# RELIGIOUS COPING STRATEGIES AND THE ROLE OF THE LOCAL MINISTER IN SUPPORTING CHURCH MEMBERS FACING NEGATIVE LIFE EVENTS

## AUSTRALIAN SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH MEMBERS' USE AND PERCEPTIONS OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF VARIOUS RELIGIOUS COPING STRATEGIES AND TYPES OF PASTORAL SUPPORT

Presented
In partial fulfillment of the requirements of:

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To the Faculty of Theology,
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# STUDENT DECLARATION

I, Kelly Peta Fry hereby declare that:

I. This thesis is my own work,

II. All persons consulted, and all assistance rendered are fully acknowledged,

III. All references used are indicated in the text and accurately reported in the list of references,

IV. The substance of this thesis has not been presented, in whole, or part by me, to any University for a degree.

Date:_____ Signature:_____

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# ABSTRACT

Coping is at the core of life. For religious people, religious coping also plays a significant part in the potential outcome of a crisis. Firstly, this study determined the type of religious coping methods adopted by Australian Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church members and the actions of the local minister in supporting them during times of negative life events. Secondly, the research explored SDA church members' perceptions of the effectiveness of various religious coping methods and pastoral support during these times of crisis.

A mixed method design was adopted in this study, encompassing both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Data were collected in a single-phase process from 206 church members across 9 churches. The instrument used to determine the respective religious coping methods adopted by the participants was adapted from Kenneth Pargament's RCOPE instrument.

It was found that SDA church members use a combination of Positive and Negative Religious Coping Methods: with Positive Coping methods that seek a connection with God often being the most effective, while negative coping methods that attribute blame to God and/or others being less effective in dealing with negative life events. An individual's age, income and the severity of the negative life event they experienced, influenced the type of Religious Coping methods they adopted.

This research indicated that pastors within the SDA Church provide substantial and much appreciated support to their members. But there were some areas/dimensions that needed additional attention. This was

particularly so in the relational dimension; with a perceived need in terms of more acceptance, a less judgmental attitude and some basic counseling skills.

This study found that church members need to feel a positive connection with God and the church before they are able to begin to successfully deal with negative life events. It is, however, only when church members have established these connections with God that they are able to also readily accept support from God and the church community.

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# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Introduction

Coping is at the core of life. Every person utilises coping mechanisms on a daily basis. However, when it comes to experiencing a painful 'negative life event,' such as the death of a loved one, facing a major illness or the realisation that a relationship is over, how one copes becomes an important aspect of journeying through that experience. There are over 130 000 deaths each year in Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008), 40% of marriages end in divorce (Considering Separation or Divorce? 2010), major illnesses are diagnosed every day, and many people face other negative life events. Both religious and non-religious people are faced with the same issues. However, when it comes to coping, religious people have a unique avenue of coping that they can draw on. They are better equipped to adopt specific coping methods to help them deal with these events.

In one way or another, church Pastors are involved with people who are in crisis, or engaging with those who are hurting. Switzer (1997) suggests that while some pastors may enjoy this form of work, others avoid it; some may be trained, and some may not; some effective, others less effective. Whatever way a pastor may look at it, pastoral care, including supporting church members as they deal with negative life events, is part of their job description. Harris Lee (2003), in his book, *Effective Church Leadership*, suggests that pastoral care is one of six specific areas in which a pastor must function if he/she is to be an effective leader. In a survey (Christianity Today, 1998), of a sample of pastors who worked a 50-55 hour week indicated that they spent 7-8 hours of their time in pastoral care. 48%

indicated that they would like more time to spend in pastoral care. Pastoral care includes encouraging and helping those who are experiencing difficulties. Switzer suggests that for this reason, the pastor is in a unique position to help. Their help is freely available and free of charge, unlike other professionals. Pastors are a symbol of a greater community of faith, their job allowing them to take the initiative to seek individuals out. Further more, they most often have pre-established relationships with those they are helping. Petersen (2007) suggests, one of the most important reasons people turn to the pastor is that they believe that "people of faith can somehow bring hope to seemingly hopeless situations" (p. 169). Pastors offer a theological perspective to the situations in which individuals finds themselves (Switzer 1997).

Howard Stone (1993) suggests, "All crises are religious at their core" (p. 16). For a pastor to help effectively in these situations, they need to have an understanding of not only how people cope, but also how people cope religiously; in particular what religious coping methods they adopt. When negative life events occur, they not only impact the individual, but the whole body of the church. By understanding how people cope religiously, pastors can recognise different methods of religious coping being utilised. By understanding different methods of coping, pastors have a broader understanding of how to deal with the situation. When pastors recognise ineffective means of religious coping being adopted, they can help steer the individual towards more effective methods of religious coping. This in turn will assist individuals in their overall coping ability when dealing with a negative life event, as well as helping the church at large.

This research project explores religious coping methods adopted by Australian Seventh-day Adventist Church members with the object of helping them deal with negative life events. In an attempt to enhance the ministry of the local church pastor, this research project will also review the church member's perceptions of the relative effectiveness of the local church pastor/pastoral team in supporting church members who have experienced a significant negative life event.

### 1.2 Context

The Australian Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) church is a Protestant evangelical church consisting of 54,173 (General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2008) members. The Australian Church is part of a world wide church consisting of 13 administrative units (divisions) made up globally of 15,921,408 (General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2008) members. The Australian Union Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church (AUC) sits within the South Pacific Division (see Fig 1.1). The AUC is itself divided into seven subunits (Conferences) most often following State boundaries. Each Conference is an incorporated body but still belonging to the sisterhood of churches within the Division.

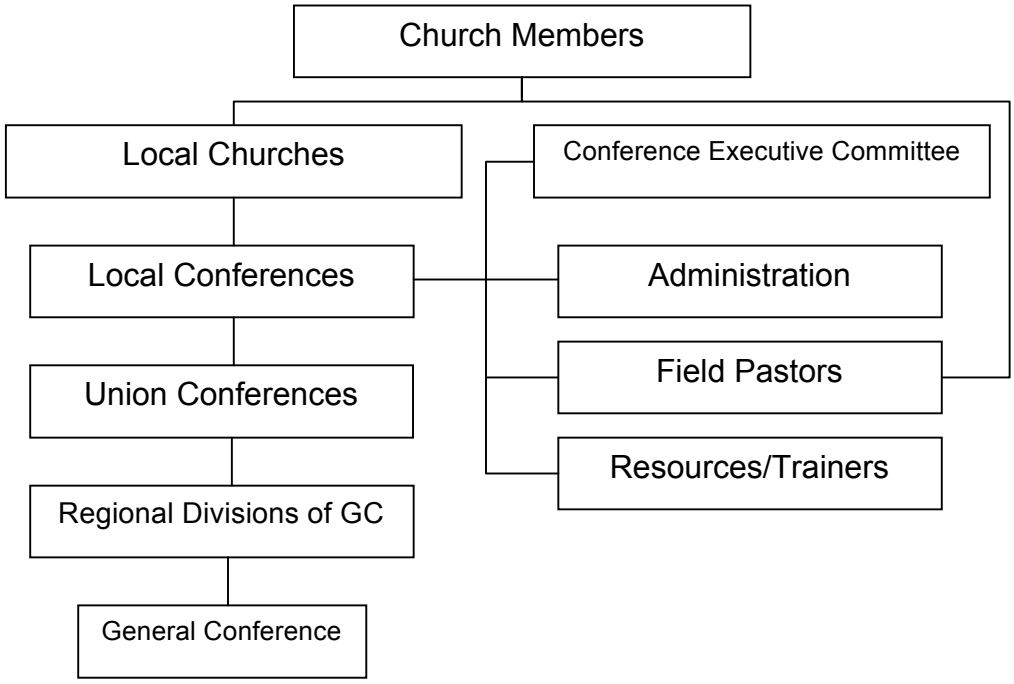



*Figure 1.1* Organisational flow chart for the Seventh-day Adventist Church (Vogel, 2001)

Each local church has allocated a local church pastor, by the respective conferences. It is hoped that as the Church at large gains a clearer understanding of its members' needs while attempting to cope with a significant negative life event, that Conference Administration will provide education and training to Church Pastors to equip them to assist members through their difficult times.

This research project sampled Australian Seventh-day Adventist church members residing in North New South Wales and Greater Sydney Conferences.

### 1.3 Framework

This research project will focus on what religious coping methods church members have adopted to deal with negative life events and their perceptions of the levels of support given to them by the Church Pastor and the church community during these time. Pargament, Koenig and Perez (2000) suggest that, "when asked how they cope with their most stressful situations, many people make mention of religion. Among some groups, particularly the elderly, minorities and individuals facing life threatening crises, religion is cited more frequent than any other resource for coping" (p. 320).

Pargament, Ensing, Falgout, Olsen and Reilly (1990), set about to describe a full range of religious coping methods, including some which may be potentially negative in their impact. Pargament, Koenig, and Perez (2000), used this as the basis for generating a religious coping scale (RCOPE) which consisted of 21 subscales covering cognitive, behavioral, interpersonal and spiritual domains.

This research project will use elements from the RCOPE scale from Pargament *et al.'s* (2000) scale as a framework for exploring religious coping methods adopted by members within the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The relationship between religious coping methods and a number of religious outcomes will then be analysed. Further, the project invited church members to report on the methods used by their local church pastor in supporting them through past negative life event/s.

### 1.4 Research Question

Given that an understanding of the religious coping methods adopted by parishioners has an impact on the pastor's ability to carry out effective pastoral care, and that no past studies have been conducted on religious coping methods of Seventh-day Adventist church members, this study is designed to:

1. Indentify the methods of religious coping adopted by Australian Seventh-day Adventist Church members.
2. Investigate which positive and negative religious coping methods were associated with coping efficacy and religious outcomes.
3. Determine the church members' perceptions of the support of the pastor/pastoral team in coping with the negative life event.
4. Determine the church members' perceptions of what the pastor/pastoral team could have done to further assist in coping with the negative life event.

### 1.5 Structure of Thesis

This chapter introduces the research topic by describing the context and framework around which it is based. Chapter two introduces the reader to the literature and research available on coping and in particular religious coping. Chapter 3 outlines the method that the research will take; in particular it highlights the two major components of the mixed mode (quantitative and qualitative) approach adopted for this study. Chapter 4 begins to describe the results of the quantitative component of the research while Chapter 5 describes the results of the qualitative component. Chapter

6 integrates and discusses the results from Chapters 4 and 5 and generates conclusions and recommendations based on these findings.

# CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

## 2.1 Coping: An Introduction

Hoff (2001) suggests that there are four categories of crisis which people face: dispositional, life transitional, sudden trauma and maturation crisis. This research will focus on the crises involved in the category of sudden trauma.

The 20th Century witnessed the development of the study of trauma coping. During World War II, it was demonstrated that men who were feeling distressed and who were treated at the scene, instead of being repatriated to a psychiatric hospital, were able to return to combat duty more rapidly.

Gerald Caplan (1964) was one of the first psychologists to develop a theory of crisis after World War II and went on to present his findings in his book*, Principles of Preventative Psychiatry*.

Since Caplan, the study of trauma coping has increased. Bjorck (2007) defines coping as "intentional behaviors initiated by persons in response to events and situations appraised as stressful" (p. 196). Whereas, Pargament (1997) defines coping as "a transactional process, a process of exchange and encounter between the individual and a situation within a larger milieu" (p. 84). Psychologists agree that coping draws on "cognitive, affective, behavioral, and physiological" dimensions of human functioning and always occurs within a "larger context of relationships and settings" (Pargament 1997, p.85).

Pargament states that coping is focused on two main themes; meaning and control. Whatever the negative life event, one's sense of "meaning and control are in jeopardy" (Spilka, Hood and Hunsberger, 2003,

p. 483). This is usually because a person's sense of significance is challenged or destroyed at the time. When a person's sense of control is being challenged, maintaining equilibrium is the highest priority when trying to cope. To keep that equilibrium, changes must me made. Spilka *et al* (2003) declare that changes in one's environment, self, or both needs to be considered. Essentially making a crisis meaningful is at the "core of successful coping and adjustment" (Spilka *et al*, 2003, p. 483). When setting out to make such changes in times of crisis, "people do not react randomly." (Pargament, Tarakeshwar, Ellison, and Wulff, 2001, p. 498). Individuals react to crisis in a unique way that is determined by the resources they have available. These resources, according to Pargament *et al* (1992) include a system of general beliefs, practices, aspirations and relationships. Other resources he indicates include prior experience in stressful situations, an optimistic outlook, access to persons one can talk to about the situation and the individual's general orientating system (Pargament, 1997). This orientating system, according to Pargament (1997) is "a frame of reference, a blueprint of oneself and the world that is used to anticipate and come to terms with life's events" (p. 100).

These resources include one's beliefs. Spilka *et al* (2003), points out that beliefs contribute cognitively by constructive mental processing which in turn helps to reduce the stress of the crisis.

### 2.2 Religious Coping

For religious people, religion plays a significant part in the coping process and theoretical literature suggests it affects the outcome of the crisis.

Harrington (2009) came to the conclusion that when an individual experiences a crisis a *spiritual journey* beings. Pargament in his lecture on *Spiritual Struggles as a Fork in the Road to Healthy Living,* stated that the greatest pain people suffer is the pain associated with God, for example, feeling abandoned, or punished by God during this time.

Spilka *et al* (2003), suggests that Pargament's book, *The Psychology of Religion and Coping*, is the definitive work in the field of religion and coping. They state that Pargament built on the work of others who looked at coping in terms of a process. Pargament also looks at coping in terms of a process, but does so within the context of religion. Religion offers people the ability to reassess their significance, to comprehend the crisis and make it meaningful in a religious setting. Pargament (1997, p. 91) views religious coping in terms of eight assumptions: (1) people seek significance; (2) events are constructed in terms of their significance to people; (3) people bring an orienting system to the coping process; (4) people translate the orienting system into specific methods of coping; (5) people seek significance in coping through the mechanisms of conservation and transformation; (6) people cope in ways that are compelling to them; (7) coping is embedded in culture; and (8) the keys to good coping lie in the outcomes and the process. Pargament suggests that religious coping methods act as a *bridge* between religious orientation and outcomes and can be categorised as either positive or negative. Coping methods describe how one utilises religion in the coping process and what they do with religion during these times (Pargament,

1997). He indicates that an individual does not use only one method, but a combination of methods to cope with the negative event.

### 2.3 The Religious Coping Scale Instrument

To begin to understand how people use religious coping, Pargament *et al* (1990) studied 586 members of Christian Churches in Midwestern America. One of the areas they explored was how various religious coping methods were helpful to those who turned to religion in a negative life event. The Religious Coping Activities scale that was used was not so much theoretical but was gathered from such practical sources as reviews of literature, personal accounts and interviews. It consisted of 31 different religious coping activities. Pargament *et al* (1990) analysed how these different religious coping activities related to three specific outcomes: recent mental health status, general outcome of the event, and the religious outcome of the event. They found that religious coping measures added "unique variance to the prediction of the three outcome measures" (p. 810).

Pargament, Koenig, and Perez (2000) used the findings from the Midwestern church members to develop a religious coping instrument they named the RCOPE. Two sample groups were established to validate the instrument; college students experiencing a negative life event, and an elderly hospital sample (College students n=540 and elderly hospital patients n=551). The RCOPE contained 21 subscales based on five key religious functions. These functions consisted of meaning, control, comfort/support, intimacy/spirituality, and life transformation. The 21 subscales relating to each of the five religious functions are as follows:

Religious coping methods to find meaning;

- Benevolent Religious Reappraisal – redefining the stressor through religion as benevolent and potentially beneficial.
- Punishing God Reappraisal – redefining the stressor as a punishment from God for the individual's sin
- Demonic Reappraisal – redefining the stressor as an act of the Devil
- Reappraisal of God's Power – redefining God's power to influence the stressful situation

Religious coping methods to gain control;

- Collaborative Religious Coping – seeking control through a partnership with God in problem solving
- Active Religious Surrender – an active giving up of control to God in coping
- Passive Religious Deferral – passive waiting for God to control the situation
- Pleading for Direct Intercession - seeking control indirectly by pleading to God for a miracle or divine intercession
- Self-Directing Religious Coping – seeking control directly through individual initiative rather than help from God

Religious coping methods to gain comfort and closeness to God;

- Seeking Spiritual Support – searching for comfort and reassurance through God's love and care
- Religious Focus – engaging in religious activities to shift focus from the stressor

- Religious Purification – searching for spiritual cleansing through religious actions
- Spiritual Connection – experiencing a sense of connectedness with forces that transcend the individual
- Spiritual Discontent – expressing confusion and dissatisfaction with God's relationship to the individual in the stressful situation
- Marking Religious Boundaries – clearly demarcating acceptable from unacceptable religious behaviour and remaining within religious boundaries

Religious coping methods to gain intimacy with others and closeness to God;

- Seeking Support from Clergy or Members – searching for comfort and reassurance through the love and care of congregation members and clergy
- Religious Helping – attempting to provide spiritual support and comfort to others
- Interpersonal Religious Discontent – expressing confusion and dissatisfaction with the relationship of clergy or members to the individual in the stressful situation

Religious coping methods to achieve a life transformation

- Seeking Religious Direction – looking to religion for assistance in finding a new direction for living when the old one may no longer by viable
- Religious Conversion – looking to religion for a radical change in life
- Religious Forgiving – looking to religion for help in shifting from anger, hurt, and fear associated with an offense to peace.

These 21 subscales, consisting of 105 items, were factor analysed. A 17 factors solution was found to be more "meaningful theoretically" (Pargament *et al*, 2000, p. 529) than the 21 subscales with smaller number of elements in each subscale whose results were harder to interpret. Pargament *et al* (2000, p. 537-538), discovered that the RCOPE was consistent with their conceptualized framework, and could be related to a broad range of adjustment indices. They found it to be applicable to different age groups, religions and problems. Listed below are the 17 subscales divided into positive and negative religious coping categories.

*Positive Religious Coping:*

- Benevolent Religious Reappraisal/Spiritual Support
- Collaborative/Low Self-Direction Religious Coping
- Active Religious Surrender
- Religious Focus
- Religious Purification/Forgiveness
- Spiritual Connection
- Marking Religious Boundaries
- Seeking Support from Clergy/Members
- Religious Helping
- Religious Direction/Conversion

*Negative Religious Coping:*

- Punishing God Reappraisal
- Demonic Reappraisal
- Reappraisal of God's Power
- Passive Religious Deferral

- Pleading for Direct Intercession
- Spiritual Discontent
- Interpersonal Religious Discontent

Due to the RCOPE's extensive length, the Brief RCOPE was established, for researchers interested in looking at patterns of positive and negative religious coping. Pargament, Smith, Koenig, and Perez (1998) utilised the same samples used to determine the RCOPE along with a sample from the Oklahoma City bombing to further experiment with the Brief RCOPE. The full RCOPE was analysed to generate only two factors that indicated positive and negative religious coping methods. Each of the 17 subscales could then be associated with either positive or negative religious coping. The full RCOPE was further analysed to produce the Brief RCOPE recognizing that a more consise measurement needed to be taken into consideration. The Brief RCOPE consisted of 14 items based on items that were; clearly loaded on only one factor, from a variety of subscales, were evident in both the college and hospital samples. The Brief RCOPE is not designed to capture all knowledge about religious coping, but is used to give a broad picture of religious coping that researchers can use to "integrate religious dimensions" into broader research topics (Pargament, 2009, p.1). It is often used when patterns of religious coping are compared and correlated with set outcomes.

### 2.4 Positive and Negative Religious Coping Scales

Higher order factor analysis of these religious coping methods found that they could be categorised into two overall patterns; positive and negative religious coping (Zwingmann, Wirtz, Müller, Körber and Murken, 2006). One of the primary functions of this instrument is to measure whether a person utilises positive or negative religious coping methods. Pargament suggests that positive religious coping indicates a positive, secure and healthy relationship with God. Whereas negative religious coping "involves expressions of a less secure relationship with God, a tenuous and ominous view of the world and a religious struggle to find and conserve significance in life" (Pargament *et al*, 2001, p. 498). In further research using the Brief RCOPE, Pargament (2001) was able to determine that positive religious coping "correlated with lower levels of psychological distress, …[and] greater self-reported growth" (p. 499). Whereas negative religious coping was associated with "higher levels of depression, lower quality of life, more psychological symptoms, and greater callousness towards others" (p. 499). Bjorck and Thurman (2007) based on their research of Protestants in Southern California came to a similar conclusion.

As stated, different methods of religious coping can be either helpful or harmful. Pargament (1997) states that 46% of the statistical relationships indicate that spiritual support is tied to better adjustment. Whereas an individual who reframes the event into thinking that the crisis is God's punishment leads to "poorer outcomes 52% of the time" (Pargament, 1997, p. 288).

### 2.4.1 Positive Outcomes.

Much of the current research shows that positive outcomes were correlated with positive religious coping. Two landmark studies in religious coping were Pargament et al.'s two-part study titled: *God Help Me (I)* (1990) and *God Help Me (II)* (1992). These studies investigated the various roles that religious coping played in dealing with negative life events; specifically what kinds were helpful and what kinds were harmful. *God Help Me (I)* included a sample of 586 church members. The results showed that 78% of the sample found their religion to be involved in someway in the coping process. Positive outcomes correlated with a belief in a just, loving God; and the experience of God as a supportive partner. This research also discovered that religious commitment was associated with improved coping and health status outcomes. *God Help Me (II)* concluded that religious coping plays a crucial role in the appraisal of negative life events. In Pargament et al.'s (2000) validation of the RCOPE, both college samples and hospital samples utilised more positive religious coping methods than negative methods. The most common in the college sample being Collaborative Religious Coping (M=1.77, S.D.=.76) and Benevolent Religious Reappraisal (M=1.52, S.D.=.80). The most common in the hospital sample were Active Religious Surrender (M=2.43, S.D.=.94) and Collaborative Religious Coping (M= 2.42, S.D.=.72).

Pargament et al. (2001) went on to use a 9-item Brief RCOPE to assess religious coping among American Presbyterian clergy (n=1260), elders (or lay leaders n=823) and members (n=735). They examined relationships between religious coping and wellbeing compared to a person's

identity and role within the religious organisation. Using multiple regression, it was discovered that for all three groups the greater use of positive religious coping methods predicted a more positive affect.

Some studies have looked at religious coping in reference to a single event, such as the Oklahoma city bombing, or the 9/11 attack (Meisenhelder and Marcum, 2004). Others such as Bjorck and Thurman (2007) researched religious coping in a convenience sample (n=336) from a range of Protestant churches in Southern California in regards to what stressors an individual had faced over the last year. This was measured by a 14-item Brief RCOPE with two, seven item subscales assessing positive and negative religious coping. The purpose was to measure religious coping against life satisfaction, well-being and rates of depression. It was discovered that positive religious coping was used more extensively than negative religious coping, $t(1,335) = 44.06$, $p<0.001$. Bjorck and Thurman (2007) conducted hierarchical canonical analysis and discovered that for people who report "high positive religious coping, the impact of negative events on depression was reduced compared to those reporting low positive religious coping" (p. 163). Their findings concluded that the more stressors one is faced with, the greater the likelihood of an increase in positive and negative religious coping methods being implemented. The research evidence suggests that religion plays an important role in a religious person's ability to cope with a negative event in a positive manner.

### 2.4.2 Negative Outcomes

When it comes to outcomes, negative religious coping almost always predicts negative outcomes. Although religious groups as a whole generally use low levels of negative religious coping, there is always a percentage who utilise more negative religious coping than others. All three groups in Pargament et al.'s (2001) study on Presbyterian members, elders and clergy used low levels of negative coping. However "negative religious coping appeared to have a more deleterious effect on the depressive affect of clergy ($\beta$ =0.356, $p<0.01$) as well as elders ($\beta$ = 0.313, $p<0.05$)" (Pargament et al., 2001, p. 507) than on members. Pargament et al. (2001), concluded that religion has more significant effects with those who identify themselves more closely with religion.

Pargament et al.'s (1994) research on 215 undergraduate students at the time of the Gulf War crisis did not use the RCOPE measurement, but similar results were concluded. Results showed that "higher levels of Good Deeds, Discontent, and Plead religious coping were predictive of Negative Affectivity" (p. 353).

In Bjorck and Thuman's (2007) research on Protestant churchgoers, negative religious coping related to increased depression ($r = 0.51$, $p<0.001$) and decreased life satisfaction ($r = -0.27$, $p<0.001$). However, positive religious coping was not significantly associated with either of them.

As part of a study of 81 end-stage lung disease patients, Burker, Evon, Sedway and Egan (2005) utilised a nine subscale RCOPE (five positive subscales and four negative) to study whether religious coping contributed to the prediction of psychological distress and disability

compared to non-religious coping styles. Part of these findings concluded that one of the strongest predictors of the outcome variables (depression, anxiety and overall disability) was Punishing God Reappraisal in five of the six regressions. This highlights Pargament's conclusion that punishing reappraisal is most often associated with poorer outcomes.

Zwingmann *et al* (2006), reported on positive and negative religious coping among 156 German breast cancer patients. Although not directly using the Brief RCOPE (it was not available in the German language), the researchers developed a similar 16-item scale that would fit the religious-cultural context in Germany. They conducted univariate analyses (ANOVA) and multiple regression analysis to discover that negative religious coping was more frequently reported by older [r(156)=0.24, p=0.003], least educated patients [F(2, 143=5.63), p=0.004] and partner-less women [t(154)=2.28, p=0.024). They also used structured equation models to discover that "religious coping variables (in particular negative religious coping) contributed to the prediction of outcomes beyond the effects of nonreligious coping strategies" (p. 542). This is in contrast to Pargament et al. (1990), and particularly Burker *et al* (2005) who suggest that religious and non-religious coping (are not functionally redundant) they work side by side in the coping process. Zwingmann *et al* (2006) suggest that this may be due to the different religious-cultural factor in Germany.

Bush *et al* (1999) studied the relationship between religious and non-religious coping methods among 61 chronic pain patients. Among the measures, they tailored a religious appraisal and coping survey compiled from Pargament *et al's* (1990) previously existing measures. These were

based around positive and negative religious coping. The research contained two outcomes, one of which was religious and corresponded with Pargament *et al's* (1990) previous religious outcome measures. Negative religious coping was factorised into Punishing God and Absent God and unlike other studies, neither were associated significantly in the multiple regression analysis with negative outcome variables.

Pargament *et al's* (2000), validation of the RCOPE revealed that age mattered when it came to negative religious coping. They discovered that the college students reported significantly greater use of some of the negative religious coping methods than the elderly hospital patients.

**2.5 Religious Coping: Religious Outcomes**

Pargament *et al* (1992) discovered religion plays a much more significant role for those who consider themselves religious. In Meisenhelder and Marcum's (2004) research on the response of clergy to the 9/11 attack, they discovered that when utilising religious coping, 77% of clergy felt closer to God, 76% felt closer to their church and 80% felt closer to their friends, and in Pargament *et al's* (2001) research among Presbyterians, positive religious coping lead to greater religious satisfaction. Bush *et al* (1999) in their study on chronic pain patients, found that the "Positive Religious Coping factor correlated positively with the Religious Outcome Scale ($r=.78$, $p<.01$)" (p. 256), and also in the hierarchical multiple regression analysis ($\beta =.82$, $p<.001$). Again reiterating the fact that positive religious coping correlates positively to religious outcome scales.

Tarakeshwar and Pargament (2001) used a 21 item instrument derived from the Brief RCOPE and RCOPE measures represented by two subscales measuring positive and negative religious coping in a survey of forty-five parents of autistic children to explore the impact that religious coping methods had on their psychological adjustment, stress-related growth and religious outcomes. In this study, the religious outcomes were statements measured on a 5-point Likert scale relating to perceived changes in closeness to God, closeness to church and spiritual growth. Positive religious coping methods were found to be associated with religious outcome and stress-related growth. The results showed that the greater use of positive religious coping the better the religious outcome ($\beta$ =.79, $p < .01$), where the greater the use of negative coping methods, the lower the religious outcomes ($\beta$ =-.32, $p<.05$).

Tarakeshwar and Pargament (2001), went on to conduct semi structured interviews with a subsample of participants (n=21) regarding how they coped with raising an autistic child. This group reported both non-religious and religious coping methods. Concerning religious coping methods, they reported the following: 9.5% of the sample indicated that their church was not receptive to their needs for respite care, 81% expressed benevolent religious appraisal provided them with meaning to their life, 40% looked to and found support in the clergy and church members, but 30% felt abandoned by their church and dissatisfied with clergy, and 25% expressed that religion could be a source of spiritual discontent. Overall 68.3% utilised positive religious coping methods. They concluded by stating that for families

of children with autism, religion can both be helpful and at times cause extra distress.

### 2.6 Religious Support

Switzer (1997) suggests that for those who are experiencing significant negative life events, the pastor is in a unique position to help. In reference to whether clergy are helpful or harmful in the coping process, studies have shown the "unique and important contribution of…spiritual support" (Pargament *et al,* 1992, p. 505) when facing and adjusting to life stressors. The results from *God Help Me (I),* indicated that involvement in religious ritual including support from clergy and church members; and the "search for spiritual and personal support through religion was, in itself, associated with more positive outcomes" (Pargament *et al,* 1990, p. 815). Pargament *et al's* (1994) research on 215 undergraduate students at the time of the Gulf War crisis discovered that "students who sought support from their clergy or fellow church members reported a more positive mood than those who did not" (p. 357). Religious support was significantly associated with ratings of Positive Affectivity (p. 353). Use of positive methods of religious coping lead to positive results. However, for those that use negative religious coping, outcomes are not as positive.

# CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

## 3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a rationale and description of the research orientation to be used in this study. A mixed methods approach, was adopted, "empirical research that involves the collection and analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data" (Punch, 2009, p. 288),.

This research approach was considered appropriate in that the two components of the study require different types of data; i.e - an understanding of church members use of religious coping methods and an exploration of the church members' perceptions of the pastor's/pastoral team's present support. The first component collects data using a quantitative approach that enabled the exploration of profiles and relationships and analysis of trends using accepted instruments and statistical procedures. The second component collects data using a qualitative approach to add sensitivity, meaning and context to the data presented, and enables the respondents to generate their own frameworks for explanation.

This study was carried out using a one-phase design, where the two types of data were collected in the same time frame. This was achieved by the construction of a single questionnaire consisting of forced-choice questions and open-ended written response questions (See Appendix 1).

## 3.2 The Sample

To obtain data relating to Seventh-day Adventist Church members in Australia, a semi-stratified/convenience sample of five churches within the

North New South Wales Conference and four churches within the Greater Sydney Conference were chosen. The sample includes country and city churches, larger and smaller congregations, and includes some with a more contemporary worship style and some with a more traditional worship style. These different categories are somewhat representative of the Seventh-day Adventist churches within Australia, and this will enhance the applicability of the study results across Australia. 289 questionnaires were distributed across the nine churches and 206 usable questionnaires were returned. This gave a very acceptable return rate of 71%.

### 3.3 Ethics Committee Approval

The questionnaire and relevant accompanying documentation such as the information letter was submitted to the Avondale College Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC). The Committee gave approval on 22 June, 2009. All participants were informed that confidentiality would be respected in the reporting of these results (See Appendix 2 for letter of approval).

### 3.4 Quantitative Component: Questionnaire Measures

The quantitative component of the questionnaire consists of three sections. Section one, made up of five demographic questions, section two made up of two questions looking at the nature of the negative life event/s, section three consisting of 50 questions looking at religious coping methods and three questions looking at outcomes. Participants will respond to the religious coping and outcome questions on a one to four forced-choice Likert

scale evaluating whether a given statement applied to them (1-not at all, 2-somewhat, 3-quite a bit, 4-a great deal). The four unit-forced choice scale was chosen in an attempt to reduce the 'I don't know' response and to enable comparisons with other studies of this topic.

### 3.4.1 Demographic Variables

Participants in the study will provide information about their age group (18-29, 30-44, 45-64, 65+); gender; ethnicity (Caucasian, Pacific Islander, Asian, Indigenous, Other); Income bracket (0-39999, 40000-69999, 70000+); and connection with the Seventh-day Adventist Church (whether they call themselves a Seventh-day Adventist, yes/no).

### 3.4.2 Negative Life Event Details

The participants in the study firstly provided information about the type of negative life event that they had experienced (Death of a close family member or friend; major personal illness, injury; major financial loss; close family member suffering from major illness or accident; major interpersonal conflict, e.g. major disagreements with friends, co-workers, church subgroup, etc; separation or divorce; job loss; or other). Secondly, they will provide information about their perception of the impact of the event on their life (extremely negative, moderately negative, some what negative or slightly negative).

### 3.4.3 Religious Coping Methods

Items from a measure of religious coping, RCOPE (Pargament, *et al*, 2000), were used to access the various methods of religious coping used by Australian Seventh-day Adventists when faced with negative life events. Pargament *et al's* (2000) RCOPE instrument consisted of 17 subscales, 10 reflecting the positive dimension and 7 the negative dimension of religious coping. This instrument consisted of 105 items, which took considerable time to complete. In an attempt to reduce the time to complete this instrument, Pargament *et al* (2000), generated a 14-item Brief RCOPE accessing 11 of the RCOPE subscales. These subscales were chosen because they had the highest factor loadings and covered a range of subscales. Pargament, Tarakeshwar, Ellison, and Wulff (2001) in their study of religious coping methods used by Presbyterian clergy, elders and members used a modified Brief RCOPE accessing six of the RCOPE subscales.

For this study nine of the RCOPE subscales were chosen to identify religious coping methods. The choice of the subscales was determined by two factors:

1. Because of the pastor/pastoral team emphasis to this study, the subscales focused on coping methods that looked at aspects of the respondent's relationship with God and that included a relationship with the pastor/pastoral team or church community.
2. Where possible these subscales paralleled the Brief RCOPE subscales. There was a significant overlap with the Pargament et al.

(2001), Presbyterian Church community study so that comparisons could be made with that study.

The resulting religious coping instrument consisted of 50 items accessing nine RCOPE subscales, five of which reflected a positive dimension, and four a negative dimension of coping. This instrument overlapped with seven of the 11 subscales accessed by the Brief RCOPE, and included five of the six subscales used by Pargament *et al's* (2001) Presbyterian study.

The full religious coping instrument used for this study is shown below.

**Positive Coping Dimension**

*Benevolent Religious Reappraisal/Spiritual Support Subscale*

*Individual Items:*

- Saw my situation as part of God's plan
- Tried to make sense of the situation with God
- Sought comfort from God
- Trusted that God would be by my side
- Trusted that God was with me
- Tried to see how the situation could be beneficial spiritually
- Thought that the event might bring me closer to God
- Tried to find a lesson from God in the event
- Tried to see how God might be trying to strengthen me in this situation

*Collaborative/Low Self-Direction Religious Coping Subscale*

*Individual Items:*

- Tried to deal with the situation on my own without God's help
- Worked together with God to relieve my worries

- Worked together with God as partners
- Tried to deal with my feelings without God's help
- Made decisions about what to do without God's help
- Depended on my own strength without support from God
- Tried to make sense of the situation without relying on God
- Looked to God for strength, support and guidance

*Active Religious Surrender Subscale*

*Individual Items:*

- Did my best and then turned the situation over to God
- Turned the situation over to God after doing all that I could
- Did what I could and put the rest in God's hands
- Tried to do the best I could and let God do the rest
- Took control over what I could, and gave the rest up to God

*Spiritual Connection Subscale*

*Individual Items:*

- Thought about how my life is part of a larger spiritual force
- Tried to experience a stronger feeling of spirituality
- Tried to build a stronger relationship with a God

*Seeking Support from Clergy/Members Subscale*

*Individual Items:*

- Asked the pastor to remember me in their prayers
- Asked others to prayer for me
- Looked for spiritual support from my pastor
- Sought support from members of my church

**Negative Coping Dimension**

*Punishing God Reappraisal Subscale*

*Individual Items:*

- Wondered whether God was punishing me because of my lack of faith
- Decided that God was punishing me for my sins
- Felt punished by God for my lack of devotion
- Wondered if God allowed this event to happen to me because of my sins
- Wondered what I did for God to punish me

*Passive Religious Deferral Subscale*

*Individual Items:*

- Didn't try much of anything; simply expected God to take control
- Knew that I could not handle the situation, so I just expected God to handle it for me
- Didn't try to do much; just assumed God would handle it
- Didn't do much; just expected God to solve my problems for me
- Didn't try to cope; only expected God to take my worries away

*Spiritual Discontent Subscale*

*Individual Items:*

- Questioned the power of God
- Wondered whether God had abandoned me
- Felt angry that God was not there for me
- Questioned God's love for me
- Wondered if God really cares
- Voiced anger that God didn't answer my prayers

*Interpersonal Religious Discontent Subscale*

*Individual Items:*

- Felt my church seemed to be rejecting or ignoring me
- Wondered whether my pastor was really there for me
- Wondered whether my church had abandoned me
- Disagreed with what the church wanted me to do or believe
- Felt dissatisfaction with my pastor

### 3.4.4 Outcomes

This study will look at two types of outcomes. First, coping efficacy that measures respondent's self-evaluation of how they coped with a particular negative life event or set of negative life events. This will be measured using the single item, "Considering the impact of the negative event on my life, I coped remarkable well."

The second outcome type related to religious outcomes. This study focuses on two religious outcomes, the impact of the coping methods respondents adopted on their relationship with God, and the second, the relationship with their church community. Each of these outcomes will be measured using a single item, "I have grown closer to God," and "I have grown closer to my church," respectively.

## 3.5 Qualitative Component

The qualitative component occupies one section of the questionnaire; section four. This consists of two open-ended questions, where the respondents will be asked to give their perceptions of the nature and

effectiveness of the pastor's/pastoral team's interaction or lack of interaction with them during and post their negative life event/s. This will be accessed by the following open-ended questions; "In what ways did the pastoral team help/support you during this time?" and " Is there anything you would have liked to see your pastoral team help/support you with during this time?" Finally there will be opportunity for participants to add further comments related to their interaction with the pastor/pastoral team during and post their negative life event.

## 3.6 Data Analysis

### 3.6.1 Quantitative Component

The data from the questionnaire will be entered into the statistical software package, SPSS 16.0 (SPSS 16.0 for Windows. (2007) SPSS inc.). Descriptive statistics for each subscale will be determined. Independent groups, t-tests and one-way between groups ANOVA with post-hoc comparisons will be run to locate any area of significant difference between participant subgroups. In addition a linear regression analysis will be used to explore the relationship between sets of individual variables and respective dependant variables. Reliability for each scale and subscale will be reviewed using Confirmatory Factor Analysis and the internal reliability reported by Crombach's Alpha.

### 3.6.2 Qualitative Component

The individual open ended responses will be transcribed and collated in a number of ways to highlight the range of approaches that will be

expressed by the participants and to explore the links between what the pastor/pastoral team were doing and could be doing to support their parishioners in times of negative life events. This data will then be further analysed using inductive thematic analysis, beginning with coding common words and phrases, combining codes into respective categories and linking categories within themes.

# CHAPTER 4: QUANTITATIVE COMPONENT RESULTS

## 4.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the results of the quantitative component of the research and aims to address the first two research questions, namely:

1. To identify the methods of religious coping adopted by Seventh-day Adventist church members.
2. To investigate which positive and negative religious coping methods were associated with coping efficacy and religious outcomes.

## 4.2 Sample Characteristics

### 4.2.1 Demographics.

This survey asked respondents about the following demographics:

#### *4.2.1.1 Gender.*

The sample consisted of 206 respondents and the gender ratio of the sample was female 52.8% to male 47.2% as shown in Fig 4.1.

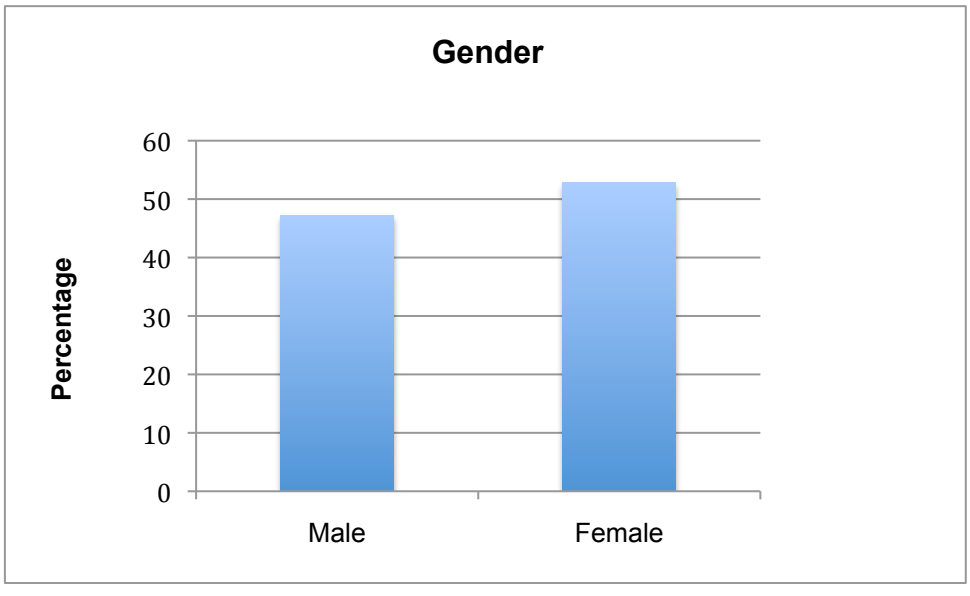



*Figure 4.1*: Gender Distribution of Respondents

#### *4.2.1.2 Age.*

The sample was divided into four age categories (18-29 years; 30-44 years; 45-64 years and 65+ years) as shown in Fig 4.2. The majority of the sample (68.9%) was over the age of 45 years, which is probably reflective of the Seventh-day Adventist membership distribution (Membership statistics were not available as age distribution is not collected ).

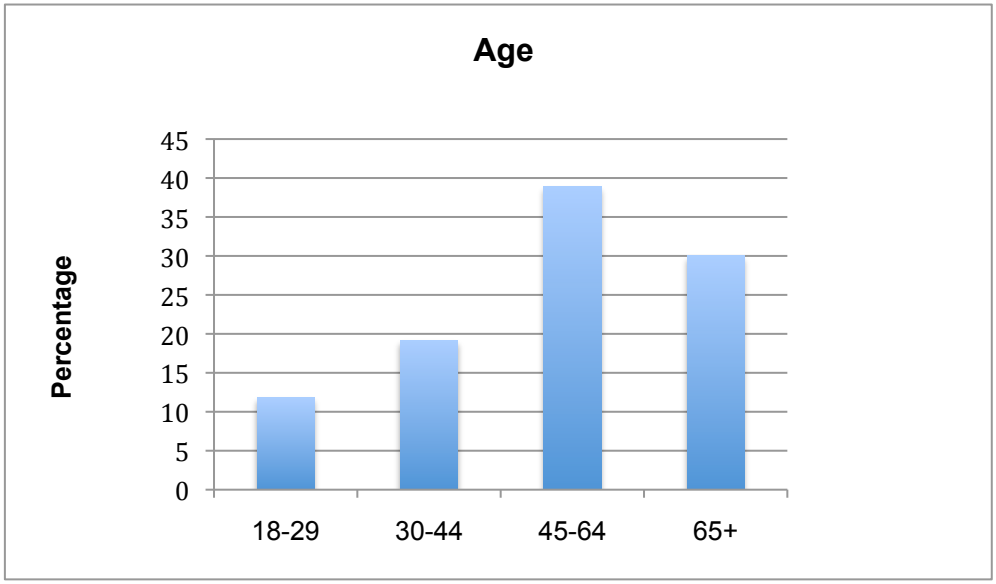



*Figure 4.2*: Age Distribution of Respondents

#### *4.2.1.3 Ethnicity.*

The sample was primarily Caucasian (81%), with minor representations from other ethnic backgrounds, Indigenous (2.5%), Pacific Islander (4.5%), South American (1%), Asian (4.5%), and Other (6.5%).

#### *4.2.1.4 Income.*

The numbers of respondents in each wage category decreased as the income increased (Fig 4.3). Of the respondents, 41.3% earned below

$40,000 per year and 58.7% earned above $40,000 per year. The most common wage group for the sample was the 0-39,000 dollar per year category.

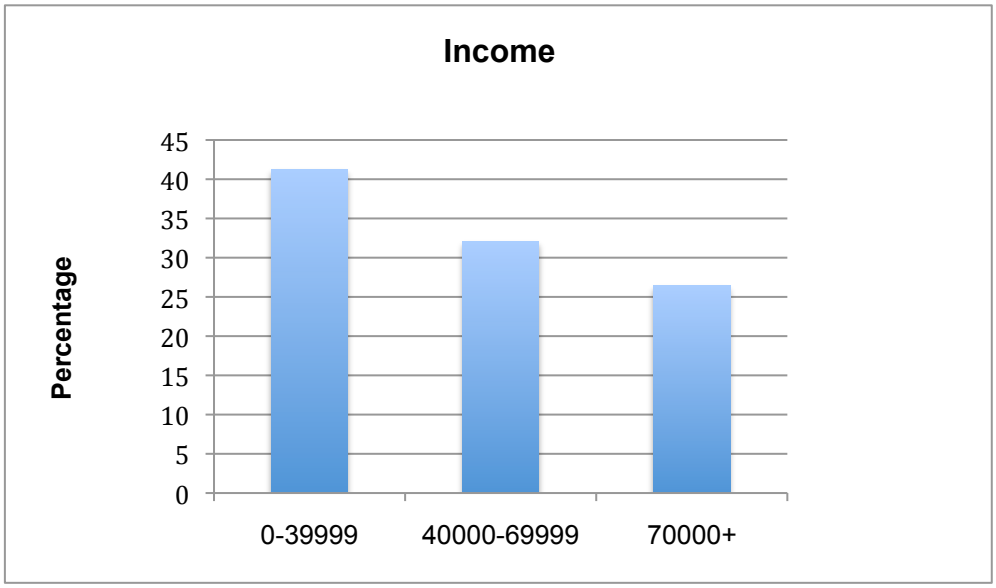



*Figure 4.3* Income Distribution of Respondents

### 4.2.2 The Negative Life Event Characteristics.

For this study, respondents were asked to report on the type, number of negative life event/s experienced and the severity of those events.

#### *4.2.2.1 Type of Negative Life Event.*

The respondents were asked to identify the type/s of negative life event/s that they had experienced with reference to seven categories (death of a close family member or friend; major personal illness, injury; major financial loss; close family member suffering from major illness or accident; major interpersonal conflict; separation or divorce; job loss or other) listed and the distribution of responses is shown in Fig 4.4.

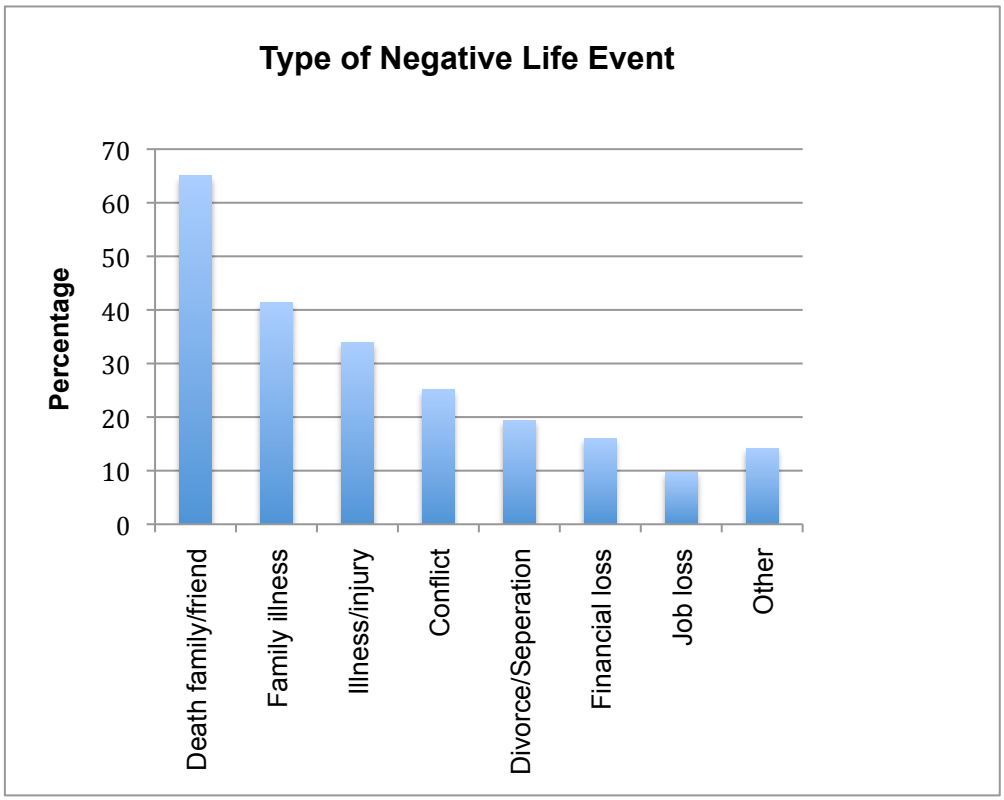



*Figure 4.4*: Negative Life Event(s) Type Distribution of Respondents

#### *4.2.2.2 Number of Negative Life Events.*

The respondents indicated from the list provided the number of negative life event/s they experienced and this is shown in Fig 4.5. The mean number per person of negative life events experienced was 2.17.

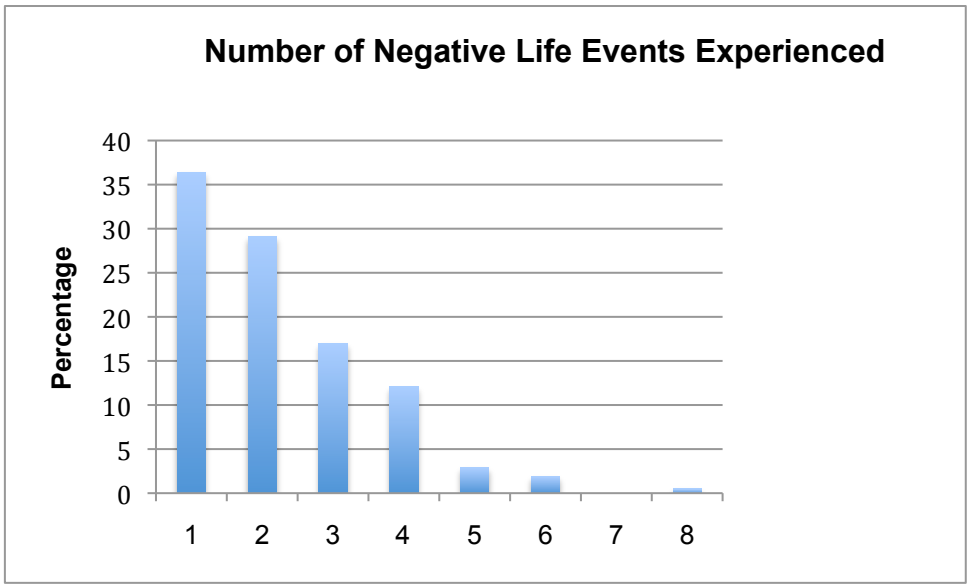



*Figure 4.5* Number of Negative Life Event/s Experienced Distribution

#### *4.2.2.3 The Impact of the Negative Life Event/s*

Respondents rated their negative life event/s on a four level (Extreme, Moderate, Somewhat or Slightly) impact scale. The distribution of the impact scale is shown in Fig 4.6. The majority of the sample (61.1%) reported that the negative life event/s had a moderate to extreme impact on their life.

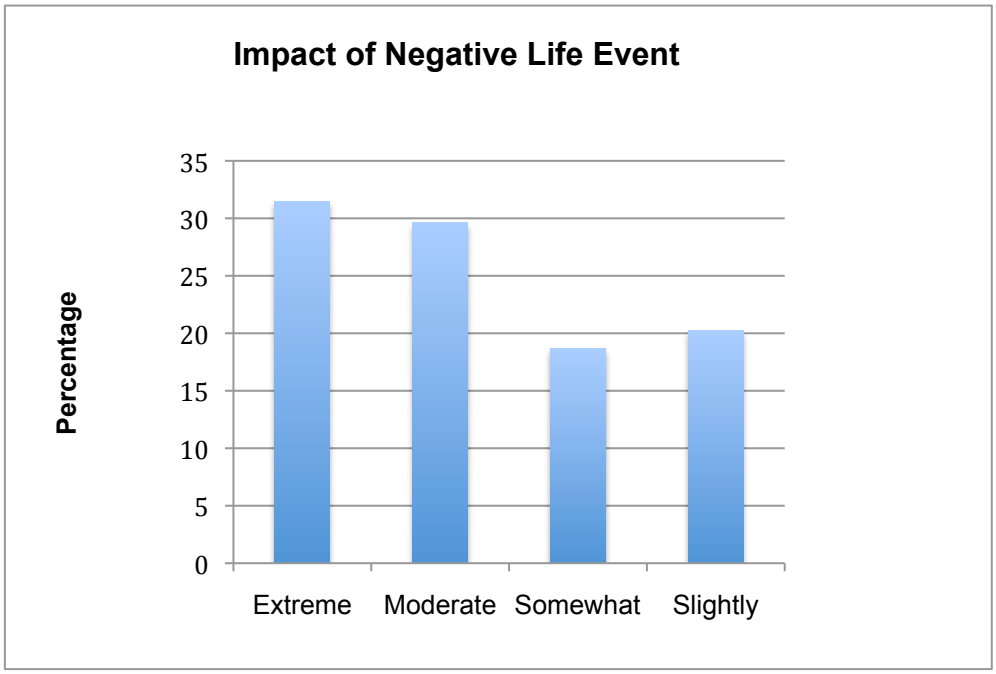



*Figure 4.6* Impact Scale Distribution

## 4.3 Instrument analysis

### 4.3.1 Factor Analysis

Confirmatory factor analysis was conducted to test the appropriateness of the various subscales (based on Pargament's RCOPE), of the coping methods instrument for this sample (Table 4.1).

Table 4.1
Initial Religious Coping Methods Subscales (Based on RCOPE)

| **Subscales** |
|---|
| *Positive Religious Coping Methods* |
| 1. Benevolent Religious Reappraisal/Spiritual Support |
| 2. Active Religious Surrender |
| 3. Collaborative/ Low Self-Direction |
| 4. Seeking Support from Clergy/Members |
| 5. Spiritual Connection |
| |
| *Negative Religious Coping Methods* |
| 6. Punishing God Reappraisal |
| 7. Passive Religious Deferral |
| 8. Spiritual Discontent |
| 9. Interpersonal Religious Discontent |

This factor analysis for the study sample (Refer to Appendix 3) also generated nine coping methods subscales. Even though most of the subscales paralleled the RCOPE subscales, there were differences with the RCOPE combination scales (Subscales 1, 3) and Subscale 5. This factor analysis indicated that the Collaborative component of subscale 3 factored with the Spiritual Support component of subscale 1. Further, Benevolent Religious Reappraisal component of subscale 1 factored with Spiritual Connection (subscale 5), and this left the Low Self-Direction component of subscale 3 as a subscale of its own.

It was decided to use the subscales identified by this factor analysis in the coping methods instrument for this study. Leaving Self-Direction by itself appears to be consistent with Phillips III, Pargament, Lynn, and Crossley (2004), where they consider self-directing religious coping as a stand-alone

concept rather than in combination with another concept. This subscale was placed within the Negative Religious Coping Methods scale as this subscale "measures an abandoning God" (p. 415). Further more, the combination of Collaborative and Spiritual Support is reasonable as both access the concepts of comfort and support from God. The combination of Benevolent Religious Reappraisal and Spiritual Connection also access a spiritual connection with God. This gives a sense of unity to these combination scales.

The final subscales and component combinations used as the Religious Coping Methods instrument in this research are shown in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2
Final Religious Coping Methods Subscales

| **Religious Coping Subscale** |
| --- |
| ***Positive Religious Coping Methods*** |
| 1. Collaborative/Spiritual Support (CSS) - *seeking comfort, reassurance and control through a partnership with God in problem solving* |
| 2. Active Religious Surrender (ARS) - *an active giving up of control to God in coping* |
| 3. Benevolent Religious Reappraisal/Spiritual Connection (BRRSC) - *seeking a sense of connectedness with God while redefining the stressor through religion as benevolent and potentially beneficial.* |
| 4. Seeking Support from Clergy/Members (SSCM) - *searching for comfort and reassurance through the love and care of congregation members and clergy* |
| ***Negative Religious Coping Methods*** |
| 5. Punishing God Reappraisal (PGR) - *redefining the stressor as a punishment from God for the individual's sin* |
| 6. Low Self-Direction (LSD) – *seeking control directly through individual initiative rather than help from God* |
| 7. Passive Religious Deferral (PRD) - *passive waiting for God to control the situation* |
| 8. Spiritual Discontent (SD) - *expressing confusion and dissatisfaction with God's relationship to the individual in the stressful situation* |
| 9. Interpersonal Religious Discontent (IRD) - *expressing confusion and dissatisfaction with the relationship of clergy or members to the individual in the stressful situation* |

### 4.3.2 Internal Reliability

The internal reliability as measured using Crombach's alpha for each subscale is shown in Table 4.1. These alphas ranged from .78 to .90, a very acceptable range (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson (2010, p.125) suggest that an alpha of above .70 is an acceptable reliability, above .80 very good reliability and above .90 excellent reliability).

Table 4.3
Subscale Crombach Alpha's

| **Religious Coping Methods Subscale** | **Alpha** |
|---|---|
| *Positive Religious Coping Methods* | |
| 1. Collaborative/Spiritual Support (CSS) | .89 |
| 2. Active Religious Surrender (ARS) | .86 |
| 3. Benevolent Religious Reappraisal/Spiritual Connection (BRRSC) | .88 |
| 4. Seeking Support from Clergy/Members (SSCM) | .82 |
| *Negative Religious Coping Methods* | |
| 5. Punishing God Reappraisal (PGR) | .90 |
| 6. Low Self-Direction (LSD) | .78 |
| 7. Passive Religious Deferral (PRD) | .78 |
| 8. Spiritual Discontent (SD) | .90 |
| 9. Interpersonal Religious Discontent (IRD) | .84 |

## 4.4 Religious Coping Methods Subscale Profiles

The means and standard deviation for the nine subscales were determined and reported in Table 4.4 with a graph highlighting the means for each of the subscales presented in Fig 4.7.

Table 4.4
Religious Coping Method Subscale Descriptives

| **Religious Coping Method Subscale** | **Mean** | **Standard Deviation** |
|---|---|---|
| *Positive Religious Coping Methods* | | |
| 1. Collaborative/Spiritual Support (CSS) | 3.1504 | .6816 |
| 2. Active Religious Surrender (ARS) | 2.7284 | .7573 |
| 3. Benevolent Religious Reappraisal/Spiritual Connection (BRRSC) | 2.5895 | .6892 |
| 4. Seeking Support from Clergy/Members (SSCM) | 2.1540 | .8440 |
| *Negative Religious Coping Methods* | | |
| 5. Punishing God Reappraisal (PGR) | 1.2880 | .5404 |
| 6. Low Self-Direction (LSD) | 1.6979 | .5904 |
| 7. Passive Religious Deferral (PRD) | 1.7937 | .6330 |
| 8. Spiritual Discontent (SD) | 1.3959 | .6104 |
| 9. Interpersonal Religious Discontent (IRD) | 1.4942 | .6642 |

The Collaborative/Spiritual Support (CSS) religious coping method was the most used coping method with a mean of 3.1504 on a four point Likert Scale where 1 indicates they do not use this method at all and 4 indicates they use it a great deal. The other three positive religious coping methods had means ranging from 2.7284 and 2.1540. The Negative Religious Coping Method, Punishing God Reappraisal (PGR) coping method was the least used of the coping methods in this religious coping methods profile. The most used negative religious coping method was Passive Religious Deferral (PRD) with a mean of 1.7937 followed by Low Self-Direction with a mean of 1.6979.

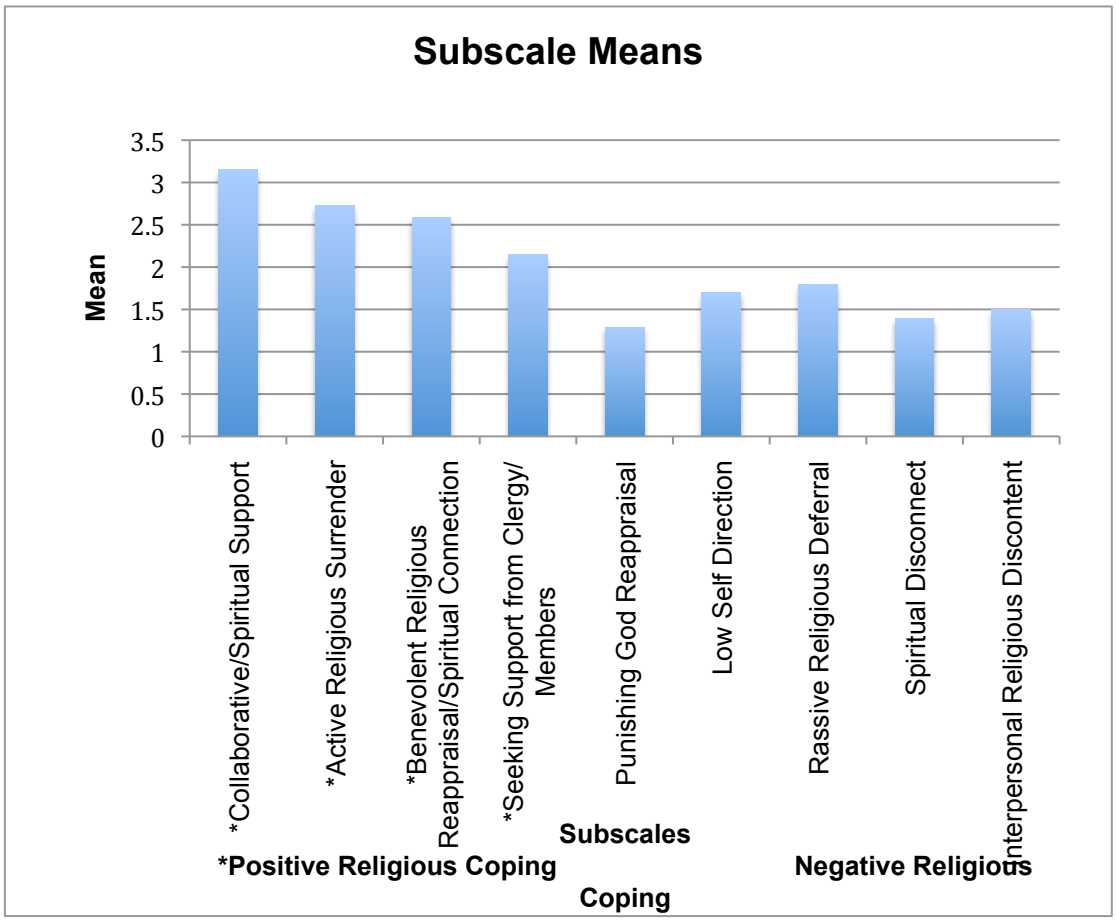



*Figure 4.7:* Religious Coping Method Subscale: Mean Distribution

When the coping methods are grouped such that all the positive religious coping methods are linked together and all the negative religious coping methods are linked, the means are 2.6556 and 1.5339 respectively as shown in Table 4.5. The means are significantly different at the 0.05 level.

Table 4.5
Religious Coping Method Group Descriptives

| Subscale | Mean | Standard Deviation |
|---|---|---|
| Positive Religious Coping (PRC) | 2.6556 | .5437 |
| Negative Religious Coping (NRC) | 1.5339 | .3789 |

The Positive Religious Coping method group with a mean of 2.655 indicates that most church members were to a large extent adopting these methods (See Fig 4.8).

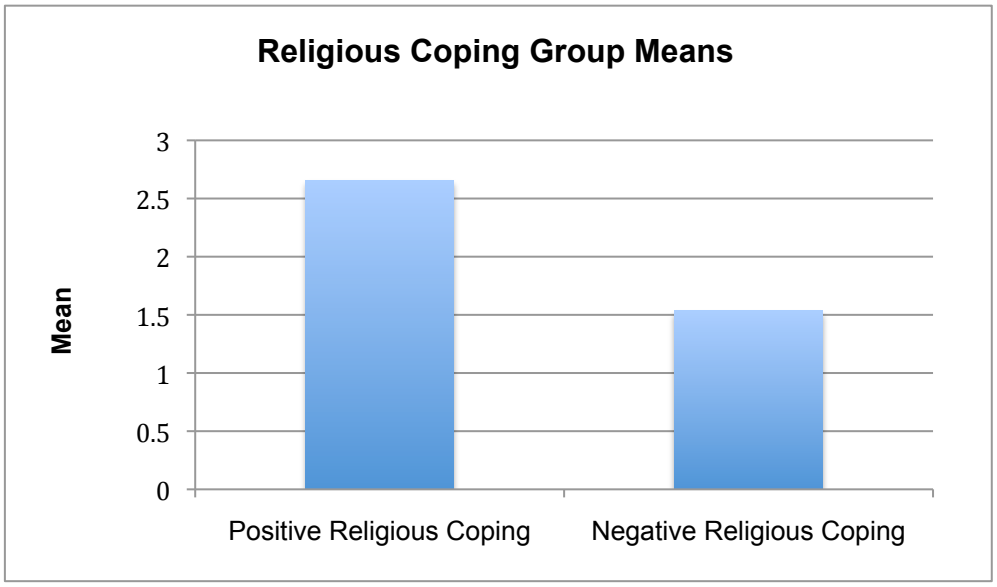



*Figure 4.8*: Religious Coping Groups: Mean Distribution

## 4.5 Profile Comparison: Demographics

### 4.5.1 Gender.

Although t-testing showed no significant difference between gender, females scored greater on all the Positive Religious Coping subscales (Fig 4.9). With the Negative Religious Coping subscales, the males scored higher in the Low Self-Direction (LSD) subscale and the Passive Religious Deferral (PRD) subscale, whereas women scored higher in Punishing God Reappraisal (PGR), Spiritual Discontent (SD) and Interpersonal Religious Discontent (IRD).

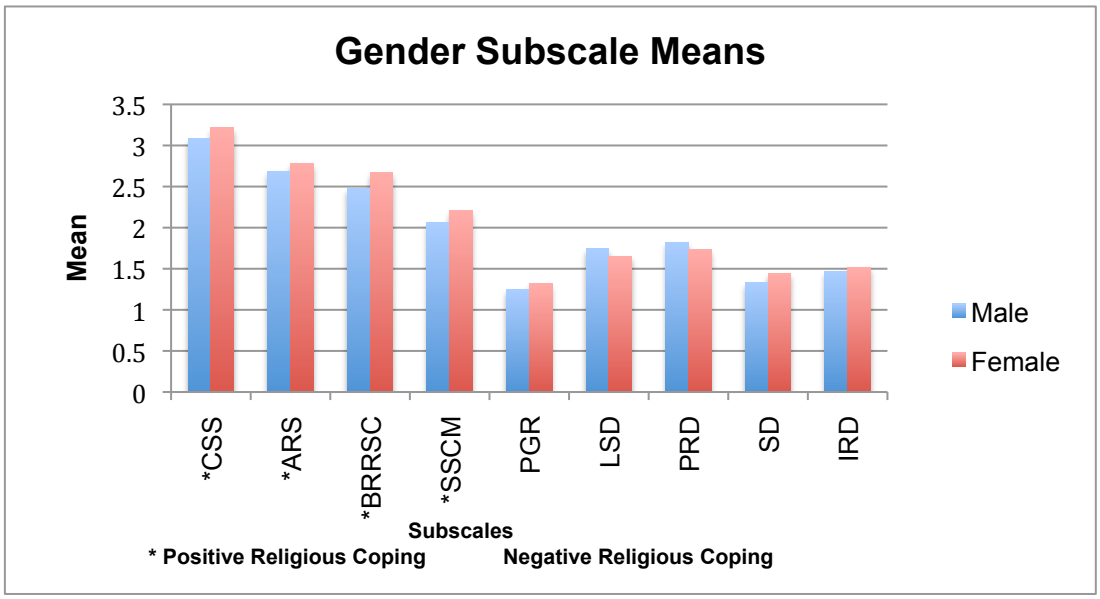



*Figure 4.9*: Religious Coping Methods: Gender Means Distribution

When the positive and negative religious coping subscales are grouped together, the females score higher in positive religious coping (Fig 4.10), where as there is no difference between the genders for Negative Religious Coping.

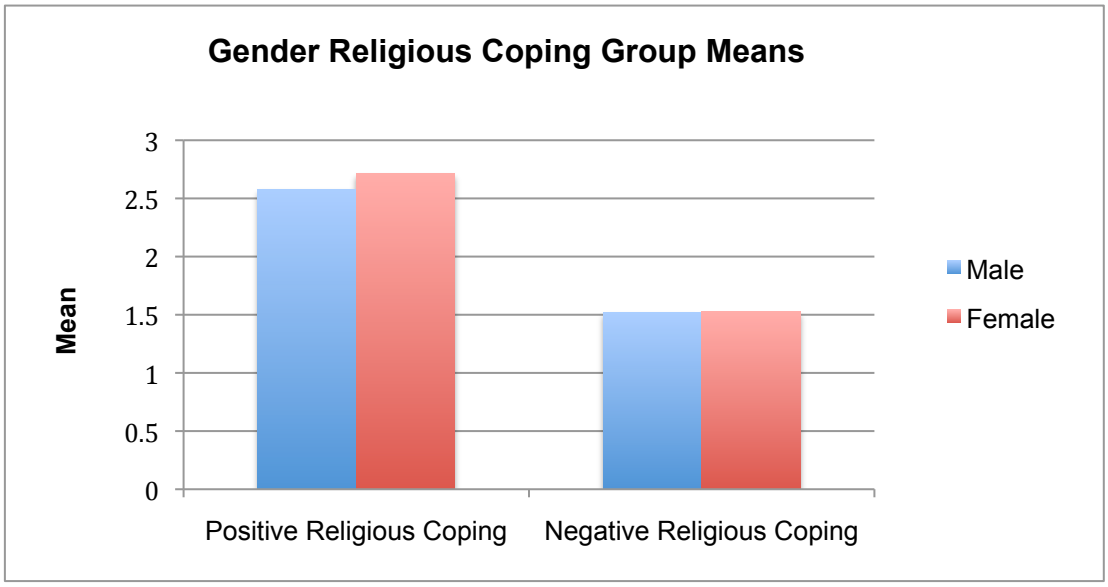



*Figure 4.10:* Religious Coping Groups: Gender Means Distribution

### 4.5.2 Age.

Analysis of variance showed that for three of the nine religious coping method subscales (PGR, LSD, and CSS) there was a significant difference in the patterns for the different age groups (See Fig 4.11). The 65+ age group registered significantly lower negative scores in PGR subscale than 30-44 and 45-64 year age group [$F(3,202) = 3.952$, $p=.005$]. The 65+ age group also registered significantly lower negative scores in LSD subscale than all other age groups [$F(3,202) = 6.085$, $p=.005$]. The 65+ age group registered significantly higher positive scores in CSS subscale than 18-29 and 45-64 year age groups [$F(3,202) = 4.523$, $p=.005$]. The 65+ age group recorded higher use of the positive religious coping methods (CSS, ARS, BRRSC, SSCM) and less use of the negative religious coping methods (PGR, LSD, PRD, SD, IRD) than the other age groupings. In terms of the use of the positive religious coping methods the 18-29 and the 45-64 age groups generally rated the lowest. In terms of the use of the negative religious coping methods it is interesting to note that the 18-29 age group use the LSD religious coping method more than all the other groups and less of the PGR and IRD religious coping methods.

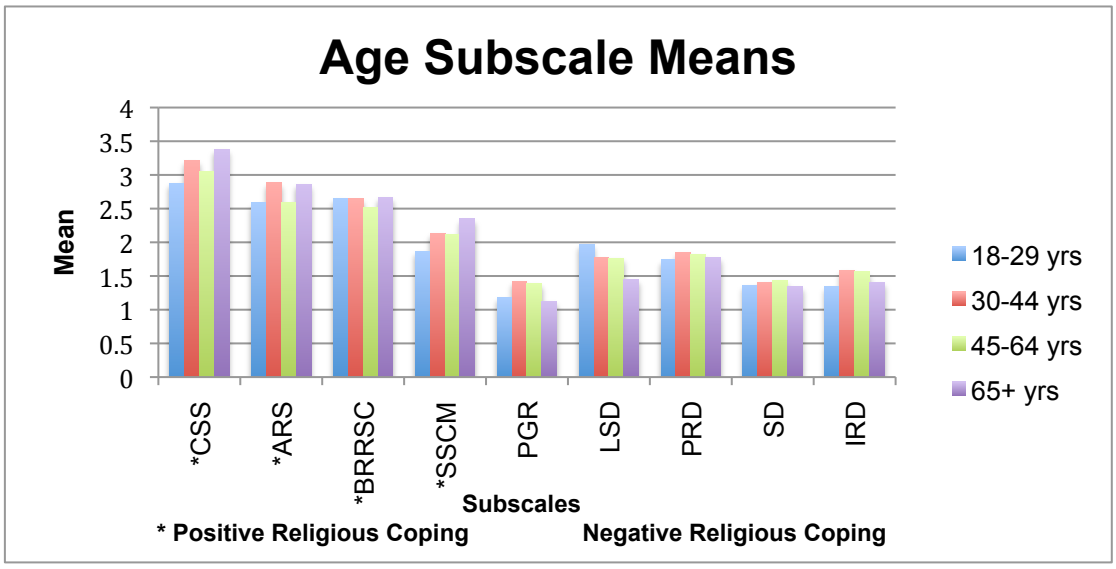



*Figure 4.11*: Religious Coping Method: Age Means Distribution

With the grouping of the subscales into two groups; positive and negative religious coping, analysis indicated that the 65+ age group registered significantly higher in the Positive Religious Coping Methods group than the 45-64 year age group [F(3, 202) = 3.494, p=.005]. Further, the 65+ age group registered significantly lower in the Negative Religious Coping Methods group than the 45-64 years [F= (3,202) = 2.959, p=.005] as shown in Fig 4.12.

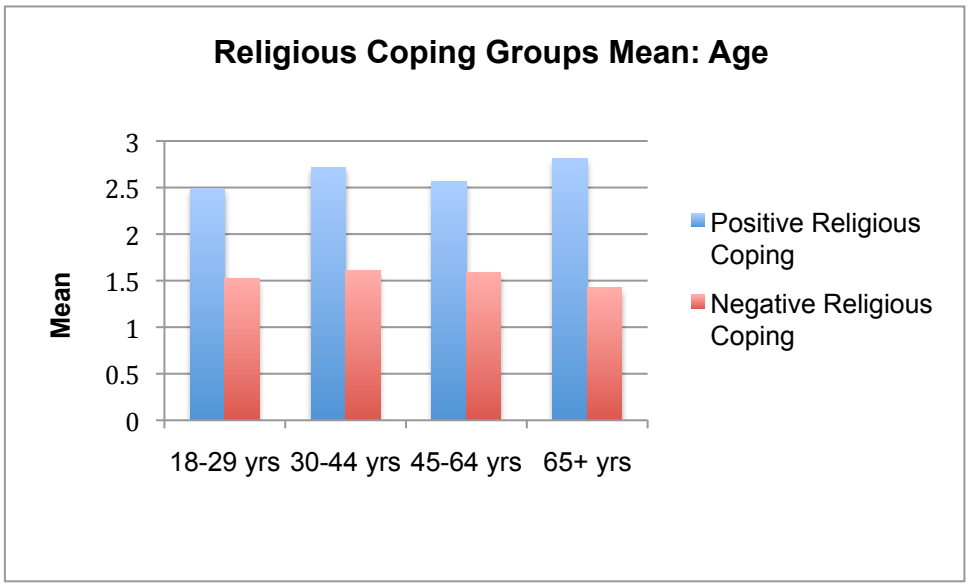



*Figure 4.12*: Religious Coping Groups: Age Means Distribution

### 4.5.3 Ethnicity.

Although the majority of participants were Caucasian, the results seem to suggest that ethnicity may play a part in an individual's method of coping (Fig 4.13). The Asian group scored higher in two of the positive religious coping subscales (ARS and SSCM) while the South American group scored highest in the CSS and BRRSC positive religious coping method subscales. The South American, Pacific Islanders and Other groups generally scored higher in all of the negative religious coping subscales.

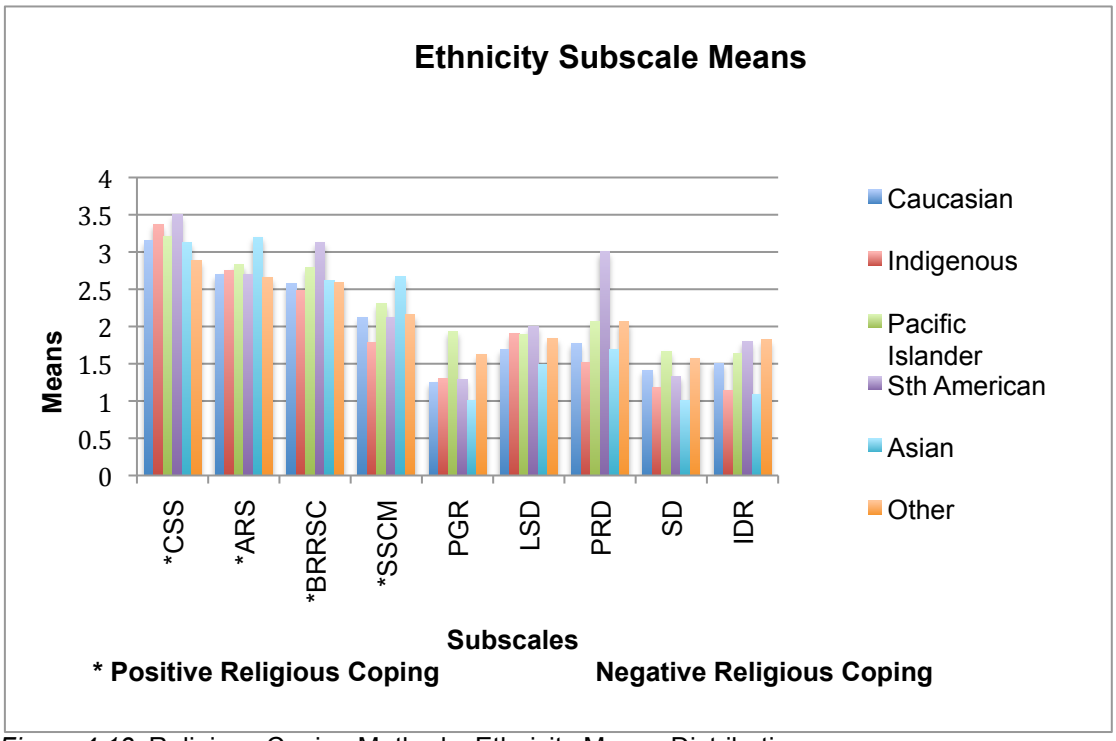



*Figure 4.13*: Religious Coping Methods: Ethnicity Means Distribution

With the grouping of the subscales into two groups; positive and negative religious coping, the Asian Group score highest in the Positive Religious Coping group and the lowest in the Negative Religious Coping group (Fig 4.14). Some groups (Pacific Islander, South American and Other) score high in both the Positive and Negative Religious Coping groups.

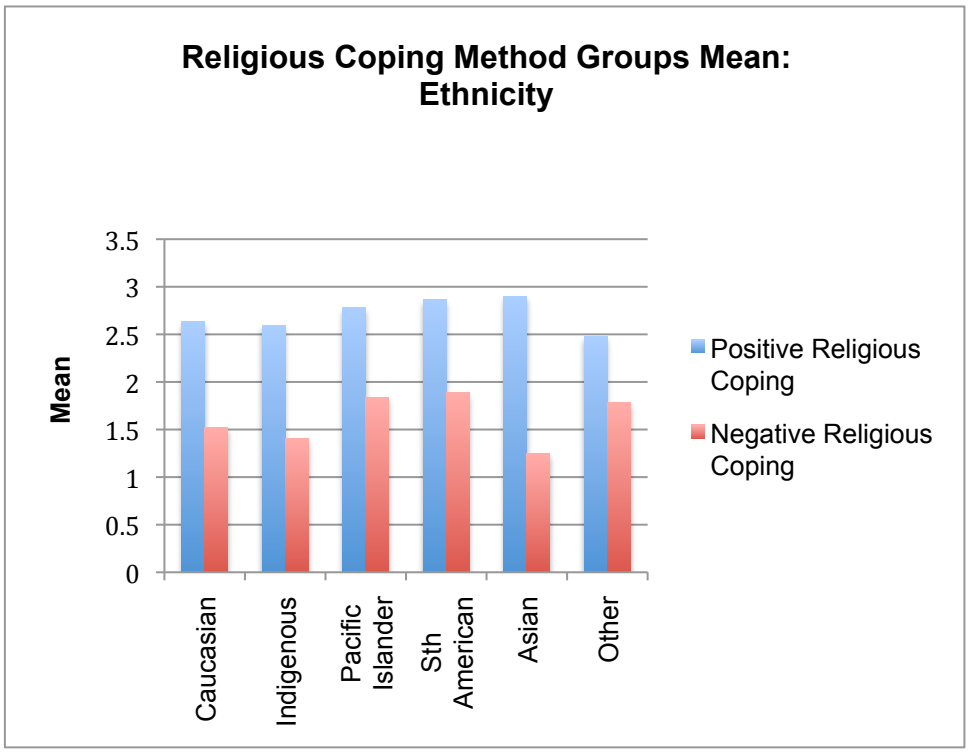



*Figure 4.14*: Religious Coping Groups: Ethnicity Means Distribution

### 4.5.4 Income.

Analysis of variance showed income is a significant factor in two of the nine religious coping method subscales. The 0-39,000 dollar per year group registered significantly lower on the negative PGR subscale than the 40,000-69,000 dollar per year group [F(2,195) = 4.330, p=.005]. Further, the 0-39,000 per year group registered significantly lower on the negative IRD subscale than the 40,000-69,000 dollar per year group [F(3,202) = 4.004, p=.005] (See Fig 4.15). The lower income group (0-39,000) generally scored higher in the positive religious coping subscales and also in one of the negative religious coping subscales (PRD).

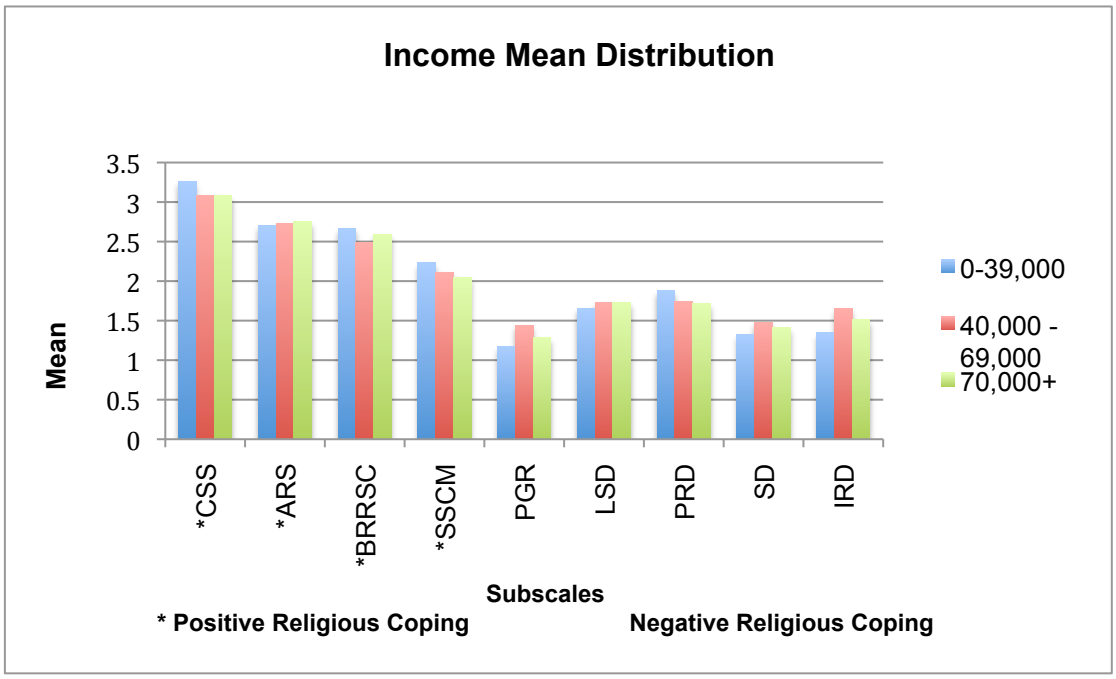



*Figure 4.15*: Religious Coping Methods: Income Mean Distribution

With the grouping of the subscales into two groups; Positive and Negative Religious Coping, there does not seem to be a consistent pattern of differences between the various income brackets as shown in Fig 4.16.

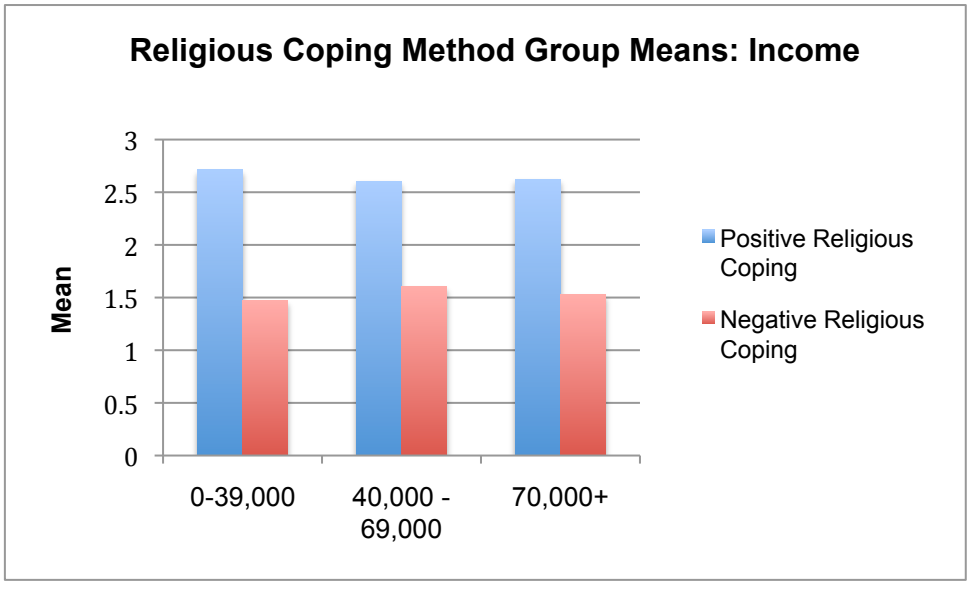



*Figure 4.16*: Religious Coping Group: Income Means Distribution

### 4.6 Profile Comparisons: Negative Life Event Characteristics

#### 4.6.1 Severity of the Negative Life Event/s.

Analysis of variance showed that the severity of the negative life event has a significant impact on three of the nine subscales, as shown in Figure 4.17. Those reporting the impact of the negative life event as Slightly negative registered a significantly higher positive scores in CSS subscale than those reporting a Moderate negative affect [F(3,202) = 4.410, p=.005]. Those reporting a Moderately negative affect registered significantly lower positive scores in the BRRSC subscale than those reporting an Extreme and Slight negative affect [F(3,202) = 4.396, p=.005]. Those reporting an Extreme negative affect registered significantly higher positive scores in the SSCM subscale that those reporting a Some What negative affect [F(3,202) = 2.613, p=.005]. For the religious coping method subscales, the Extreme and Slightly groups, reported a higher use of most of the positive religious coping methods than the Moderate and Somewhat groups. The Extreme group reported higher use of the negative religious coping subscale IRD than other groups, while the Slightly group reported higher use of the negative religious coping subscale PRD than other groups.

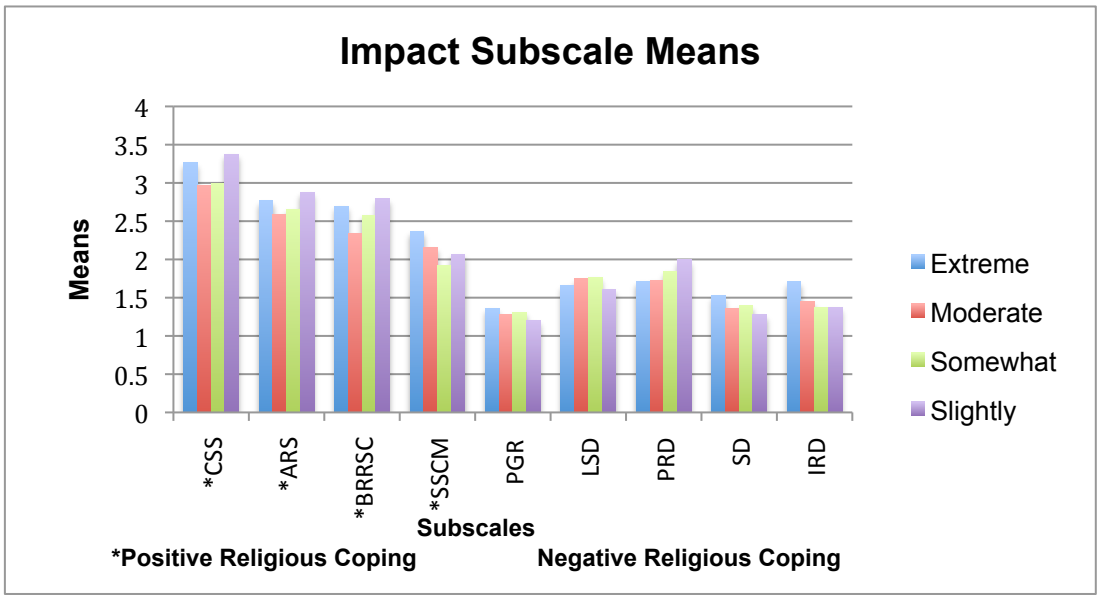



*Figure 4.17*: Religious Coping Method: Impact Means Distribution

With the grouping of the subscales into two groups; positive and negative religious coping, those reporting an Extreme negative affect registered significantly higher in the Positive Religious Coping methods group than those reporting a Moderate negative affect [F(3, 202) = 3.822, p=.005] (See Fig 4.18). Both the Extreme and Slightly groups used higher positive religious coping methods than the Moderate and Somewhat groups.

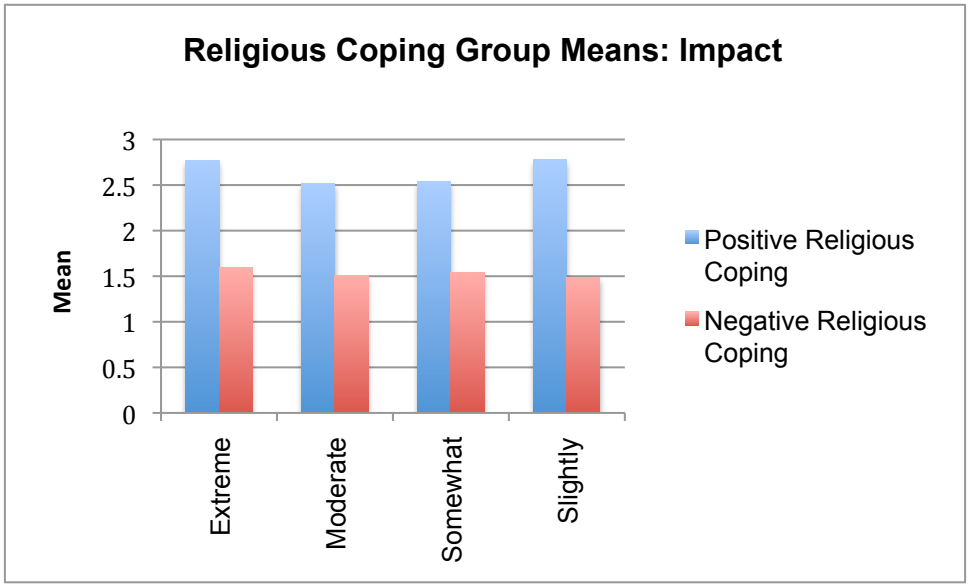



*Figure 4.18*: Religious Coping Groups: Impact Means Distribution

### 4.6.2 Nature of the Negative Life Event/s.

Figure 4.19 shows the distribution pattern occurring across the various negative life event types. The 'Other' type of negative life events category included such things as domestic violence, child abuse, problems with children, and family alcohol problems. There does not seem to be a consistent pattern of differences between the various natures of negative life events across the different religious coping methods. However, the 'Other' group uses more negative religious coping methods than all other groups. Respondents who reported a Divorce used high SSCM (Seeking Support for Clergy/Members) but also scored high in IRD (Interpersonal Religious Discontent).

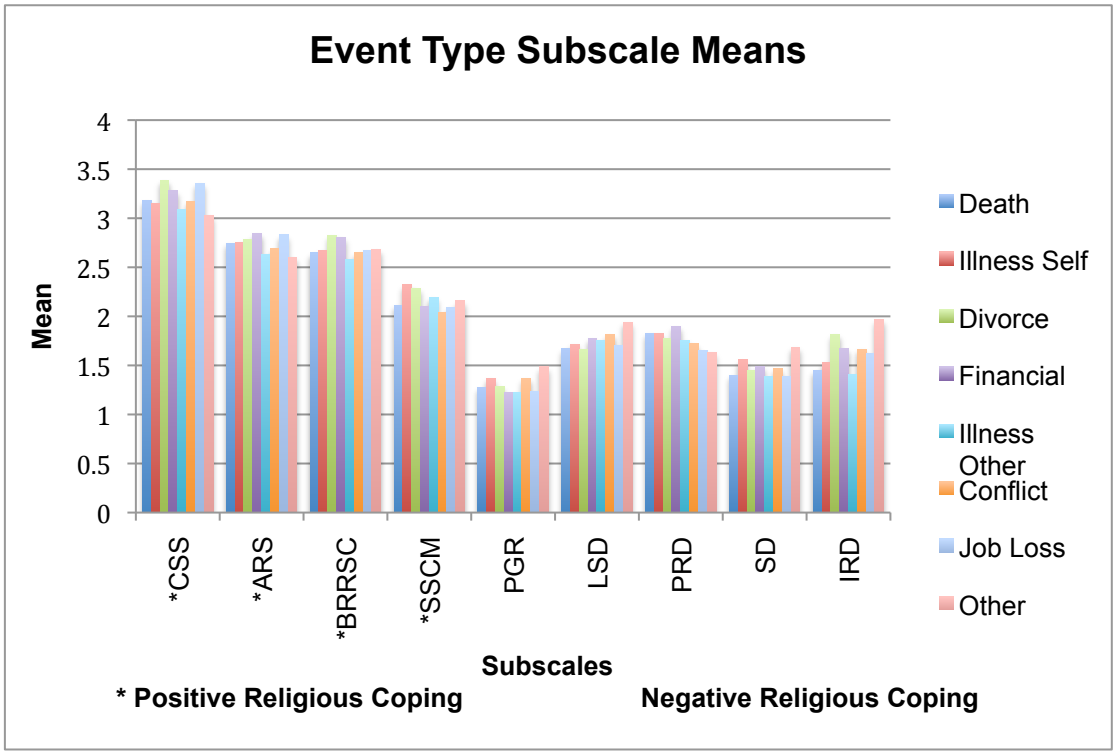



*Figure 4.19*: Religious Coping Methods: Event Type Means Distribution

## 4.7 Regression Analysis for Predictors of Specified Outcomes: Demographics, Event Characteristics and Religious Coping Groups

For church members who had encountered one or more negative life event/s, hierarchical regression analysis was carried out to explore the potential relationships between church members coping efficacy and two religious outcomes (strength of relationship with God and strength of relationship with their church), and the members demographics, the characteristic/s of the negative life event and their approach to dealing with these events (use of positive or negative coping methods).

### 4.7.1 Regression Analysis For Predictors of Coping Efficacy.

Hierarchical regression analysis was carried out to determine the impact the three group variables (Demographics, Event Characteristics, Coping Method Groups) had on coping efficacy (Table 4.6).

Table 4.6

Regression: Coping Efficacy Model Summary

| Model | R Square | R Square Change | Standardized Coefficients Beta | t | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **1. Predictors: Demographics** | .009 | .009 | | | |
| (Constant) | | | | | |
| Gender | | | | | |
| Age | | | | | |
| Ethnicity | | | | | |
| Income | | | | | |
| **2. Predictors: Demographics & Event Characteristics** | .072 | .063 | | | |
| (Constant) | | | | | |
| Gender | | | | | |
| Age | | | | | |
| Ethnicity | | | | | |
| Income | | | | | |
| Number of negative events | | | | | |
| Impact | | | | | |
| **3. Predictors: Demographics, Event Characteristics and Coping Method Groups** | .208 | .136 | | | |
| (Constant) | | | | 3.885 | .005 |
| Gender | | | -.040 | -.565 | .573 |
| Age | | | -.106 | -1.476 | .142 |
| Ethnicity | | | -.044 | -.600 | .549 |
| Income | | | -.012 | -.162 | .871 |
| Number of negative events | | | .114 | 1.593 | .113 |
| Impact | | | .249 | 3.425 | .001 |
| Positive Religious Coping | | | .316 | 4.360 | .000 |
| Negative Religious Coping | | | -.159 | -2.229 | .027 |

*Dependent variable: Coping Efficacy*

The first model (Demographics only) accounted for 0.9% of the explained variance in coping efficacy. Model two in which the negative life event characteristics were included with demographics as predictors accounted for 7.2% of the explained variance in coping efficacy. Model three which contained the coping methods as well as the other factors identified in model two, accounted for 20.8% of the explained variance. That is, the use and nature of coping methods adopted by the church members who had experienced negative life events accounted for the bulk of the variance (65.4%) in coping efficacy.

The strongest predictor of coping efficacy was Positive Religious Coping methods (p<.001) followed by the negative life event impact (p=.001) as shown in Table 4.6. The use of Negative Religious Coping methods was also a significant predictor (p=.027), but with a negative beta. Here the more the church members adopted negative religious coping method(s) the less they were able to cope with the negative life event(s).

### 4.7.2 Regression Analysis For Predictors of Religious Outcomes: Strengthening One's Relationship with God.

Hierarchical regression analysis was carried out to determine the impact the three group variables (Demographics, Event Characteristics, Coping Method Groups) had on strengthening one's relationship with God (Table 4.7).

Table 4.7
Regression: Strengthening One's Relationship with God Model Summary

| Model | R Square | R Square Change | Standardized Coefficients Beta | t | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **1. Predictors: Demographics** | .052 | .052 | | | |
| (Constant) | | | | | |
| Gender | | | | | |
| Age | | | | | |
| Ethnicity | | | | | |
| Income | | | | | |
| **2. Predictors: Demographics & Event Characteristics** | .086 | .034 | | | |
| (Constant) | | | | | |
| Gender | | | | | |
| Age | | | | | |
| Ethnicity | | | | | |
| Income | | | | | |
| Number of negative events | | | | | |
| Impact | | | | | |
| **3. Predictors: Demographics, Event Characteristics and Coping Method Groups** | .363 | .276 | | | |
| (Constant) | | | | -.467 | .641 |
| Gender | | | -.072 | 1.132 | .259 |
| Age | | | .059 | .920 | .359 |
| Ethnicity | | | .068 | 1.039 | .300 |
| Income | | | .024 | .361 | .781 |
| Number of negative events | | | .150 | 2.349 | .020 |
| Impact | | | .121 | 1.857 | .065 |
| Positive Religious Coping | | | .543 | 8.373 | .000 |
| Negative Religious Coping | | | .004 | .065 | .948 |

*Dependent Variable: Relationship with God*

The first model (Demographics only) accounted for 5.2% of the explained variance in strengthening one's relationship with God. Model two in which the negative life event characteristics were included with demographics as predictors accounted for 8.6% of the explained variance in strengthening one's relationship with God. Model three which contained the coping methods as well as the other factors indentified in model two, accounted for 36.3% of the explained variance (Table 4.5). That is, the use and nature of coping methods adopted by the church members who had experienced negative life events accounted for the bulk of the variance (76%) in strengthening one's relationship with God.

The strongest predictor of strengthening one's relationship with God was Positive Religious Coping methods ($p<.001$) followed by the number of negative life events ($p=.020$).

### 4.7.3 Regression Analysis For Predictors of Religious Outcomes: Strengthening One's Relationship to the Church.

Hierarchical regression analysis was carried out to determine the impact the three group variables (Demographics, Event Characteristics, Coping Method Groups) had on strengthening one's relationship with the church (Table 4.8).

Table 4.8:
Regression: Strengthening One's Relationship to the Church Model Summary

| Model | R Square | R Square Change | Standardized Coefficients Beta | t | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **1. Predictors: Demographics** | .067 | .067 | | | |
| (Constant) | | | | | |
| Gender | | | | | |
| Age | | | | | |
| Ethnicity | | | | | |
| Income | | | | | |
| **2. Predictors: Demographics & Event Characteristics** | .087 | .020 | | | |
| (Constant) | | | | | |
| Gender | | | | | |
| Age | | | | | |
| Ethnicity | | | | | |
| Income | | | | | |
| Number of negative events | | | | | |
| Impact | | | | | |
| **3. Predictors: Demographics, Event Characteristics and Coping Method Groups** | .249 | .162 | | | |
| (Constant) | | | | -.740 | .461 |
| Gender | | | .105 | 1.507 | .134 |
| Age | | | .041 | .591 | .556 |
| Ethnicity | | | .130 | 1.821 | .071 |
| Income | | | -.065 | -.900 | .370 |
| Number of negative events | | | -.018 | -.260 | .795 |
| Impact | | | .167 | 2.347 | .020 |
| Positive Religious Coping | | | .420 | 5.931 | .000 |
| Negative Religious Coping | | | .108 | 1.557 | .121 |

*Dependent Variable: Relationship with Church*

The first model (Demographics only) accounted for 6.7% of the explained variance in strengthening one's relationship with the church. Model two in which the negative life event characteristics were included with demographics as predictors accounted for 8.7% of the explained variance in strengthening one's relationship with the church. Model three which contained the coping methods as well as the other factors indentified in model two, accounted for 24.9% of the explained variance (Table 4.8). That is, the use and nature of coping methods adopted by the church members

who had experienced negative life events accounted for the bulk of the variance (65.1%) in strengthening one's relationship with the church.

The strongest predictor of strengthening ones relationship with the church was Positive Religious Coping methods ($p<.001$) followed by the negative life event impact ($p=.020$).

For each outcome, the coping methods component accounted for the majority of the variance in the respective outcomes.

## 4.8 Regression Analysis for Predictors of Specified Outcomes: Using the Nine Religious Coping Methods

For church members who had encountered one or more negative life event/s, backward regression analysis was carried out to explore the potential relationships between church members coping efficacy and two religious outcomes (strength of relationship with God and strength of relationship with their church), and the respective coping methods they used (Positive Religious Coping - CSS, ARS, BRRSC, SSCM; Negative Religious Coping -PGR, LSD, PRD,SD, IRD)

### 4.8.1 Regression Analysis For Predictors of Coping Efficacy.

Backward regression analysis was carried out to determine the significant predictors (religious coping methods – CSS, ARS, BRRSC, SSCM, PGR, LSD, PRD,SD, IRD) of coping efficacy in terms of church members coping efficacy with negative life events (dependant variable – coping efficacy).

The first model of regression consisted of the following set of independent variables; Collaborative/Spiritual Support (CSS), Active Religious Surrender (ARS), Benevolent Religious Reappraisal/Spiritual Connection (BRRSC), Seeking Support from Clergy/Members (SSCM), Punishing God Reappraisal (PGR), Low Self-Direction (LSD), Passive Religious Deferral (PRD), Spiritual Discontent (SD), and Interpersonal Religious Discontent (IRD). This model accounted for 17.7% of the total variance in coping efficacy.

However, backward regression of model one generated a three-factor model (Table 4.9), which accounted for 16.0% of the explained variance in coping efficacy.

Table 4.9
Regression Analysis for Predictors of Coping Efficacy

| Independent Variables (Predictors) | R Square | Standardized Coefficients Beta | t | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | .160 | | | |
| Passive Religious Deferral (PRD) | | -.127 | -1.831 | .069 |
| Low Self-Direction (LSD) | | -.185 | -2.2681 | .008 |
| Benevolent Religious Reappraisal/Spiritual Connection (BRRSC) | | .319 | 4.402 | .000 |

*Dependent Variable: Coping Efficacy*

In this model only two of the factors were significant (at the 0.05 level). The strongest predictor of coping efficacy was Benevolent Religious Reappraisal/Spiritual Connection (BRRSC) ($p<.001$). The coping method, Low Self-Direction (LSD) was also a significant predictor ($p=.008$), but with a negative beta. Here the more the church members adopted Low Self-

Direction religious coping methods the less they were able to cope with the negative life event(s).

### 4.8.2 Regression Analysis For Predictors of Strengthening of one's Relationship with God.

Backward regression analysis was carried out to determine the significant predictors (religious coping methods – CSS, ARS, BRRSC, SSCM, PGR, LSD, PRD,SD, IRD) of strengthening ones relationship with God.

The first model of regression consisted of the following set of independent variable; Collaborative/Spiritual Support (CSS), Active Religious Surrender (ARS), Benevolent Religious Reappraisal/Spiritual Connection (BRRSC), Seeking Support from Clergy/Members (SSCM), Punishing God Reappraisal (PGR), Low Self-Direction (LSD), Passive Religious Deferral (PRD), Spiritual Discontent (SD), Interpersonal Religious Discontent (IRD). This model accounted for 37.9% of the total variance in strengthening ones relationship with God.

However, backward regression of model one generated a two-factor model (Table 4.10), which accounted for 36.3% of the explained variance in strengthening ones relationship with God.

Table 4.10
Regression Analysis for Predictors of Strengthening One's Relationship with God

| Independent Variables (Predictors) | R Square | Standardized Coefficients Beta | t | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | .363 | | | |
| Collaborative/Spiritual Support (CSS) | | .291 | 4.078 | .000 |
| Benevolent Religious Reappraisal/Spiritual Connection (BRRSC) | | .378 | 5.301 | .000 |

Dependent Variable: Relationship with God

In this model the two factors were significant (at the 0.05 level). The strongest predictor of strengthening ones relationship with God was Benevolent Religious Reappraisal/Spiritual Connection ($p<.001$) followed by Collaborative/Spiritual Support ($p<.001$).

### 4.8.3 Regression Analysis For Strengthening one's Relationship with the Church.

Backward regression analysis was carried out to determine the significant predictors (religious coping methods – CSS, ARS, BRRSC, SSCM, PGR, LSD, PRD,SD, IRD) of strengthening ones relationship with the Church.

The first model of regression consisted of the following set of independent variables; Collaborative/Spiritual Support (CSS), Active Religious Surrender (ARS), Benevolent Religious Reappraisal/Spiritual Connection (BRRSC), Seeking Support from Clergy/Members (SSCM), Punishing God Reappraisal (PGR), Low Self-Direction (LSD), Passive Religious Deferral (PRD), Spiritual Discontent (SD), and Interpersonal

Religious Discontent (IRD). This model accounted for 30.1% of the total variance in strengthening ones relationship with the church.

However, backward regression of model one generated a three-factor model (Table 4.11), which accounted for 27.4% of the explained variance in strengthening ones relationship with the church.

Table 4.11
Regression Analysis for Predictors of Strengthening One's Relationship with the Church

| Independent Variables (Predictors) | R Square | Standardized Coefficients Beta | t | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | .274 | | | |
| Spiritual Discontent (SD) | | .106 | 1.733 | .085 |
| Seeking Support from Clergy/Members (SSCM) | | .428 | 6.593 | .000 |
| Benevolent Religious Reappraisal/Spiritual Connection (BRRSC) | | .174 | 2.677 | .008 |

Dependent Variable: Relationship with Church

In this model only two of the factors were significant (at the 0.05 level). The strongest predictor of strengthening one's relationship with the church was Seeking Support from Clergy/Members ($p<.001$) and was followed by Benevolent Religious Reappraisal/Spiritual Connection ($p=.008$).

## 4.9 Regression Analysis for Predictors of Specified Outcomes: Gender Differences

Separate backward regression analyses were carried out to determine the significant predictors (religious coping methods – CSS, ARS, BRRSC, SSCM, PGR, LSD, PRD,SD, IRD) of coping efficacy for both the male and female church members.

### 4.9.1 Regression Analysis for predictors of Coping Efficacy: Male.

The first model of regression consisted of the nine religious coping methods (CSS, ARS, BRRSC, SSCM, RGR, LSD, PRD, SD, IRD). This model accounted for 29.0% of the total variance in coping efficacy.

However, backward regression of model one generated a two-factor model (Table 4.12), which accounted for 25.2% of the explained variance in coping efficacy.

Table 4.12
Regression Analysis for Predictors Overall Coping: Male

| Independent Variables (Predictors) | R Square | Standardized Coefficients Beta | t | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | .252 | | | |
| Low Self-Direction (LSD) | | -.186 | -1.909 | .060 |
| Benevolent Religious Reappraisal/Spiritual Connection (BRRSC) | | .411 | 4.222 | .000 |

*Dependent Variable: Coping Efficacy*

In this model only one of the factors was significant (at the 0.05 level). The strongest predictor of overall coping for men was Benevolent Religious Reappraisal/Spiritual Connection ($p<.001$).

### 4.9.2 Regression Analysis for predictors of Coping Efficacy: Female.

The first model of regression consisted of the nine religious coping methods (CSS, ARS, BRRSC, SSCM, RGR, LSD, PRD, SD, IRD). This model accounted for 15.1% of the total variance in coping efficacy.

However, backward regression of model one generated a two-factor model (Table 4.13), which accounted for 10.9% of the explained variance in coping efficacy.

Table 4.13
Regression Analysis for Predictors of Overall Coping: Female

| Independent Variables (Predictors) | R Square | Standardized Coefficients Beta | t | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | .10.9 | | | |
| Spiritual Discontent (SD) | | -.193 | -2.029 | .045 |
| Benevolent Religious Reappraisal/Spiritual Connection (BRRSC) | | .270 | 2.833 | .006 |

*Dependent Variable: Coping Efficacy*

In this model two of the factors were significant (at the 0.05 level). The strongest predictor of coping efficacy for women was Benevolent Religious Reappraisal/Spiritual Connection (p=.006) followed by Spiritual Discontent (p=.045). Here the more the female church members adopted Spiritual Discontent religious coping method/s the less they were able to overall cope with the negative life event/s.

### 4.9.3 Regression Analysis for predictors of Strengthening One's Relationship with the Church: Male.

The first model of regression consisted of the nine religious coping methods (CSS, ARS, BRRSC, SSCM, RGR, LSD, PRD, SD, IRD). This model accounted for 34.0% of the total variance in strengthening ones relationship with the church.

However, backward regression of model one generated a three-factor model (Table 4.14), which accounted for 29.7% of the explained variance in overall coping.

Table 4.14
Regression Analysis for Predictors Strengthening Ones Relationship with the Church: Male

| Independent Variables (Predictors) | R Square | Standardized Coefficients Beta | t | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | .297 | | | |
| Punishing God Reappraisal (PGR) | | .153 | 1.694 | .094 |
| Seeking Support from Clergy/Members (SSCM) | | .330 | 3.308 | .001 |
| Benevolent Religious Reappraisal/Spiritual Connection (BRRSC) | | .300 | 3.003 | .003 |

*Dependent Variable: Relationship with Church*

In this model only two of the factors were significant (at the 0.05 level). The strongest predictor of relationship with the church for men was Seeking Support from Clergy/Members (p=.001) followed by Benevolent Religious Reappraisal/Spiritual Connection (p=.003).

### 4.9.4 Regression Analysis for predictors of Strengthening Ones Relationship with the Church: Female

The first model of regression consisted of the nine religious coping methods (CSS, ARS, BRRSC, SSCM, RGR, LSD, PRD, SD, IRD). This model accounted for 33.8% of the total variance in strengthening ones relationship with the church.

However, backward regression of model one generated a two-factor model (Table 4.15), which accounted for 29.8% of the explained variance in overall coping.

Table 4.15
Regression Analysis for Predictors of Strengthening Ones Relationship with the Church: Female

| Independent Variables (Predictors) | R Square | Standardized Coefficients Beta | t | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | .298 | | | |
| Spiritual Discontent (SD) | | .178 | 2.105 | .038 |
| Seeking Support from Clergy/Members (SSCM) | | .521 | 6.161 | .000 |

*Dependent Variable: Relationship with Church*

In this model both of the factors were significant (at the 0.05 level). The strongest predictor of strengthening ones relationship with the church for women was Seeking Support from Clergy/Members ($p<.001$) followed by Spiritual Discontent ($p=.038$). Here the more the female church members adopted Spiritual Discontent religious coping method/s the more they were able to strengthen their relationship with the church, which at first seems to contradict previous data, where the adopting of Negative Religious Coping methods resulted in a reduction in one's relationship with the church.

## 4.10 Regression Analysis for Predictors of Specified Outcomes: Levels of Severity Differences

Backward regression analysis was carried out to determine the significant predictors (religious coping methods – CSS, ARS, BRRSC, SSCM, PGR, LSD, PRD,SD, IRD) of coping efficacy in terms of the impact of the reported negative life event/s (dependant variable – overall).

### 4.10.1 Regression Analysis for predictors of Coping Efficacy: Levels of Severity.

The first set of models of regression consisted of the nine religious coping methods (CSS, ARS, BRRSC, SSCM, RGR, LSD, PRD, SD, IRD), as predictors of coping efficacy for each of the respective levels of severity (Extreme, Moderate, Somewhat, Slightly). Regression Analysis of these predictors indicated that they accounted for 20.2% of the total variance in coping efficacy for the Extreme group; 31.5% for the Moderate group; 45.6% for the Somewhat group and 30.5% for the Slightly group.

However, backward regression of the model for the Extreme group generated a two-factor model (Table 4.16), which accounted for 14.6% of the explained variance in coping efficacy. One of the factors was significant (at the 0.05 level). The strongest predictor of coping efficacy for Extreme severity of the negative life event/s was Benevolent Religious Reappraisal/Spiritual Connection (p=.032).

Backward regression of the model for the Moderate group generated a two-factor model, which accounted for 24.5% of the explained variance in coping efficacy. Both of the factors were significant (at the 0.05 level). The

strongest predictor of coping efficacy for Moderate severity of the negative life event/s was Seeking Support from Clergy/Members (p=.000), followed by Punishing God Reappraisal (p=.032), where the more one uses PGR the less they are able to cope overall.

Backward regression of the model for the Somewhat group generated a four-factor model which accounted for 36.8% of the explained variance in coping efficacy. Three of the factors were significant (at the 0.05 level). The strongest predictor of coping efficacy for Somewhat severity of the negative life event/s was Benevolent Religious Reappraisal/Spiritual Connection (p=.000), followed by Passive Religious Deferral (p=.038), and then Interpersonal Religious Discontent (p=.048), where the more one uses PRD and IRD the less they are able to cope overall.

Backward regression of the model for the Slightly group generated a three-factor model, which accounted for 28.7% of the explained variance in coping efficacy. All of the factors were significant (at the 0.05 level). The strongest predictor of coping efficacy for Slight severity of the negative life event/s was Low Self-Direction (p=.012), followed by Interpersonal Religious Discontent (p=.020) and then Spiritual Discontent (p=.026), where the more one uses LSD and SD the less they are able to cope overall. However, the more they use IRD the more they are able to cope overall, which at first seems to contradict previous data, where the adopting of Negative Religious Coping methods resulted in a reduction in one's ability to cope.

Table 4.16
Regression Analysis for Predictors of Coping Efficacy: Impact

| | Independent Variables (Predictors) | R Square | Standardized Coefficients Beta | t | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Extreme | | .146 | | | |
| | Low Self-Direction (LSD) | | -.221 | -1.815 | .074 |
| | Benevolent Religious Reappraisal/Spiritual Connection (BRRSC) | | .268 | 2.200 | .032 |
| Moderate | | .245 | | | |
| | Punishing God Reappraisal (PGR) | | -.258 | -2.197 | .032 |
| | Seeking Support from Clergy/Members (SSCM) | | .439 | 3.740 | .000 |
| Somewhat | | .368 | | | |
| | Passive Religious Deferral (PRD) | | -.348 | -2.160 | .038 |
| | Spiritual Discontent (SD) | | .329 | 1.785 | .086 |
| | Interpersonal Religious Discontent (IRD) | | -.377 | -2.053 | .048 |
| | Benevolent Religious Reappraisal/Spiritual Connection (BRRSC) | | .670 | 4.110 | .000 |
| Slightly | | .287 | | | |
| | Spiritual Discontent (SD) | | -.399 | -2.331 | .026 |
| | Interpersonal Religious Discontent (IRD) | | .433 | 2.438 | .020 |
| | Low Self-Direction (LSD) | | -.412 | -2.650 | .012 |

*Dependent Variable: Coping Efficacy*

### 4.10.2 Regression Analysis for predictors of Strengthening One's Relationship with God: Levels of Severity.

The first model of regression consisted of the nine religious coping methods (CSS, ARS, BRRSC, SSCM, RGR, LSD, PRD, SD, IRD) as predictors of one's relationship with God for each of the respective levels of severity (Extreme, Moderate, Somewhat, Slightly). Regression Analysis of

these predictors indicated that they accounted for 41.5% of the total variance in coping efficacy for the Extreme group; 47.7% for the Moderate group; 59.7% for the Somewhat group and 41.7% for the Slightly group.

However, backward regression of the model for the Extreme group generated a two-factor model (Table 4.17), which accounted for 37.4% of the explained variance in strengthening one's relationship with God. Both of the factors were significant (at the 0.05 level). The strongest predictor of strengthening one's relationship with God for Extreme severity of the negative life event/s was Collaborative/Spiritual Support (p=.002) followed by Benevolent Religious Reappraisal/Spiritual Connection (p=.019).

Backward regression of the model for the Moderate group generated a two-factor model, which accounted for 42.7% of the explained variance in strengthening one's relationship with God. Both of the factors were significant (at the 0.05 level). The strongest predictor of strengthening one's relationship with God for Moderate severity of the negative life event/s was Benevolent Religious Reappraisal/Spiritual Connection (p=.000), followed by Seeking Support from Clergy/Members (p=.033).

Backward regression of the model for the Somewhat group generated a two-factor model, which accounted for 49.9% of the explained variance in strengthening one's relationship with God. Both of the factors were significant (at the 0.05 level). The strongest predictor of strengthening one's relationship with God for Somewhat severity of the negative life event/s was Collaborative/Spiritual Support (p=.027) followed by Benevolent Religious Reappraisal/Spiritual Connection (p=.045).

Backward regression of the model for the Slightly group generated a two-factor model, which accounted for 31.8% of the explained variance in strengthening one's relationship with God. Both of the factors were significant (at the 0.05 level). The strongest predictor of strengthening one's relationship with God for Slight severity of the negative life event/s was Low Self-Direction (p=.000), followed by Punishing God Reappraisal, where the more one uses LSD and SD the less they were able to strengthen their relationship with God. However, the more they use PGR the more they are able to strengthen their relationship with God, which at first seems to contradict previous data, where the adopting of Negative Religious Coping methods resulted in a reduction in strengthening one's relationship with God.

Table 4.17
Regression Analysis for Predictors of Strengthening One's relationship with God: Impact

| | Independent Variables (Predictors) | R Square | Standardized Coefficients Beta | t | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Extreme | | .374 | | | |
| | Collaborative/Spiritual Support (CSS) | | .390 | 3.154 | .002 |
| | Benevolent Religious Reappraisal/Spiritual Connection (BRRSC) | | .298 | 2.412 | .019 |
| Moderate | | .427 | | | |
| | Benevolent Religious Reappraisal/Spiritual Connection (BRRSC) | | .461 | 3.715 | .000 |
| | Seeking Support from Clergy/Members (SSCM) | | .269 | 2.191 | .033 |
| Somewhat | | .49.9 | | | |
| | Collaborative/Spiritual Support (CSS) | | .400 | 2.309 | .027 |
| | Benevolent Religious Reappraisal/Spiritual Connection (BRRSC) | | .361 | 2.082 | .045 |
| Slightly | | .318 | | | |
| | Punishing God Reappraisal (PGR) | | .363 | 2.417 | .021 |
| | Low Self-Direction (LSD) | | -.614 | -4.086 | .000 |

*Dependent Variable: Relationship with God*

### 4.10.3 Regression Analysis for predictors of Strengthening One's Relationship with the Church: Levels of Severity.

The first model of regression consisted of the nine religious coping methods (CSS, ARS, BRRSC, SSCM, RGR, LSD, PRD, SD, IRD), as predictors of strengthening one's relationship with the church for each of the respective levels of severity (Extreme, Moderate, Somewhat, Slightly). Regression Analysis of these predictors indicated that they accounted for 39.4% of the total variance in strengthening one's relationship with the church for the Extreme group; 47.3% for the Moderate group; 31.3% for the Somewhat group and 46.6% for the Slightly group.

However, backward regression of the model for the Extreme group generated a three-factor model (Table 4.18), which accounted for 33.5% of the explained variance in strengthening one's relationship with the church. Two of the factors were significant (at the 0.05 level). The strongest predictor of strengthening one's relationship with the church for Extreme severity of the negative life event/s was Seeking Support from Clergy/Members (p=.000) followed by Collaborative/Spiritual Support (p=.033).

Backward regression of the model for the Moderate group generated a two-factor model, which accounted for 42.8% of the explained variance in strengthening one's relationship with the church. Both of the factors were significant (at the 0.05 level). The strongest predictor of strengthening one's relationship with the church for Moderate severity of the negative life event/s was Seeking Support from Clergy/Members (p=.001), followed by Active Religious Surrender (p=.016).

Backward regression of the model for the Somewhat group generated a one-factor model, which accounted for 14.7% of the explained variance in strengthening one's relationship with the church. This factor, Seeking Support from Clergy/Members was significant (at the 0.05 level) with p=.019.

Backward regression of the model for the Slightly group generated a two-factor model, which accounted for 35.6% of the explained variance in strengthening one's relationship with the church. Both of the factors were significant (at the 0.05 level). The strongest predictor of strengthening one's relationship with the church for Slight severity of the negative life event/s was Seeking Support from Clergy/Members (p=.000), followed by Punishing God

Reappraisal, where the more one uses PGR the better one is able to strengthen their relationship with the church, which at first seems to contradict previous data, where the adopting of Negative Religious Coping methods resulted in a reduction in strengthening one's relationship with the church.

Table 4.18
Regression Analysis for Predictors of Relationship with the Church: Impact

| | Independent Variables (Predictors) | R Square | Standardized Coefficients Beta | t | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Extreme | | .335 | | | |
| | Collaborative/Spiritual Support (CSS) | | .280 | 2.180 | .033 |
| | Seeking Support from Clergy/Members (SSCM) | | .479 | 4.211 | .000 |
| | Low Self-Direction (LSD) | | .236 | 1.901 | .062 |
| Moderate | | .428 | | | |
| | Active Religious Surrender (ARS) | | .251 | 2.480 | .016 |
| | Seeking Support from Clergy/Members (SSCM) | | .596 | 5.894 | .001 |
| Somewhat | | .147 | | | |
| | Seeking Support from Clergy/Members (SSCM) | | .384 | 2.460 | .019 |
| Slightly | | .356 | | | |
| | Punishing God Reappraisal (PGR) | | .363 | 2.628 | .013 |
| | Seeking Support from Clergy/Members (SSCM) | | .574 | 4.148 | .000 |

*Dependent Variable: Relationship with the Church*

# CHAPTER 5: QUALITATIVE RESULTS

## 5.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the results of the qualitative component of the questionnaire and attempts to address the two research questions:

1. To determine the church members perceptions of the support of the pastor/pastoral team in coping with the negative life event.
2. To determine the church members perceptions of what the pastor/pastoral team could do further to assist in coping with the negative life event.

This was carried out by the use of two open-ended questions, where the respondents were asked to give their perceptions of the nature and effectiveness of the pastor/pastoral team's interaction or lack of interaction with them during and post their life's negative life event/s. The responses from these questions were subjected to inductive thematic analysis where, once codes and categories were determined, themes were generated and models designed to highlight the links between various themes.

## 5.2 Perception of the Pastor/Pastoral Teams Support

### 5.2.1 The Nature of Support Given: An Overview.

The first of these research questions (4) was addressed by the open-ended question; "In what ways did the pastor/pastoral team help/support you during this time?" The responses were firstly coded and categorised into the nature of the support given. The three main positive types of support given were; prayer (33.4%), visitation (23.1) and encouragement/support (15.9). Two forms of negative 'support' were reported; that of little or no help at all

(19.2%) and feeling abandoned or judged during the support process (2.7%). The details of this component of analysis are depicted in Fig 5.1.

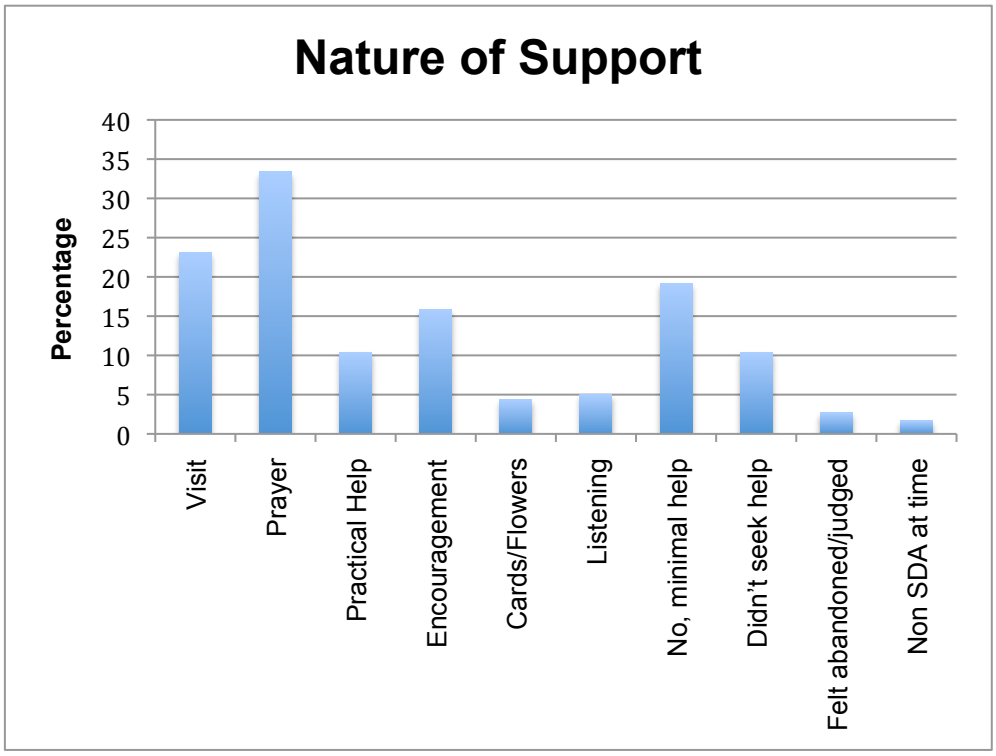



*Figure 5.1:* Nature of the Support Given by the Pastor/Pastoral Team

### 5.2.2 Nature of Support Given: The Actual Support Model.

Thematic analysis was used to study the nature of various elements of pastoral support and to highlight the relationships between the different elements of the support. These elements, and links between these elements are presented diagrammatically in Fig 5.2 (Model of Pastor/Pastoral Team's Actual Support).

As shown in the model, the nature of the support provided was represented by three main groups; those receiving 'Action' from the pastor/pastoral team; those receiving 'No Action' and further, the 'Non Indicators' who did not seek support from the pastor/pastoral team or who were not Seventh-day Adventists at the time of the negative life event.

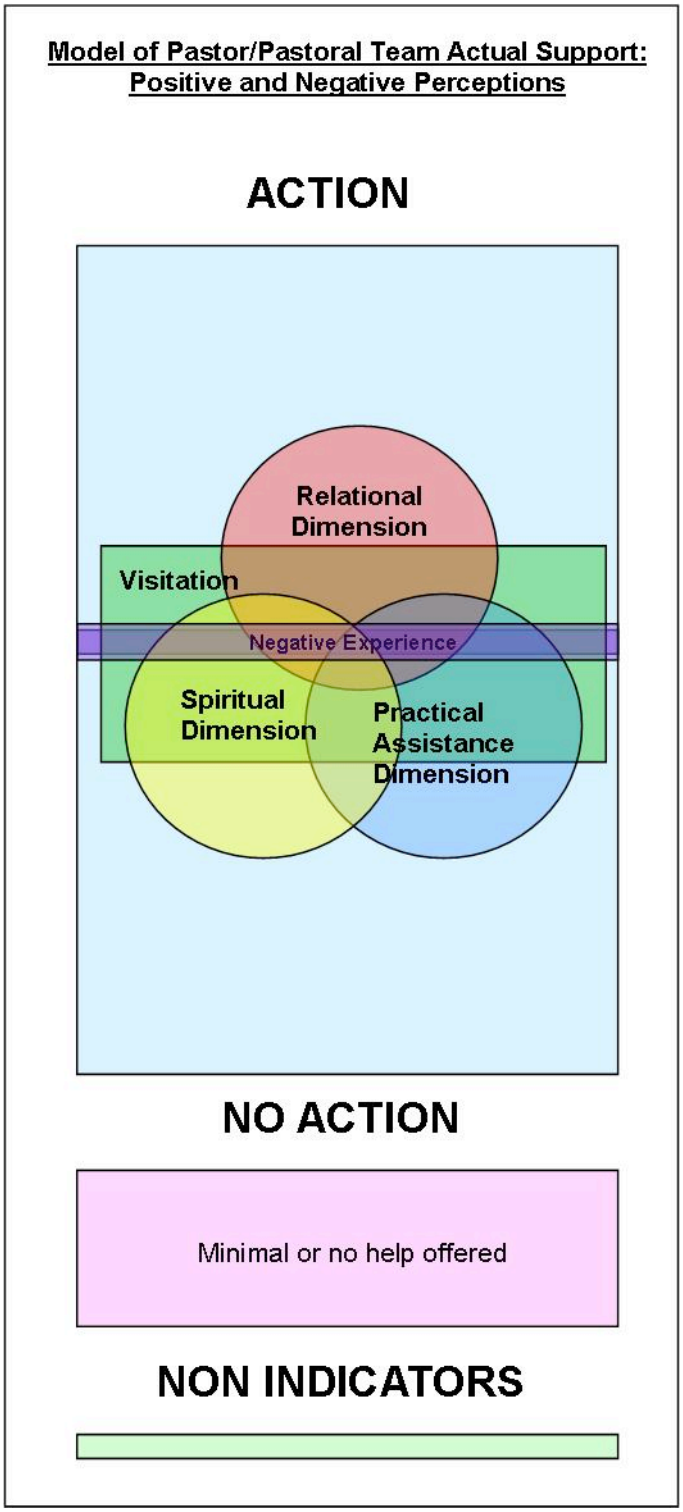



*Figure 5.2*: Model of Pastor/Pastoral Team's Actual Support

The nature of the action of support offered by the pastor/pastoral team can be classified into three broad dimensions; Relational, Spiritual and

Practical. Three overlapping circles in the model represent these dimensions.

The Relational dimension includes the pastor/pastoral team being a friend/listener and providing encouragement and support as respondent 195 noted the pastor supported him "by listening and being friendly and encouraging," while respondent 044 says the pastor/pastoral team are "an outlet to talk to and get emotional/spiritual support."

The responses seemed to suggest little more than prayer ritual within the Spiritual dimension. Often there was mention of the pastor/pastoral team offering support or encouragement and this may have included a spiritual component but it was not overtly expressed as spiritual. Prayer was a common response to what the pastor/pastoral team had done to support an individual through a negative life event. Respondent 060 says "the pastor visited and prayed often with me," while respondent 155 says "[the pastor] prayed for me and the family showing their love."

The Practical Assistance dimension included; flowers, cards, food, and day-to-day assistance. This was a common response especially for those who had experienced the death of a loved one or friend. Respondent 145 says that the pastor supported her "through phone calls, visits, offers of support, flowers and cards, [and] prayer." Respondent 011 says her support consisted of " prayer, visits at hospital, organised food/meals, [they] put us in contact with other people who could support and help us."

These three dimensions often overlap in that even though one dimension may be the focus of the action, it often includes the other dimensions. All or some of these types of support may or may not have

been offered and may or may not have been in conjunction with a pastoral visit as indicated with the green rectangle that spans each of the three broad dimensions (relational, spiritual, practical assistance).

The nature of this support was positive for the majority of respondents. Typical of this was the response from respondent 187, “[They] did a great job and without them [pastor/pastoral team] I would have been lost.” However a small percentage reported a negative response to the support. This is illustrated by the narrow rectangle crossing each of the dimensions and the visitation rectangle. The narrowness of the rectangle is indicative of the small number of respondents who reported this. During the support offered by the pastor/pastoral team, the respondents felt abandoned or judged, not because they did not get support, but rather, the support left them with feelings of abandonment or as being judged. Respondent number 026 states, “The Pastor and the church turned their back on me and condemned me. They became very judgmental of my divorce. They abandoned me.” Respondent 115 says, “my spiritual family abandoned me;” respondent 123 says, “I felt abandoned – I sought out a departmental pastor,” while respondent 166 suggested the pastor was “judgmental and intolerant.”
A number of respondents indicated that during the negative life event, they did not seek any form of support from the pastor/pastoral team, in that they did not inform him or her of the situation, such as respondent 039 who states, “I didn’t seek help/support from church,” and respondent 030 who “didn’t let anyone know.” Respondent 084 says “I didn’t [seek support]. No one knew because no one at church really shows concern to develop a relationship to find out.” This element is represented by the Non Indicators who also

included respondents who indicated that they were not Seventh-day Adventists at the time of the negative life event occurred such as respondent 140 who says “I wasn’t a member of the SDA church when this event happened but another denomination.”

## 5.3 Perception of the Nature of Support Needed by the Pastor/Pastoral Team

### 5.3.1 The Nature of the Support Needed: An Overview.

The second of the research questions (5) was addressed by the open-ended question; “Is there anything else you would have liked to have seen from your pastor/pastoral team that would have helped/supported you during this time?” The responses were firstly coded and categorised into the nature of the support needed. 42.2% of the respondents were content with the support they received. This was made up of 35.2% who reported that the support received was sufficient and did not think anything further was needed, and 7% - the non indicators who did not require assistance and were content to deal with the negative life event without the support of the pastor/pastoral team. However, there were three main types of support needed that was reported; encouragement/support/counselloring (14.1%), more visitation (13.3%), and for the pastor to be more open, understanding and relational (10.6%.). The details of this component of analysis are depicted in Fig. 5.3.

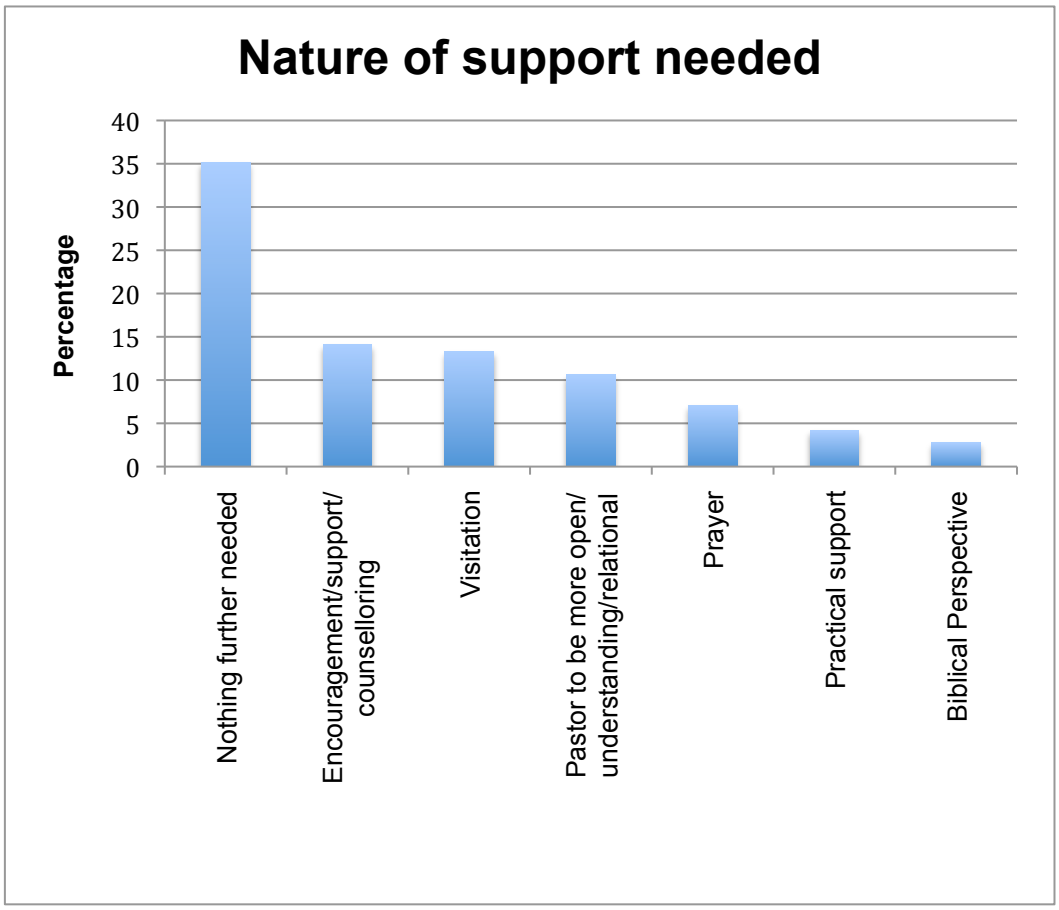



*Figure 5.3*: Nature of the Support Needed by the Pastor/Pastoral Team

### 5.3.2 Nature of Support Needed: The Ideal Support Model.

The coded categories of support needed were divided into two broad groups, those who were Content and those who would like more Action from the pastor/pastoral team when dealing with a negative life event. These divisions are highlighted in Figure 5.4 Model of Pastor/Pastoral Team's Ideal Support. The Content group, depicted as an orange rectangle represents those who reported that the support received was sufficient and the non-indicators who did not require assistance to deal with the negative life event. The remaining respondents identified categories fitted into the same themes and dimensions established for the 'Action' group (Relational, Spiritual, Practical Assistance, and Visitation).

The visitation theme was a prominent response by many of the respondents (represented by a green rectangle). Many reported they wanted to be visited or to have more visits than what they received. Respondent 189 says, “More home visits,” while respondent 084 says she would like, “someone ringing or visiting me during the week when I’m not at church instead of saying to my husband I was missed.” Others reported that a visit would give them someone to talk to, to feel encouraged, and to have someone that could listen to them. Respondent 060 says, “More visitation, just someone to talk to apart from family,” while respondent 089 suggests, “Pastoral visits to encourage/pray for coping skills, during and after the event, would have been helpful. ” Further respondent 117 says, “A visit and heart to heart talk and prayer would have been appreciated.”

There was one avenue of the Practical Assistance dimension that respondents felt they needed more of when dealing with a negative life event. Help with day-to-day practical assistance was reported as an avenue that church members would appreciate. Respondent 142 put it this way; “Practical help with some of the sheer hard work,” while respondent 065 says, “Maybe more hands on support. I know God cares but often I wonder does the church care?”

The Spiritual dimension was expanded by respondents in terms of what they felt should be included within the spiritual support offered for a person experiencing a negative life event. Not only would respondents like to see prayer utilised more but they also suggested Bible studies and informal discussions on the role of suffering and God to help them gain a biblical perspective and reflection of their negative life event, or help them

strengthen their relationship with God, such as respondent 094 who says, “I would have liked some Bible studies to help strengthen my connection with God.” Others would like to see the pastor/pastoral team and the church provide a theology of suffering and it’s role within a Christian’s life, such as respondent 003; “Our church needs an understanding of suffering and failure and their role in a Christians life.”

By far the largest proportion of respondents felt they needed more support in the relational dimension. Many respondents reported that the pastor needed to be more open, understanding, empathetic and relational. Respondent 044 says she wished the pastor would “try to relate more with who I am as an individual and come to me as a person rather than just another member on the church roll.” Respondent 137 would like the pastor “to be seen to be emphatic.” A number of respondents asked for the pastor to come with genuine care for them and be less judgmental, and condescending. Respondent 125 wants the pastor to have, “a genuine care for people” Respondent 109 suggested the pastor “be pleasant, lack of judgment, more open,” while respondent 201 says, “to be interested, thought of, prayed for, visited, nurtured. However our pastor would/could not do that. He is condescending and doesn’t listen to what you are experiencing.”

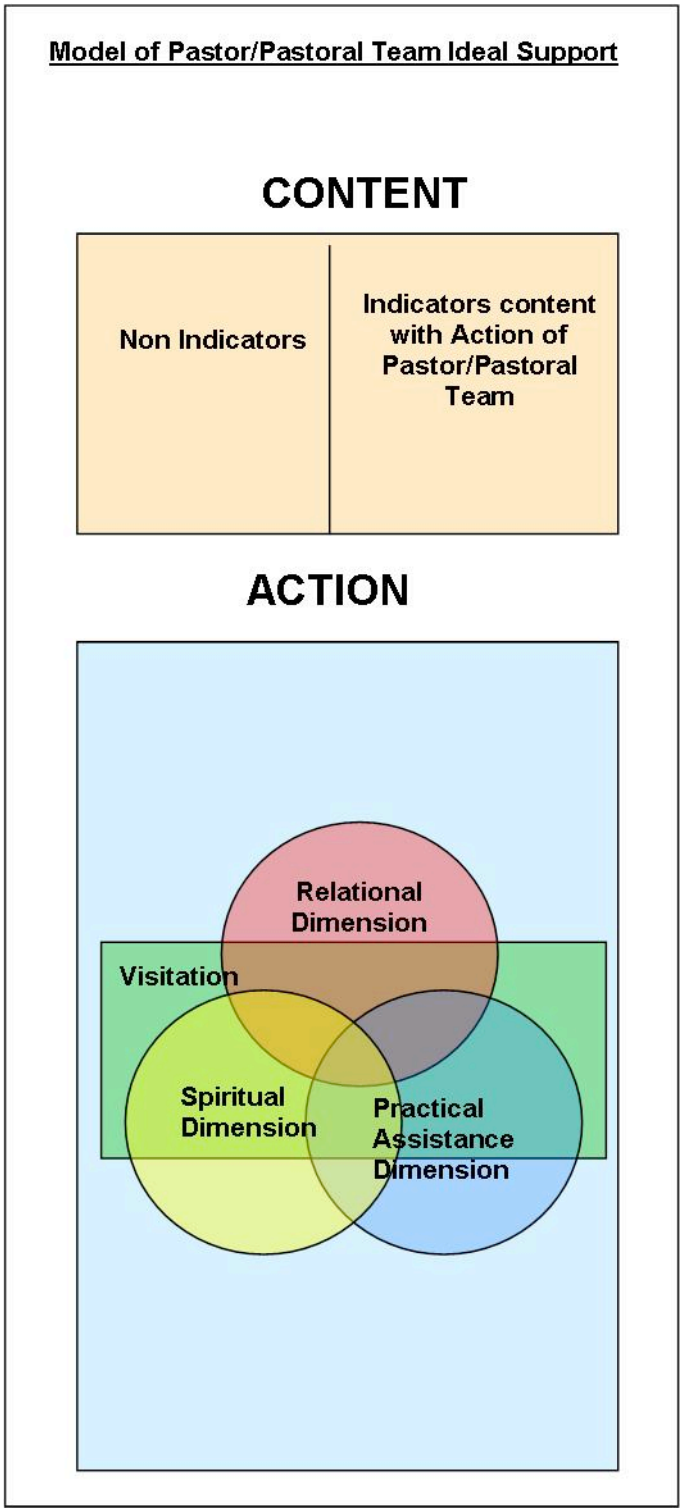



*Figure 5.4* Model of Pastor/Pastoral Team's Ideal Support

Counseling was another area of the relational dimension that church members would appreciate when experiencing a negative life event. As much as desiring counseling from their pastor/pastoral team, respondents

often realized that their pastor would need training in this area. Respondent 065 says “maybe more hands on support/counseling, not just words of ‘God cares;’” respondent 097 wanted, “some counseling support.” Respondent 119 suggests that he would have appreciated “mediation between separated people, [recognising they] would need training.” While others suggested that if pastors were not trained in the area of support, referrals were important. Respondent 009 suggests, “if they [pastor] are not trained in meeting these situations with members, they should be equipped to refer to those who could.”

## 5.4 Integration of Data

### 5.4.1 The Impact of the Event.

Opportunity was given for respondents to make further comment relating to their experiences during negative life events in the qualitative component. Many respondents chose to comment on what impact their religious faith had on their relationship with God during this time. Respondent 060 states: “I certainly believe this situation helped me to have a closer walk with my Lord and now (I) live very close to Him. I know he is always by my side in all situations in my life.” Respondent 102 says, “I grew in the way I coped, I am much more balanced and trusting of God now.” Respondent 180 says, “Looking back I am grateful to God for the experience. We learned a lot about compassion and faith building. God was what got us through and only him.” Respondent 001 says “the effect of seeing God’s work in action led me back to church.” Some respondents chose to write a letter to the researcher outlining their negative life event, such as respondent

111 who outlined the details of the negative event and the pain it brought him, however, he ended with these comments, “I can now look back at the hurts and the tribulation and see how God led us through. God gave strength for continuance and he provided a new job.” These comments reflect and provide some validation for the quantitative analysis results, indicating that negative life events when dealt with in a positive manner can enhance one’s relationship with God.

### 5.4.2 Role and Support of the Pastor.

Other respondents chose to make further comment on the role and support of the pastor during the negative life event. These include the need for the pastor to provide more emotional support. Further there was seen to be a need for the pastor to assess the type of support need (emotional, social, spiritual, etc), rather than assuming spiritual support is the most important. Respondent 109 says, “Emotional support is low and needs to be worked on. Most pastors are men and they struggle with this personally, how can they offer emotional support to others. Determine what support is needed: spiritual, emotional, mental, social, etc and offer the one needed at the time in a progressive manner. We make an assumption that spiritual is always needed.” Respondent 050 says “The handling of stress, distress and grief is often poorly handled leaving members isolated to the point it is easier to not come to church anymore.” Respondent 108 suggests that pastoral support is still very much needed, “the personal touch is still important in our technological world.” Others see the problems that individuals face, but don’t see the church taking any action to support people, such as respondent 065

who says, “As I get older I see many problems that life brings but I don’t see the church coming up with practical ‘action’ solutions. Focusing on the ‘action might be a way forward for the church and not just ‘pray for it to be better.’” On the other hand the support that has been provided by the church was seen by some as ineffective such as respondent 094 who says, “I had to seek assistance from outside agencies to get counseling and support. When the church set up their DV (Domestic Violence) taskforce, I was very disappointed to see that no one had a clue how DV and divorce affects real people and what support was needed.”

While others shared the pain of his or her experience, “I withdrew from the church socially and no one even called. I had been a member for over twenty years” (respondent 064). Respondent 026 says, “The pastor and the church turned their back on me and condemned me.” Respondent 036 says, “[it was] the most painful time ever, almost gave up on the SDA church – not God.” In general, of those respondents who indicated a negative experience of support, such as feeling abandoned, judged, or condemned, the majority of these respondents indicated that the negative life experience/s associated with this support was divorce. These further comments reinforce what was perceived to be the ideal pastoral model, which includes the interaction between the social, spiritual, emotional; but emphasizes the need to be sensitive to which of these particular areas each church member is in need of.

### 5.4.3 Gender Perceptions.

A number of female respondents reported in the further comments section that the most male pastors are struggling to come to grips with their own emotional response to life and are limited in giving emotional support to members experiencing significant negative life events; respondent 109 says, “emotional support is low and needs to be worked on. Most pastors are men and they struggle with this personally, how can they offer emotional support to others.”

Most often the male respondents in this section perceived there was more support given to female church members than male members who themselves had experienced negative life events. Respondent 189 says, “This time [I coped] better than last. More support [needed], though guys [are] much less cared for than females.” This implied that for many males there was a longing for more support, and this conclusion was supported by their reactions during the survey gathering process. It was noticed that many male church members were eager to discuss with the researcher the details of their negative life event, even though this was not requested. Such actions are consistent with a feeling of a lack of pastoral support during or post the negative life event.

## 5.5 Overview

The data relating to the church members’ perception of the pastor’s/pastoral team’s interaction or lack of interaction can be effectively depicted by the two models; Model of Pastor/Pastoral Team’s Actual Support, and Model of Pastor/Pastoral Team’s Ideal Support. Further, the

data would indicate that the models are restricted in that they do not expand on when and how to use the respective elements within the model. The respondents also indicated that the extent and nature of the application of the elements within the model are somewhat dependent on the gender of the church member. Finally a number of church members reported that often the ultimate result of the negative life event was a perceived closeness to God.

# CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION

## 6.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the discussion and integration of the quantitative and qualitative component results in reference to the four research questions:

1. What methods of religious coping are adopted by Seventh-day Adventist church members in coping with negative life events.
2. Which positive and negative religious coping methods adopted by Seventh-day Adventist church members were associated with coping efficacy and religious outcomes.
3. What are the Seventh-day Adventist church members' perceptions of the support of the pastor/pastoral team in coping with the negative life event.
4. What are the Seventh-day Adventist church members perceptions of what the pastor/pastoral team could do further to assist in coping with the negative life event.

These research questions will be discussed in the context of an exploration of ways of enhancing the pastor/pastoral team's support of church members who had experienced negative life events.

## 6.2 Methods of Religious Coping

The quantitative approach component of this study focused on the first two research questions that looked at methods of religious coping used by Seventh-day Adventist church members. The initial design of the instrument used within this study to measure Religious Coping methods consisted of nine subscales and was based on Pargament's RCOPE Religious Coping methods framework. Within this framework Pargament's suggestion of combining four methods into two subscales was also adopted. Factor analysis on the initial instrument using the Seventh-day Adventist church members' data generated subscales similar to those generated in Pargament's data. This analysis, using the Seventh-day Adventist church member data, however, indicated that a rearrangement of Pargament's subscales into two different combined subscales would produce greater subscale reliabilities.

This rearranged design was used to construct the final Religious Coping measurement instrument in the present study. The difference from Pargament's Religious Coping instrument could well have been due to the different national or church culture from that of Pargament's sample group (Respective U.S community groups). What is needed to test this hypothesis is replication of this study with different samples consisting of different nationalities, cultural backgrounds and church cultures.

Much of the previous research on the use of religious coping examines its role in personal health, well-being, and religious outcomes. This research used nine of the RCOPE religious coping methods to determine the religious coping method profile of Seventh-day Adventists and

to explore which of these methods these church members found most helpful in dealing with significant life events. In particular the study looked at which religious coping methods best helped them in their coping efficacy, their relationship with God and their relationship with the church. It also examined which of the individual religious coping methods were most helpful in dealing with a significant negative life event and which religious coping methods may not have been particularly helpful. Finally, the aim of this component of the study was to gain a greater understanding of the use of patterns and the impact of religious coping methods to enable pastor/pastoral teams to be more effective in their ministry to those church members experiencing significant negative live events.

### 6.2.1 A Seventh-day Adventist religious coping methods profile.

The nine religious coping methods profile consisted of four methods that look to God or the religious community in a positive light (positive methods) and five that look to God and the religious community in a negative light (negative methods). The majority of Seventh-day Adventist Church members primarily adopted Positive Religious Coping methods. This is consistent with other research on protestant church members in the area of religious coping (see Pargament et al, 2000, 2001; Bjorck, 2007) as well as research on individuals experiencing major illnesses, such as German breast cancer patients (Zwingmann, et al). While Positive Religious Coping is primarily adopted, the patterns indicate that individuals most often use positive and negative methods of coping simultaneously. This indicates that elements of spiritual struggle and doubt can still be present even when

adopting positive methods, highlighting that everyone has spiritual struggles at some point and they are not a sign of weakness, but a chance to reassess one's perceptions of God. This study suggests that interventions by pastors/pastoral teams who encourage the adoption of positive methods of religious coping in emotionally sensitive and non judgmental ways will help individuals to cope with a negative life event in a more favourable manner.

Of the nine religious coping methods, the positive coping method Collaborative/Spiritual Support (CSS) was the most commonly used method in dealing with a negative life event. The data suggested that individuals often attempt to gain control through partnering with God in the problem solving process and searching for comfort and reassurance from God. These results are consistent with Pargament's studies that indicate Collaborative Religious coping was the most commonly used method of religious coping in a Midwestern American church member sample and an American college student sample (Pargament, et. al, 2000, 1990). Meisenhelder and Marcum's (2004) research found that similar results occurred amongst clergy dealing with the 9/11 attacks. The most frequently adopted method of coping for clergy being; looking to God for strength, support and guidance (Positive Religious Coping). Further, in this study, the positive coping method Benevolent Religious Reappraisal/Spiritual Content (BRRSC) subscale where individuals attempt to find meaning through reappraising the negative life event as benevolent and potentially beneficial as well as attempting to find comfort from God through experiencing a connection with Him, was confirmed as the second most used religious coping method. This is also consistent with the work of Pargament et al

(2000) and Pargament et al (1990). Those that adopt the BRRSS method see their situation as part of God's plan and try to find a lesson from the experience as well as attempting to build a stronger connection with God. Pargament (1997) suggests that reappraising the event allows "suffering … [to] become something explainable, bearable, and even valuable" (p. 221-222). He goes on to say that what was something terrible has become bearable because it now has a different dimension.

The least used method of coping adopted by those in this study was the negative method, Punishing God Reappraisal (PGR), where individuals attempt to find meaning through redefining the negative life event as being a punishment from God for the sins they have committed. In contrast, Pargament *et al's*, 2000 study reported that the least used religious coping method was Interpersonal Religious Discontent (IRD) in which the expression of confusion and dissatisfaction with the clergy or members to the individual in the stressful situation is expressed. This difference may indicate that Seventh-day Adventists in Australia do not see God as a punishing God as much as other groups, but may feel more dissatisfaction with the pastor and/or church members than other groups in relation to the negative life event.

Although no statistically significant difference is shown between gender, females generally score higher than males on all coping methods. The result indicates that for females, both positive and negative Religious Coping methods can work along side each other, however the use of positive Religious Coping methods outweighs the use of negative Religious coping methods.

Age was a big factor in which methods of coping were used to help deal with the negative life event for church members. The 65+ age group seemed to use more positive methods and less negative methods (have an overall better approach to coping) than all other age groups. This may indicate that with age, reflection on the meaning of life and the part that God has played, plays a greater role in the reappraisal of negative life events experienced.

Income was also a significant factor in the religious coping methods adopted. Low-income earners use more positive methods and less negative religious coping methods than the other income brackets. Pargament (1997) suggests that a consistent finding among research studies is the greater use of religious coping amongst lower socio-economical groups. He states, "we cope with the tools that are most available to us" (p. 145). Low-income earners may have less access to "secular resources and power in our culture" (Pargament, 1997, p. 301) for coping, hence relying on religion to a greater extent for coping than higher income earners.

Seventh-day Adventist church members experienced a wide range of negative life events. Those who perceived the negative life event to be either Extreme or Slight, used more Positive Religious Coping methods than those who perceived the negative life event to be Moderate or Somewhat. Individuals who perceived that they had experienced an Extreme event sought more support from the pastor (SSCM) than other groups, and, maybe due to this, they also reported more IRD (expressing confusion and dissatisfaction with the relationship of clergy or members to the individual in the stressful situation) with the church pastor and church community. This

was also the case for those who had experienced a Divorce or Separation. The Seventh-day Adventist Church's traditional conservative stand on marriage and divorce may be an influence here and this is supported by the qualitative responses which indicated that those who had experienced a divorce often felt abandoned and judged by the pastor and the church.

### 6.2.2 Predictors of Coping Efficacy and Religious Outcomes: An Overview.

Preliminary analysis indicated that the coping method type used (positive or negative), the impact of the negative life event on the person, and the gender of the respondent were important factors in determining the measured outcomes: Seventh-day Adventist church members coping efficacy, their relationship with God and their relationship with the church.

Table 6.1 (Predictors Outcome Summary), outlines the coping methods that had a significant effect on the respective outcomes: coping efficacy, relationship with God and relationship with the church. These results are presented for the group as a whole, for the males and females, and for the different perceived levels of severity (Impact - Extreme, Moderate, Somewhat, Slight).

**Table 6.1**
**Predictors Outcome Summary**

**Coping Efficacy**

| | ***Gender*** | | ***Impact*** | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **All Data** | **Male** | **Female** | **Extreme** | **Moderate** | **Somewhat** | **Slight** |
| BRRSC<br>*LSD$^{v}$ | BRRSC | BRRSC<br>*SD$^{v}$ | BRRSC | SSCM | BRRSC<br>*SD^<br>*IRD^ | *LSD$^{v}$<br>*IRD^<br>*SD$^{v}$ |

**Relationship with God**

| | ***Gender*** | | ***Impact*** | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **All Data** | **Male** | **Female** | **Extreme** | **Moderate** | **Somewhat** | **Slight** |
| BRRSC<br>CSS | BRRSC<br>CSS | BRRSC<br>CSS | BRRSC<br>CSS | BRRSC<br>SSCM | CSS<br>BRRSC | *LSD$^{v}$<br>*PGR^ |

**Relationship with Church**

| | ***Gender*** | | ***Impact*** | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **All Data** | **Male** | **Female** | **Extreme** | **Moderate** | **Somewhat** | **Slight** |
| SSCM<br>BRRSC | SSCM<br>BRRSC | SSCM<br>*SD^ | SSCM<br>CSS | SSCM<br>ARS | SSCM | SSCM<br>*PGR^ |

*Negative Religious Coping Methods (^ increased the outcome, $^{v}$ decreased the outcome)

**Where:**

**BRRSC** – encapsulates seeking a sense of connectedness with God while redefining the stressor through religion as benevolent and potentially beneficial.

**CSS** - encapsulates seeking comfort, reassurance and control through a partnership with God in problem solving.

**SSCM** - encapsulates searching for comfort and reassurance through the love and care of congregation members and clergy.

**ARS** – encapsulates an active giving up of control to God in coping.

**LSD** - encapsulates seeking control directly through individual initiative rather than help from God.

**PGR** - encapsulates redefining the stressor as a punishment from God for the individual's sin.

**SD** - encapsulates expressing confusion and dissatisfaction with God's relationship to the individual in the stressful situation.

**IRD** - encapsulates expressing confusion and dissatisfaction with the relationship of clergy or members to the individual in the stressful situation.

The noticeable trends include; for the combined data the BRRSC coping method was a significant factor in enhancing coping efficacy, relationship with God and relationship with the church. For coping efficacy there was also a significant negative coping method, LSD that impacted to reduce coping efficacy.

The analysis based on gender indicated that along with BRRSC, the CSS coping method was also a significant factor in relationship with God. For the females, the negative religious coping method, *SD was a significant factor in reducing coping efficacy and was also a significant factor and contrary to expectations in increasing one's relationship with the church.

The analysis based on event severity indicated that for coping efficacy and relationship with God, BRRSC was a significant religious coping method. For those who perceived the negative event as Extreme and Somewhat, BRRSC was a significant method in increasing coping efficacy, whereas for the Extreme, Moderate and Somewhat BRRSC was a significant method in increasing one's relationship with God. The only positive method being used by the Slight group was SSCM for the relationship with church outcome. The Slight group however, used negative religious coping methods across all three outcomes (coping efficacy, relationship with God and relationship with church), although this does not correspond with the other severity groups, for this group, utilising Negative Religious Coping (IRD and PGR) seems to be effective. Maybe due to the low severity of the negative life event, using Negative Religious Coping methods, which concentrate on self-help and transferring some of the blame to others are in this situation effective in increasing outcomes. Those in the Extreme category, in contrast only used

Positive Religious Coping methods across all three outcomes. The Moderate group seems to use SSCM across all three outcomes. For those experiencing a Moderately severe negative life event, SSCM was a predictor in all three outcomes (Coping Efficacy, Relationship with God and Relationship with Church) highlighting the importance of the role of the local church pastor.

### 6.2.3 Predictors of Coping Efficacy and Religious Outcomes.

#### *6.2.3.1 Coping Efficacy*

For Seventh-day Adventist church members, both Positive and Negative Religious Coping methods significantly impacted coping efficacy. The more the church members used positive methods, the greater coping efficacy they had. On the other hand, those who used greater Negative Religious Coping methods experienced lower coping efficacy. These results are consistent with research carried out on other religious groups. Pargament et al.'s (2001) study on religious coping amongst Presbyterians indicated that the use of Positive Religious Coping was related to greater positive affect while Negative Religious Coping was associated with lower positive affect. The Positive Religious Coping method BRRSC and the Negative Religious Coping method *LSD[v] were significant factors in terms of coping efficacy (see Table 6.1). The more one uses BRRSC the better their coping efficacy, whereas, the more one uses *LSD and attempts to deal with the event on their own without God, the less coping efficacy they have.

Those for whom the impact was viewed as Slight used only Negative Religious Coping methods.

The Pargament *et al* (1990) study showed that loving images of God, and experiencing closeness with God are tied to better psychological states, while Pargament *et al's* (1995, cited in Pargament, 1997) study of people coping with the 1993 floods in the Midwest showed that Collaborative coping was tied to better mental states and Self-Directional coping was tied to poorer mental states. Similar results were found by Rutledge and Spilka (1993, cited in Pargament, 1997) when measuring religious coping against depression scales for single men and women aged 41-50 years. This study seems to confirm the literature that suggests that the more one uses Positive Religious Coping, the better they are able to cope with the negative life event.

#### *6.2.3.2 Relationship to God.*

Positive Religious Coping, in particular BRRSC and CSS were the most significant predictors for strengthening one's relationship with God for Seventh-day Adventist church members. This result is consistent with other research that looks at the relationship between religious coping methods adopted and religious outcomes. Pargament *et al's* (1990) study of coping in Midwestern churches showed that positive religious variables were predictors of religious coping. This same result was found when individuals were measured against various negative life events. Pargament *et al's* (1996, cited in Pargament, 1997) research on people experiencing the Oklahoma City bombing reported that Positive Religious Coping methods were related

to greater religious outcomes, and Tarakeshwar and Pargament's (2001) study of families with children with Autism found that Positive Religious Coping was associated with greater religious outcomes.

#### *6.2.3.3 Relationship to the Church.*

While strengthening one's relationship with God is predicted by positive images of God, strengthening one's relationship to the church is strongly predicted by one's image of the pastor and wider church community (SSCM a predictor) as well as looking to God in a positive light (BRRSC method was also a predictor). For Seventh-day Adventist church members, one's relationship with the pastor and church community was an important factor when dealing with a negative life event. This is consistent with Pargament *et al's* (1994) study on undergraduates' response to the Gulf War. Here it was found that students who sought support from the clergy reported a more positive mood than those who did not. Research conducted by Chalfant *et al* (1990, cited in Pargament, 1997 p210) discovered that individuals seek support from clergy more than any other professional, while other empirical studies such as Belavich and Pargament (1995, cited in Pargament, 1997) and Pargament et al (1990) have shown that help and support from the clergy is beneficial to its members. Pargament (1990, p. 86), suggests that "social relationships are completely intertwined with coping."

Communities that provide individuals with someone to talk to (Pargament 1997, 100) are important avenues for support and encouragement of Positive Religious coping. Respondent 200 sums up the

importance of social relationships when she states, “[I] had no close relationships within the church, [I] felt on the periphery. These relationships need nurturing before a crisis hits.” Therefore the church community and its pastor play a crucial role particularly in times when individuals experience a negative life event, and prior to negative events occurring. This ensures that individuals will have social networks and support that they can connect with.

This research highlights the fact that for Seventh-day Adventist church members, the pastor and the church community play an important role in helping individuals maintain and strengthen their relationship with the church when dealing with a negative life event. SSCM (searching for comfort and reassurance through the love and care of congregation members and clergy) was an essential predictor in strengthening one’s relationship with the church for both males and females, and for all levels of severity of the negative life event.

### 6.3 Pastor/Pastoral Team Actual and Ideal Support

The qualitative approach component of this study focused on the final two research questions. Along with the study, use and impact of different religious coping methods on Seventh-day Adventist church members, the research aimed to discover the support offered to Seventh-day Adventist church members by the pastor/pastoral team and to compare it to the type of support individuals most desired. By comparing the actual support to the ideal support, potential gaps can be identified allowing pastors/pastoral teams to be more able to design interventions that would better assist church members to cope with a negative life event/s.

The Pastoral Support Model developed from this data highlights the necessary areas of support and areas needing more support (Fig 6.1). This support comes in three overlapping dimensions, Relational, Practical Assistance and Spiritual dimensions of support. These dimensions of support were often but not always offered simultaneously and were frequently mentioned by respondents as occurring together. Further, these three dimensions can often, but not always, take place in conjunction with a pastoral visitation. Because of the unique role of the pastoral visit with its possibility of including or excluding all three dimensions of pastoral support, the green rectangle (shown in Fig 6.1) has been depicted in the model as intersecting with, but going beyond the pastoral support dimensions. The respondents reported that they would like further visitation by their pastor/pastoral team when seeking to cope with negative life events. The respondents also indicated that the extent and application of support in these three dimensions was often dependent on the gender of the pastor and the gender of the individual requiring support as indicated below.

The relational dimension (red circle) consists of the pastor/pastoral team offering themselves as a friend/s to the person and offering emotional support. This is one critical area in which gender plays a specific role and must be taken into account when offering support to individuals. Female church members felt that emotional support was low due to most pastors being men and that they perceived them to have difficulty in coming to terms with their own emotional response to life, let alone being able to provide emotional support to others. Whereas male church members felt there was more emotional support for women than for themselves given by the

pastor/church and this was reflected in their eagerness to discuss their negative life event with the researcher even though this was not requested.

The relational dimension also includes providing encouragement and support in a manner that is non-judgmental and accepting of the individual's situation. Although pastors within the Seventh-day Adventist church provided this support to some extent, this was also the area that was seen to need the biggest improvement. Although being a friend/listener and providing encouragement was included in the actual support given, many respondents indicated they would appreciate further support in these areas. One reported area of relational support was the need for pastoral counselling. This was virtually missing right across the survey. As pastors are the most sought out professionals when it comes to individuals coping with a negative life event, it is important for the pastor to provide some form of counselling. Some respondents recognised that not all pastors have skills or are trained in this area, but some such as respondent 009 suggest that "if they were not trained in meeting these situations with members, they should be equipped to refer to those who could," while respondent 109 suggests "do not do counselling if you [the pastor] are not a trained counselor [and] make appropriate referrals to other service providers if you [the pastor] have a conflict of interest." Pargament (1997, p. 390) suggests that "the most obvious source of professional religious assistance in coping are clergy", however he goes on to say that although counselling is a growing area within religion, theological colleges/seminaries offer little training to undergraduates in the counselling field. This is the case for the Seventh-day Adventist theological training college in Australia (Avondale College). It is not

suggested that all church pastors become counselors or have extensive understanding of psychology,

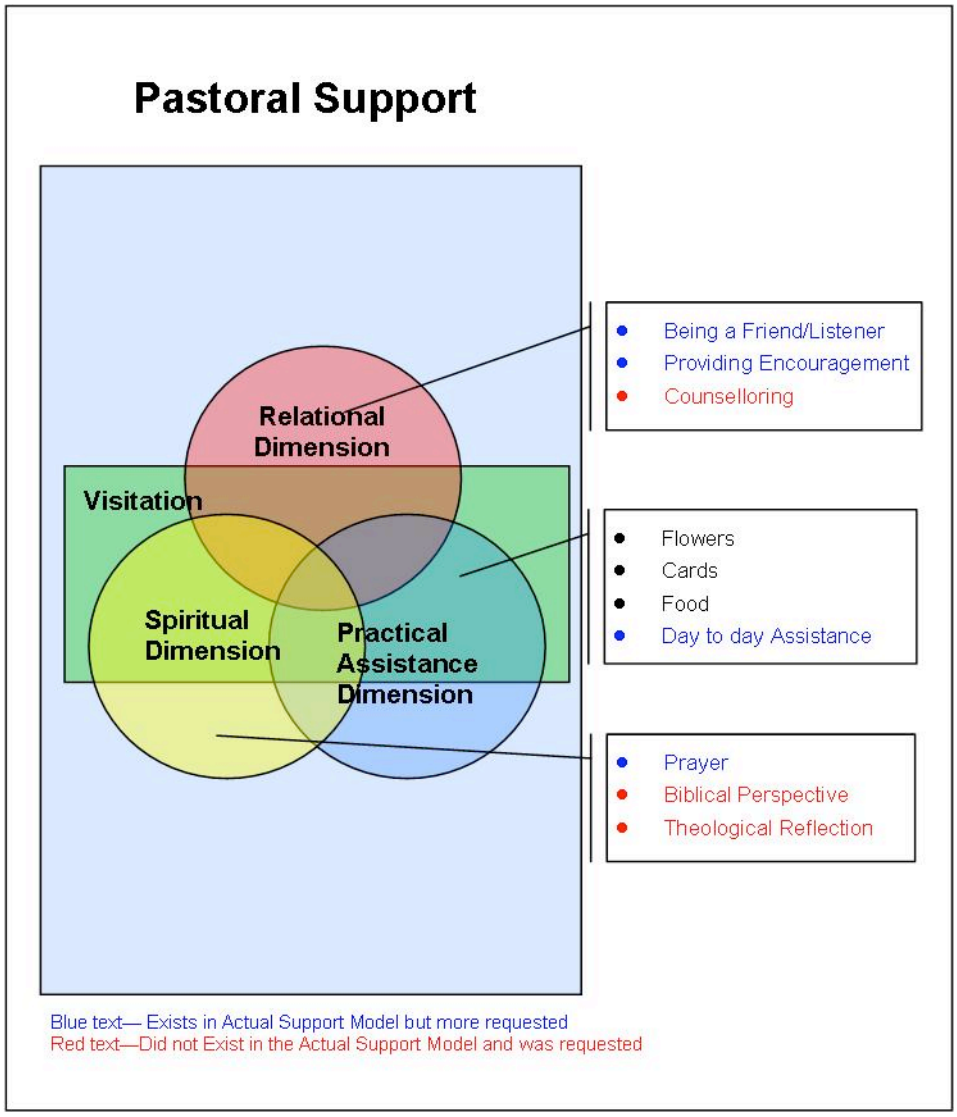



Figure 6.1: Model of Pastoral Support

but that they have an understanding of general counseling skills that can be of benefit to them as they work with their church members.

The second dimension is the Practical Assistance Dimension represented by the blue circle (Fig 6.1). This includes supporting an individual through such things as cards (sympathy), flowers, meals, or other forms of practical day-to-day assistance. Seventh-day Adventist pastors and

pastoral teams were generally reported as offering good support in this area, but there is still room for improvement. Respondents reported that they would especially appreciate further help and assistance in day-to-day normal functioning needs.

The third dimension of pastoral support is the Spiritual Dimension represented by a yellow circle (fig 6.1). This dimension includes supporting an individual through prayer, Bible studies and theological reflection. Church members reported that they were often supported through prayer by their pastor/pastoral team and it was much appreciated. There was another group that suggested that prayer was needed via visitation or during worship times. For the church members, two of the areas in the Spiritual Dimension that were seen as lacking in the actual support given were offering a Biblical perspective (Bible studies) and a theological reflection on the negative life event. Some respondents were keen to use Bible study with the pastor to gain a closer connection to God, and to understand the role of suffering. Pastor/pastoral team support of this type would also encourage more church members to use Positive Religious Coping methods rather than Negative Religious coping methods.

For some church members, support from the pastor/pastoral team did not exist at all, while for a few others, that support was interpreted in a negative fashion whereby they felt abandoned because they perceived they were judged by the pastor and the church. This seemed to be reported more often in the case for people who had experienced a divorce. They had a high rate of seeking support from the pastor (SSCM), but also had a high rate of Interpersonal Religious Discontent – IRD (expressing confusion and

dissatisfaction with the relationship of clergy or members to the individual in the stressful situation). As mentioned previously, this may be due to the Church's traditional stand on marriage and divorce and could be an area for pastors/pastoral teams to consider when relating to individuals in these circumstances.

### 6.4 Conclusion

This research has highlighted that Seventh-day Adventist church members use a combination of Positive (where God and the church community are seen providing support and comfort during these times) and Negative (where dissatisfaction with God and the church are felt and the individual attempts to deal with the event themselves) Religious Coping Methods in dealing with negative life events. An individual's age, income and the severity of the negative life event they experienced, influenced the type of Religious Coping methods they adopted. The older age group, the lower income group and the high severity negative life event group all adopted more Positive Religious Coping Methods and less Negative Religious Coping methods than the other groups in the respective categories.

The data from this study suggests that the use of Positive Religious Coping methods results in better outcomes; whereas in most cases the Negative Religious Coping methods results in poorer outcomes.

In terms of the individual respective Religious Coping Methods it was the positive Religious Coping Method BRRSC (seeking a sense of connectedness with God while redefining the stressor through religion as benevolent and potentially beneficial) that had the greatest positive impact

across all the outcomes (coping efficacy, relationship with God, and relationship with the church). The Negative Religious Coping Method, *LSD (seeking control directly through individual initiative rather than help from God) also significantly decreased the outcome, but only on coping efficacy. For the specific outcome, increased relationship with the church, the SSCM (searching for comfort and reassurance through the love and care of congregation members and clergy), as anticipated, was the other significant contributor along with BRRSC. In terms of the increased relationship with God, CSS (seeking comfort, reassurance and control through a partnership with God in problem solving) was the other significant contributor along with BRRSC.

It seems that only when one feels connected with God (adopt BRRSC) and have a connection with the church community members (refer to interview data), that one is then able to accept the support and help of God (CSS) and the support of the community (SSCM) and consequently are more able to successfully deal with the negative life event.

There were considerable similarities with the impact of the Religious Coping Methods adopted for both male and female church members with respect to the three outcomes. Though the adoption of the *SD (expressing confusion and dissatisfaction with God's relationship to the individual in the stressful situation) religious coping method significantly reduced female church members coping efficacy, it had no impact on coping efficacy for males.

Unexpectantly, for females the use of the Positive Religious Coping Method, BRRSC, along with the use of the Negative Religious Coping

Method, *SD, in dealing with negative life events, appears to increase the strength of their relationship with the church. This unexpectant result may well be due to the sum of the two methods (negative and positive) resulting in an overall increase in outcome.

In terms of the different perceived levels of severity of the negative life event, in contrast to most of the groups, the Slight group was significantly impacted by various Negative Religious Coping Methods (*LSD, *IRD, *SD, *PGR) across the three outcomes with SSCM (searching for comfort and reassurance through the love and care of congregation members and clergy) being the only Positive Religious Coping Method utilised in strengthening their relationship with the church. The Moderate group used SSCM Religious Coping Method across all three outcomes along with using the BRRSC (seeking a sense of connectedness with God while redefining the stressor through religion as benevolent and potentially beneficial) Religious Coping method to strengthen their relationship with God.

Church pastors were shown to be a vital link in the coping process. This research indicated that pastors within the Seventh-day Adventist church provide substantial and much appreciated support to their members. The church members indicated that the pastor/pastoral team helped and supported them to cope with the significant negative life event/s by visitation, prayer, encouragement, being a friend/listener, and by providing practical assistance. But they also indicated that there were some areas/dimensions that needed additional attention. The church offers a unique avenue of support and resources for people coping with a negative life event.

The respondents suggested that the relational dimension of the support was the main area in need of improvement. They indicated that they would particularly like more help in the area of counseling. Church members not only want this relational support, they also want to feel connected both with God and with each other in the greater church community. They want to feel accepted by the pastor and the church community rather than judged and condemned. The respondents also indicated that they wanted more Bible studies/theological reflection to help them feel connected to God, particularly in how negative life events fit into the Christian worldview. Pargament (1997) suggests, “Spiritual experiences, religious beliefs, religious scriptures, and congregations come together to form a system of religious support that individuals can draw on in their efforts to sustain themselves and each other in the midst of turmoil and change” (p.212).

### 6.5 Limitations

This study was limited in that it was context bound and so lacks generalizability. Further studies are needed to repeat the study for different religious groups across different cultures. Also this study was limited by the relatively small numbers in the sample. Because the sample was not large this resulted in rather small cohorts when considering the four severity levels of the negative life event categories.

This study only surveyed Seventh-day Adventist church members who had experienced a negative life event and remained within the church. It did not survey members who had experienced a negative life event and did not remain within the church. Further studies that survey members who had left

the church would be beneficial in gaining a more adequate picture of how Seventh-day Adventist church members overall have coped with negative life events. Also, the study did not take into account any detail in terms of time since the negative life event occurred or the nature or number of negative life events that the church member encountered.

Finally, one needs to gather greater diversity in feedback relating to respondent's perceptions of the pastor/pastoral teams support and need of further support. This would ensure that the broad analysis in this study was accurate and would give opportunity to expand and tease out further information from respondents on this topic.

## 6.6 Recommendations

From the results of this study it would seem reasonable to present the following recommendations, aimed at enhancing the ministry of the local church pastor/pastoral team as they assist their church members in dealing with negative life events.

### 6.6.1 Recommendation: Part 1

1. The first area that can help pastors/pastoral teams enhance their ministry to church members is by gaining further personal knowledge and skills in the area of coping and relating to persons experiencing significant negative life event.
2. Pastors need to have an opportunity to gain further knowledge about Religious Coping Methods so that they can recognise these methods and thus be more able to help, encourage and support their church

members to adopt Positive Religious Coping methods. One way to achieve this could be through in-service training.

3. Pastors could benefit from in-service training in communication skills, gaining knowledge and understanding of the grief process helping them to develop empathy towards others so as to enhance relational skills.
4. Other ways to enhance the level of support of pastors/pastoral teams could be through further study in relevant areas of support, e.g. counseling. If pastors do not have the skills in counseling, they could enhance their support by having a directory of different professionals to whom they could refer their church members to. The South Pacific Division/Australian Union Conference Family Ministries Department could set up a referral directory for major regional areas.
5. Pastoral training undergraduate study providers could include basic counseling skills as part of preparation for future pastors which in the long term could enhance the ministry of the church pastor.

### 6.6.2 Recommendation: Part 2

The second area that can help pastors/pastoral teams enhance their ministry skills for helping their members connect both with God and with the church community.

1. Pastors can help connect their members with God through individual bible study/discussion through preaching about God's role in individual lives (particularly the negative aspects), and by allowing opportunities for members to openly discuss the difficult questions in life without feeling judged or condemned.

2. Pastors/Pastoral teams can help connect their members with each other by fostering accepting and inclusive attitudes in the church community.
3. Finally this study highlights the importance of church members needing to feel a positive connection with God and the church before they are able to successfully deal with negative life events. It is only after achieving this level of acceptance that they are open to receiving support from God and the church. It is only when church members have established this connection with God and the church community, and have accepted support from God and the church community, that they will be able to effectively deal with significant negative life events.

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# APPENDIX 1

# Questionnaire
# Coping with Negative Life Issues: An Australian Seventh-day Adventist Context

The purpose of this study is to determine the effect religious coping factors had on one's overall feeling of having coped well with a negative life event. It will also look at how church members see the role of the church pastor in the coping process, and in what ways they would appreciate the pastoral team assisting them during this difficult time. It is hoped that data from this study and others like this study will enhance Pastors and church members ability to support other church members through such events.

**Return of this questionnaire indicates consent to participate in this study.**

## SECTION 1 (Please tick the appropriate box)

**Gender**: ☐ Male ☐ Female

**Age Group**: ☐18-29 ☐30-44 ☐45-64 ☐65+

**Ethnicity**:

☐ Caucasian ☐ Indigenous ☐ Pacific Islander ☐ Sth American ☐ Other_____

Do you consider yourself to be a Seventh-day Adventist? ☐ Yes ☐ No

**Income Group** (For families, use ½ of combined family income):

☐ 0 – 39 999 ☐ Average (40 000 – 69 000) ☐70 000+

## SECTION 2 (Which of the following negative life events have you experienced in recent times. Please tick any that are applicable)

☐ Death of a close family member or friend

☐ Major personal illness, injury

☐ Major financial loss

☐ Close family member suffering from major illness or accident

☐ Major interpersonal conflict (E.g. major disagreements with friends, co-workers, church subgroup, etc)

☐ Separation or divorce

☐ Job loss

☐ Other_____

At the time the event occurred, what kind of impact did the event have on your life (tick one)

☐ Extremely negative ☐ Somewhat negative

☐ Moderately negative ☐ Slightly negative

## SECTION 3

The following items deal with possible ways you coped with the negative events in your life. There are many ways to deal with problems. These items ask what you did to cope with this/these negative event/s. Obviously different people deal with things in different ways, but we are interested in how **you** tried to deal with it. Each item says something about a particular way of coping. We want to know to what extent you did what the item says. *How much or how frequently*. Don't answer on the basis of what worked or not, just whether or not you did it. Try to rate each item separately in your mind from the others. Make your answers as true FOR YOU as you can.

**Circle the answer that best applies to you**

**1 – Not at all 2 – Somewhat 3 – Quite a bit 4 – A great deal**

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Tried to deal with the situation on my own without God's help…….. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 2. | Worked together with God to relieve my worries.…… | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 3. | Wondered whether God was punishing me because of my lack of faith. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 4. | Didn't try much of anything; simply expected God to take control…….. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 5. | Knew that I couldn't handle the situation, so I just expected God to handle it for me…….. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 6. | Worked together with God as partners…….. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 7. | Saw my situation as part of God's plan…….. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 8. | Decided that God was punishing me for my sins…….. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 9. | Questioned the power of God…… | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 10. | Tried to deal with my feelings without God's help…… | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 11. | Did my best and then turned the situation over to God…….. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 12. | Felt punished by God for my lack of devotion…….. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 13. | Tried to make sense of the situation with God…….. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 14. | Turned the situation over to God after doing all that I could…… | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 15. | Sought comfort from God…….. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 16. | Trusted that God would be by my side…….. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 17. | Didn't try to do much; just assumed God would handle it…… | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 18. | Did what I could and put the rest in God's hands…….. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 19. | Wondered if God allowed this event to happen to me because of my sins… | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 20. | Made decisions about what to do without God's help…….. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 21. | Trusted that God was with me…… | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 22. | Depended on my own strength without support from God…… | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 23. | Tried to do the best I could and let God do the rest…….. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 24. | Didn't do much; just expected God to solve my problem for me……. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 25. | Tried to see how the situation could be beneficial spiritually…… | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 26. | Didn't try to cope; only expected God to take my worries away…… | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 27. | Tried to make sense of the situation without relying on God…… | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 28. | Looked to God for strength, support and guidance…… | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 29. | Thought that the event might bring me closer to God…… | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 30. | Tried to find a lesson from God in the event…….. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 31. | Took control over what I could, and gave the rest up to God…… | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 32. | Tried to see how God might be trying to strengthen me in this situation….. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 33. | Wondered what I did for God to punish me…….. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 34. | Wondered whether God had abandoned me…….. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 35. | Felt my church seemed to be rejecting or ignoring me…….. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 36. | Felt angry that God was not there for me…….. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

**Circle the answer that best applies to you**

**1 – Not at all 2 – Somewhat 3 – Quite a bit 4 – A great deal**

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 37. | Asked the pastor to remember me in their prayers…… | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 38. | Asked other to pray for me…… | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 39. | Thought about how my life is part of a larger spiritual force…… | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 40. | Wondered whether my pastor was really there for me…….. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 41. | Wondered whether my church had abandoned me…… | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 42. | Questioned God's love for me…… | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 43. | Tried to experience a stronger feeling of spirituality…… | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 44. | Wondered if God really cares……. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 45. | Tried to build a strong relationship with a higher power…….. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 46. | Voiced anger that God didn't answer my prayers…… | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 47. | Looked for spiritual support from my pastor…….. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 48. | Disagreed with what the church wanted me to do or believe…… | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 49. | Felt dissatisfaction with my pastor……. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 50. | Sought support from members of my church……. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

Looking at the event **now**, what are your reactions?

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 51. | Considering the impact of the negative event on my life, I coped remarkably well…….. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 52. | I have grown closer to God…… | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 53. | I have grown closer to my church…….. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

## SECTION 4

In what ways did the pastoral team help/support you during this time?

_____

_____

_____

Is there anything else you would have liked to have seen from your pastoral team that would have help/support you during this time?

_____

_____

_____

Further comments:

_____

_____

Thank you for your time **(Could you please place this completed questionnaire in the box provided)**.

# APPENDIX 2

Avondale
COLLEGE

22 June 2009

Ms Kelly Fry
c/- Dr Peter Morey
Faculty of Business & IT
Avondale College
COORANBONG NSW 2265

Dear Kelly

On Friday 12 June, the Avondale College Human Research Ethics Committee met and considered your research application for the project titled: *Coping with Negative Life Issues: An Australian Seventh-day Adventist Context.*

The committee resolved to approve your application subject to outstanding matters being addressed to the satisfaction of your supervisors, Drs Morey and Robertson.

- *Application 12.2:* name the person and/or the position he/she holds who is responsible for disposing of the data after the 5-year period.
- *Application 13.1:* add that permission will be sought from the minister of each church selected to be part of the convenience sample.
- *Information Letter:* delete the word 'well' from the first sentence of the paragraph with the heading 'What is the purpose of this study?'
- *Information Letter:* add the sentence "No individual church will be indentified" to the paragraph with the heading "How will the information collected be used?'
- *Questionnaire*: Expand the selections for the Ethnicity question in Section 1. The Avondale application for enrolment form is suggested as an appropriate example.

The following additional standard conditions would then apply:

1. That you notify the committee of any changes to circumstances or research design, which might require a review of the ethics approval.
2. That you provide an annual interim report of your progress to the committee, and a final report once this project is completed. The first report will be due twelve months from the date you commence the research.

We wish you well in this valuable research endeavour.

Sincerely

V. Watts

**Dr Vivienne Watts**
**Chair**
Avondale College Human Research Ethics Committee

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# APPENDIX 3

# Factor Analysis

| | Factor | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
| Tried to deal with the situation on my own without God's help | -.516 | | | | | .666 | | | | |
| Worked together with God to relieve my worries | .769 | | | | | -.474 | .360 | | -.395 | |
| Wondered whether God was punishing me because of my lack of faith | | .676 | | | | | | -.494 | | .303 |
| Didn't try much of anything; simply expected God to take control | | | | .731 | | | | | | |
| Knew that I couldn't handle the situation, so I just expected God to handle it for me | | | | .678 | | | | | | |
| Worked together with God as partners | .732 | | | | -.376 | -.516 | .336 | | -.429 | |
| Saw my situation as part of God's plan | | | | .348 | | | | | -.523 | |
| Decided that God was punishing me for my sins | | .822 | | | | | | -.455 | | |
| Questioned the power of God | -.308 | .515 | | | | | | -.698 | | |
| Tried to deal with my feelings without God's help | -.326 | | | | | .705 | -.318 | | | |
| Did my best and then turned the situation over to God | | | | | -.711 | | | | | |
| Felt punished by God for my lack of devotion | | .798 | | | | | | -.552 | | |
| Tried to make sense of the situation with God | .477 | | | | | | | | -.471 | |
| Turned the situation over to God after doing all that I could | .379 | | | | -.792 | | | | -.369 | |
| Sought comfort from God | .882 | | | | -.424 | -.355 | .356 | | -.477 | |
| Trusted that God would be by my side | .823 | | | | -.422 | -.363 | | | -.399 | |
| Didn't try to do much; just assumed God would handle it | | | | .698 | | | | | | |
| Did what I could and put the rest in God's hands | .452 | | | | -.856 | | | | -.388 | |
| Wondered if God allowed this event to happen to me because of my sin | | .775 | | | | | | -.401 | | |
| Made decisions about what to do without God's help | -.313 | | | | | .606 | | | | |
| Trusted that God was with me | .800 | | | | -.431 | -.336 | | | -.382 | |
| Depended on my own strength without support from God | -.422 | | | | | .807 | | -.319 | | |
| Tried to do the best I could and let God do the rest | .362 | | | | -.834 | | | | | |
| Didn't do much; just expected God to solve my problems for me | | | | .647 | | | | | | -.315 |
| Tried to see how the situation could be beneficial spiritually | .425 | | | | | | | | -.723 | |
| Didn't try to cope; only expected God to take my worries away | | | | .578 | | | | | | |

| | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Tried to make sense of the situation without relaying on God | -.316 | .330 | | | | .642 | | | | |
| Looked to God for strength, support and guidance | .760 | | | | -.397 | -.412 | | | -.417 | |
| Thought that the event might bring me closer to God | .479 | | | | | | | | -.765 | |
| Tried to find a lesson from God in the event | .444 | | | | | | | | -.853 | |
| Took control over what I could, and gave the rest up to God | | | | | -.756 | | | | | |
| Tried to see how God might be trying to strengthen me in this situation | .466 | | | | -.354 | | | | -.793 | |
| Wondered what I did for God to punish me | | .839 | | | | | | -.553 | | |
| Wondered whether God had abandoned me | | .720 | | | | | | -.748 | | |
| Felt my church seemed to be rejecting or ignoring me | | .341 | .790 | | | | | | | |
| Felt angry that God was not there for me | | .522 | | | | | | -.702 | | |
| Asked the pastor to remember me in their prayers | | | | | | | .885 | | | |
| Asked others to pray for me | .328 | | | | | -.320 | .790 | | -.340 | |
| Thought about how my life is part of a larger spiritual force | .419 | | | | | -.320 | .472 | | -.622 | |
| Wondered whether my pastor was really there for me | | | .810 | | | | | | | |
| Wondered whether my church had abandoned me | | | .822 | | | | | | | |
| Questioned God's love for me | | .496 | | | | | | -.859 | | |
| Tried to experience a stronger feeling of spirituality | .333 | | | | | | .421 | | -.592 | |
| Wondered if God really cares | | .502 | | | | | | -.828 | | |
| Tried to build a strong relationship with a higher power | .403 | | | | | | .479 | | -.558 | |
| Voiced anger that God didn't answer my prayers | | .397 | .315 | | | | | -.721 | | |
| Looked for spiritual support from my pastor | .339 | | | | | | .663 | | -.304 | |
| Disagreed with what the church wanted me to do or believe | | | .566 | | | | | -.355 | | |
| Felt dissatisfaction with my pastor | | | | | | | | | | |
| Sought support from members of my church | | | | | | | .602 | | | |