



Item response theory analysis of the spiritual well-being questionnaire

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Abstract

Recently, Gomez and Fisher (2003) published the Spiritual Well-Being Questionnaire (SWBQ). This is a self-rating measure with separate 5-item scales for personal, communal, environmental, and transcendental spiritual well-being. This study used item response theory (IRT) to examine the psychometric properties of these scales. A sample comprising 4462 participants from mainly secondary schools and universities completed the SWBQ. Samejima's graded response model was used for the analyses. The results showed that the discrimination parameters for all items in the four scales were moderate to large. The threshold parameters showed adequate representation of the relevant traits from low to the mean trait level for personal, communal and environmental items, and from low to moderately high trait level for the transcendental items. With the exception of five items, all other items showed good item information function values, and therefore acceptable reliability. The findings also indicated that the number of response options could be decreased and increased at the low and high trait levels, respectively. Thus while there was general support for the psychometric properties of the SWBQ from an IRT perspective, there were also indications that this measure can be further improved.

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1. Introduction

There is now growing evidence linking spirituality with general well-being, and physical and mental health (Miller & Thoresen, 2003; Powell, Shahabi, & Thoresen, 2003; Seeman, Dubin, & Seeman, 2003). Fisher (1998) has proposed a broad-based spiritual well-being model, comprising obliquely related domains of personal, communal, environmental and transcendental spiritual well-being. More recently, Gomez and Fisher (2003) published the Spiritual Well-Being Questionnaire (SWBQ). This measure has four scales, one for each of the domains identified by Fisher. Existing data show generally good reliability and validity for this measure (Gomez & Fisher, 2003, submitted for publication). The study reported here extends this area of research by examining the psychometric properties of the four scales of the SWBQ using item response theory, a method not used previously to evaluate this measure.

Traditionally, the terms spirituality and by extension spiritual well-being have been viewed in terms of religion or religious spiritual behaviors and experiences (Powell et al., 2003). However, spirituality and spiritual well-being are not necessarily limited to only religious spiritual behaviors and experiences (Schneiders, 1986). According to the National Interfaith Coalition on Aging (NICA, 1975) spiritual well-being is the affirmation of life in relationships with oneself (personal), others (communal), nature (environment), and God (or transcendental other). Using this definition, Fisher (1998) proposed a multidimensional model of spiritual well-being. According to this model, spiritual well-being comprises four oblique primary order factors, namely personal, communal, environmental and transcendental. In this model, the term well-being does not necessarily imply positive or better well-being always, as the different spiritual well-being domains are believed to have different effects for different people at different times (Gomez & Fisher, 2003).

In Fisher's (1998) (see also Gomez & Fisher (2003)) model, 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 enjoyment, 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's multidimensional model has been supported in a number of studies (Gomez & Fisher, 2003; Fisher, 1998, 2001; Fisher, Francis, & Johnson, 2000).

Recently Gomez and Fisher (2003) published the Spiritual Well-Being Questionnaire (SWBQ). The SWBQ was developed to measure the four spiritual well-being domains proposed by Fisher (1998). It comprises 20 items, with separate scales for personal, communal, environment and transcendental spiritual well-being, with five items in each scale. In a series of four studies reported in the same paper, Gomez and Fisher (2003) provided evidence for the validity of the SWBQ. Both exploratory factor analysis and confirmatory factor analysis supported the four-factor model. A joint factor analysis of the four SWBQ domains with Eysenck's personality dimensions (Eysenck & Eysenck, 1991) showed that the spiritual well-being domains were independent of the personality dimensions, thereby supporting their factorial independence. Also, consistent with predictions from existing theory and data, the SWBQ domain scores (or total scale scores) for personal, communal, and environmental spiritual well-being correlated as expected with extravert-

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