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Domains of spiritual well-being and development and validation of the Spiritual Well-Being Questionnaire

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Abstract

Fisher (1998) proposed a spiritual well-being model, comprising the domains of personal, communal, environmental and transcendental well-being, and a single global spiritual well-being dimension. This paper reports on four studies aimed at testing Fisher's theoretical model, and establishing the validity and reliability of a new self-rating questionnaire (Spiritual Well-Being Questionnaire; SWBQ), developed to reflect this model. All four studies supported Fisher's model. The SWBQ showed good reliability (Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability and variance extracted), and validity (construct, concurrent, discriminant, predictive and factorial independence from personality). The SWBQ has the advantage over other existing spiritual well-being measures in that it is based on a broader and more empirically based conceptualization of spiritual well-being, and has well established psychometric properties.

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1. Introduction

The concept of "spiritual health" is doubly problematic in view of the way in which the two terms "spiritual" and "health" have themselves undergone considerable development and revisions in recent years. Classical definitions of spirituality have tended to concentrate on the religious, ecclesiastical, or matters concerned with the soul, while current studies in spirituality adopt much wider definitions, integrating all aspects of human life and experiences (Muldoon & King, 1995; Schneiders, 1986). There has been a similar widening in understanding of what counts as

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health and wellness, in that, current emphasis in medicine tends to give greater concern for the whole person, rather than just the treatment of disease. According to Coward and Reed (1996), wellness reflects a sense of well-being that is derived from an intensified awareness of wholeness and integration among all dimensions of one's being, which also includes the spiritual elements of life.

In recent years, several attempts have been made to link the two concepts of spirituality and health within the idea of spiritual well-being. For example, Hateley (1983) wrote about spiritual health in terms of relationship to self, empathy in the community, and relationship with God. Young (1984) mentioned the interrelatedness of body, mind, and spirit within the context of inner peace, and in terms of relationships with others and with nature. Goodloe and Arreola (1992) spoke of meaning and purpose with self-transcendence, social and spiritual actions with others, oneness with nature, and personal relationship with God. For Hood-Morris (1996), spiritual health included transcendent and existential features pertaining to an individual's relationships with the self, others and a higher being, coupled with interactions with one's environment. The National Interfaith Coalition on Aging (1975) suggested that spiritual well-being is the affirmation of life in a relationship with oneself (personal), others (communal), nature (environment), and God (or transcendental other). Integrating these concepts together, spiritual well-being can be defined in terms of a state of being reflecting positive feelings, behaviours, and cognitions of relationships with oneself, others, the transcendent and nature, that in turn provide the individual with a sense of identity, wholeness, satisfaction, joy, contentment, beauty, love, respect, positive attitudes, inner peace and harmony, and purpose and direction in life.

Using the domains proposed by the NICA (1975) as a framework, Fisher (1998) interviewed 98 secondary school teachers in terms of what they thought were important indicators of spiritual well-being in their students. The interview used questions reflected in a number of measures for spiritual well-being. These included the Spiritual Well-Being Scale (Ellison, 1983), the Spiritual Orientation Inventory (Elkins, Hedstrom, Hughes, Leaf, & Saunders, 1988), the Mental, Physical and Spiritual Well-Being Scale (Vella-Brodrick & Allen, 1995), the Spiritual Assessment Inventory (Hall & Edwards, 1996), the Perceived Wellness Survey (Adams, Bezner, & Steinhardt, 1997), and the JAREL Spiritual Well-Being Scale (Hungelmann, Kenkel-Rossi, Klassen, & Stoltenwerk, 1996). Consistent with the NICA (1975) model, quantitative analyses of their responses led Fisher (1998) to also conclude that spiritual well-being reflects the extent to which people live in harmony within relationships with oneself (personal), others (communal), nature (environment), and God (or transcendental other).

According to Fisher (1998), the personal domain deals with how one intra-relates with oneself with regard to meaning, purpose and values in life. The communal domain expresses in the quality and depth of inter-personal relationships, between self and others, and includes love, justice, hope, and faith in humanity. The environmental domain deals with care and nurture for the physical and biological world, including a sense of awe, wonder and unity with the environment. The transcendental domain deals with the relationship of self with some-thing or some-one beyond the human level, such as a cosmic force, transcendent reality, or God, and involves faith towards, adoration and worship of, the source of mystery of the universe. Fisher also suggested that these four spiritual well-being domains cohere to determine a person's overall or global spiritual well-being. It is to be noted that in Fisher's model, the term "well-being" is associated with the different domains to cohere with existing literature, and to be consistent with the NICA (1975) model. Thus its use in Fisher's model does not necessarily imply positive or better well-being (Fisher, 1998).

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