burnout?**

* familiar risk factors
	+ excessive work, especially unrewarding work or futility of work
	+ little control, or sense of helplessness
	+ reward/recognition: feeling unrecognized or appreciated or taken advantage of
	+ isolation, competition or hostility from coworkers or recipients
	+ conflict: feeling conflict about tasks undertaken, inc ethical conflict
* additional: personality disposition, e.g. perfectionism, need to please,
* but often linked with risk factors for depression:
	+ loss
	+ helplessness
	+ pessimistic world view
	+ unresolved aggression

**Treating burnout**

* Rest and removal of stressful environment
* Care and support
* Restorative practices: meditation, relaxation, massage, exercise
* Medication
* Journalling
* Wholeheartedness acc David Whyte
* Long-term changes in environment triggering
* Counselling and/or psychotherapy

**BURNOUT IN PASTORS**

**How does it present?**

* Distinct burnout symptoms
* Depressive disorder an/or anxiety
* Physical symtoms
* Alcohol abuse
* Interpersonal and marital difficulties

**Distinctive risk factors for pastors**

* Many of the typical factors are less critical for pastors
* Lack of clear work boundaries in work
* Carrying the emotional burdens of church members
* Buying into the expectations/projections of people
* Dismissing emotional issues, or disguising them as spiritual
* Expectations of being understanding

**Preventing burnout and depression in pastors**

* Establishing boundaries
* Become aware of personal agendas which become risks
	+ Need to please or be heroic
* Spirituality as a disguise/cover for emotional issues
* Unrealistic expectations of self, e.g. no anger
	+ Example of pastor’s dream
* Reflective experience & processing of emotion
	+ Journaling
	+ Mindfulness
	+ Peer reflection: Balint groups