

## Clergy Satisfaction and Vocational Commitment

How committed are the leaders of America's local congregations to their work and ministry? How satisfied are they with their effectiveness as congregational leaders? And, what types of problems do they face on a daily basis? These are important questions that religious researchers have begun to explore. There is widespread concern among denominational leaders that today's clergy are increasingly at risk of "dropping out" of congregational ministry due to high levels of stress, congregational conflict, and burnout. Yet, few national studies have examined the state of clergy commitment and work satisfaction in the United States.

In this learning module, you will use quantitative data from the Association of Religion Data Archives to explore the work satisfaction and vocational commitment of U.S. congregational leaders.

If you find yourself lost at any point, refer to the instructions on the right.

Open your web browser and go to the homepage for the Association of Religion Data Archives (ARDA), [www.thearda.com](http://www.thearda.com).

Begin by searching for the *Pulpit and Pew National Survey of Pastoral Leaders, 2001*. This file contains information on clergy work satisfaction and vocational commitment.

In the upper right-hand corner of the homepage you will see a search box. Try searching for "**Pulpit and Pew**". Using this search feature will generate a list of all of the ARDA files containing the words *pulpit and pew*. The survey file that you are looking for should appear near the top of this list in the "Files" section. Once you find the correct file, select it.

You will now see a summary, or description, of the *Pulpit and Pew* study. Let's see what we can find out about this study. Read through the summary and try to answer the following questions.

1. What types of individuals were interviewed for the *Pulpit and Pew* study?

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**Open your web browser.**

**Go to [www.thearda.com](http://www.thearda.com)**

**Type "Pulpit and Pew" into the search box at the top of the page.**

**Click "Go".**

**Scroll through the list of ARDA files until you find the Pulpit and Pew survey.**

**Click on the name of the survey.**

2. How many people were interviewed (Hint: people are referred to as cases in data sets)?

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3. How many of the people interviewed were leaders in non-Christian (non-Catholic and non-Protestant) religious groups (Hint: “Sampling Procedures” explains how interview participants were selected)?

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Now that you know a little more about who was interviewed for the study, let’s see what the data can tell us about the level of work satisfaction among pastors in the United States.

You can search for particular questions within the survey by clicking on the “Search” tab at the top of the *Pulpit and Pew* summary page and entering specific search terms. (Note: You can also browse through all of the questions on a survey by clicking on the “codebook” tab).

You will want to search for questions dealing with work satisfaction. Try searching for the word “**satisfied**” using the “Search” tab. This will generate a list of questions containing that word. As you will see, there are several questions dealing with different aspects of work satisfaction.

Locate the question SAT\_1 (Variable #161) in the list of survey items that is generated. This question asked Christian pastors how satisfied they are with their overall effectiveness as a congregational leader.

4. What are the response categories for this question?

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5. What **percentage** of Christian pastors would you estimate are *very satisfied* with their overall effectiveness as a congregational leader?

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**Scroll back to the top of the summary page and click on the “Search” tab.**

**Type “satisfied” into the search box within the “Search” tab.**

**Select “Analyze Results” for question #161.**

By clicking on “Analyze Results” directly beneath this question’s response categories we can see how the respondents answered this question.

6. What **percentage** of Christian pastors gave the following answers?

Very satisfied: \_\_\_\_\_

Somewhat satisfied: \_\_\_\_\_

Somewhat dissatisfied: \_\_\_\_\_

Very dissatisfied: \_\_\_\_\_

As you can see, most pastors say that they are satisfied with their overall effectiveness as a leader. In fact, about a third of all pastors are *very satisfied*.

The survey data also allow us to determine if there are significant relationships between work satisfaction and demographic factors such as a pastor’s race, gender, or education level. We can develop and test research hypotheses pertaining to these relationships. Let’s formulate and test a hypothesis using this data.

7. What do you think the relationship between pastors’ satisfaction with their effectiveness as a congregational leader and educational attainment might be? Will pastors with higher levels of education be more or less satisfied with their effectiveness as a congregational leader? Write your hypothesis:

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Now, scroll down the page and you will see a series of tables that reveal the statistical relationship between our variable, SAT\_1, and other demographic variables. Look specifically for the “Education” table. This table reveals the relationship between work satisfaction and pastors’ educational attainment.

**Scroll down to view the tables.**

**Find the “Education” table.**

8. Using the data in the “Education” table, fill in the percentages below for pastors who say they are *very satisfied* with their effectiveness as congregational leaders.

	<b>HS Diploma</b>	<b>Community College</b>	<b>Bachelor’s Degree</b>	<b>Master’s Degree</b>	<b>Doctorate</b>
<b>Percent Very Satisfied</b>	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

9. Was your hypothesis supported by the data?

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Overall, these data suggest that most pastors are satisfied with their effectiveness as a congregational leader. Yet, pastors also report facing significant problems on a day-to-day basis. Let’s take a closer look at some of the problems that today’s pastors face.

Scroll back to the top of the web page and click on the “Search” tab to search for a new survey question. Try searching for the word “**problem**” and find the question PRB3 (Variable #183). This question asks pastors how much of a problem it is for them to find time for recreation, relaxation, or personal reflection on a daily basis. Let’s analyze results for this question.

10. What **percentage** of U.S. pastors say that it is *a great problem* finding time for recreation and relaxation?

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11. What **percentage** of U.S. pastors say that it is *somewhat a problem* finding time for such activity?

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Another problem that pastors sometimes face in their day-to-day work is dealing with feelings of isolation and loneliness. But how common are such feelings? Using the “Search” tab again, find the question **ISOLATE** (Variable #200) in the survey data, and answer the following questions.

**Scroll back to the top of the page and click on the “Search” tab.**

**Type “problem” into the search box and click on “search”.**

**Select “Analyze Results” for the question PRB3.**

**Search for the question ISOLATE using the “Search” tab.**

12. What **percentage** of U.S. pastors said that they have *fairly* or *very often* felt lonely or isolated in their work over the past year (Hint: add the two categories together)?

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Now that you know how to analyze survey data on the ARDA, you can also examine the relationship between pastors' feelings of isolation and demographic characteristics such as gender, race and age.

13. What do you think the relationship is between a pastor's gender and the frequency of feeling lonely or isolated in their work? Do you think male or female pastors are more likely to say that they have experienced such isolation *fairly* or *very often*? Write your hypothesis:

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14. Now, locate the table that reveals the actual relationship between feelings of isolation and gender. Do the data support your hypothesis?

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15. What might be some possible explanations for this relationship between gender and feelings of isolation in congregational work?

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Select “Analyze Results” for the question ISOLATE.

Scroll down to view the tables.

Find the “Gender” table.

16. Look through the tables and find another demographic variable that appears to have a relationship with feelings of loneliness and isolation. Describe this relationship.

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Many religious leaders believe that they have been “called” by God to work in congregational ministry. This sense of being “called” can sustain their commitment to ministry in the face of the significant day-to-day problems that they may experience. Sometimes, however, pastors do experience doubts about their religious “calling”. Use the search tab to find the question **CALLDBT** (Variable #192), and answer the following questions.

17. What **percentage** of congregational leaders said that they have *very often* doubted that they are called by God to the ministry?

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18. What **percentage** of congregational leaders said that they have *never* doubted that they were called by God to the ministry?

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19. Finally, find a demographic variable that appears to be related to the likelihood that a congregational leader has *very often* doubted that he or she was called by God to the ministry. What is this variable and how is it related to the question?

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**Search for the question CALLDBT using the “Search” tab.**

**Select “Analyze Results” for the question CALLDBT.**