

Shari's research:

In the early 2000s, training wives for church planting was a new idea for many leaders. Why train the wife? She's not planting the church. But the challenges faced by wives were significant, leading to a need for education. Having worked with my husband for 20 years to start churches, I realized existing courses didn't address the unique struggles of planting ministry.

When asked to develop care for planters' wives in 2003, I declined, emphasizing the need for education. To gather data, I conducted qualitative research with a control group of wives in their third to seventh year of planting. These women faced common struggles, prompting further quantitative research to gauge the extent of these issues.

The top reasons for stress or satisfaction

Listed in order of importance as rated by church planting spouses.

1. The Planter
Stress due to lack of involvement and understanding of the planter, increasing loneliness and marital pressure for the spouse.
2. Support System
3. Reliance on Christ
4. Sabbath Rest
5. Boundaries
6. Physical Health
7. Evidence of changed lives
8. Commitment and sense of call
9. Family Life
10. Expectations

Since the initial 2005 research, we've re-evaluated the concerns in the U.S., Europe, and Latin America. Latin American wives stressed expectations, while global cities emphasized finances. Across cultures, the husband's support and reliance on Christ remained vital.

1. Stress due to lack of involvement and understanding of the planter, increasing loneliness and marital pressure for the spouse.
2. Stress caused by the absence of a healthy support system, primarily relying on the husband for support, leading to isolation.
3. Satisfaction and joy found in relying on Christ's finished work, embracing God's grace and acceptance.

4. Stress-related to the lack of recreation and Sabbath rest, with weekends often consumed by church responsibilities.
5. Stress from navigating shifting roles and a lack of emotional and physical clarity, particularly in ambiguous church planting environments.
6. Stress on physical health due to sustained tension and trauma from ministry demands, resulting in exhaustion and other ailments.
7. Satisfaction from witnessing changed lives and impact on the community through church growth.
8. Satisfaction and reduced stress when both spouses are equally committed to church planting and aligned in their sense of calling.
9. Stress-related to family life and raising children, as the spouse becomes the primary caregiver with little help from the planter.
10. Stress from managing expectations of self and others, leading to burnout and emotional withdrawal.
11. Stress arising from financial limitations and the need for the spouse to work to sustain the family during church planting.
12. Stress when there is a disagreement between the planter and spouse regarding the use of her gifts and abilities in ministry.