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The spiritual well-being questionnaire: Testing for model applicability, measurement and structural equivalencies, and latent mean differences across gender

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Abstract

Fisher (1998) proposed a spiritual well-being model, comprising primary factors for the domains of personal, communal, environmental and transcendental well-being, that cohere to form a single higher order or global spiritual well-being dimension. In line with this model, Gomez and Fisher (2003) published the Spiritual Well-Being Questionnaire (SWBQ), with scales for measuring personal, communal, environmental and transcendental spiritual well-being. This study used multi-group confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to examine gender equivalencies of the measurement and structural models of the SWBQ, and the latent mean in the four SWBQ factors. A total of 3101 females and 1361 males, with age ranging from 15 to 32 years, completed the SWBQ. The statistical fit results supported the invariance of the measurement model, and some aspects of the structural model. The practical fit indices results provided support for the invariance of both the measurement and structural models. The results also showed little gender differences. Together, these findings support gender equivalencies for the SWBQ.

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Keywords: Spiritual well-being questionnaire; Gender; Invariance; Latent mean differences

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1. Introduction

Spirituality and other spiritual related areas are now emerging as an important area of research (Miller, 2003; Seeman, Dubin, & Seeman, 2003). Recently, Fisher (1998) proposed a hierarchical multidimensional model of spiritual well-being. The model comprises four oblique primary order factors, namely personal, communal, environmental and transcendental, that all cohere to form a higher order secondary overall or global spiritual well-being factor. 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 is expressed 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).

Gomez and Fisher (2003) have recently published the Spiritual Well-Being Questionnaire (SWBQ). The SWBQ comprises 20 items, five items for each of the four domains identified by Fisher. In a series of four studies reported in the same paper, Gomez and Fisher (2003) provided evidence for the factorial validity of the SWBQ. Both exploratory factor analyses and confirmatory factor analyses supported the four-factor oblique model. The four-factor oblique model showed statistically better fit than a four factor orthogonal model and also a one-factor model comprising all 20 SWBQ items. 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 for personal, communal, and environmental spiritual well-being correlated as expected with extraversion, neuroticism, psychoticism, and happiness. The SWBQ factor scores also contributed additional variance over that of the personality dimensions in the prediction of happiness, thereby indicating support for their incremental validity. The results also showed that SWBQ scores correlated appropriately with the scores of Ellison's (1983) Spiritual Well-Being Scale. In addition, the four studies supported the reliabilities of the four subscales in terms of internal consistency, composite reliability, and variance extracted. Overall, these findings indicate good support for validity and reliability of the SWBQ.

However for the SWBQ to be useful when gender is considered, we will need first of all to demonstrate the invariance of the SWBQ and comparability of the factor scores across the gender groups. In our previous study (Gomez & Fisher, 2003), exploratory factor analyses showed support for a similar factor structure and loadings for males and females. However, exploratory factor analysis does not provide a clear test of invariance since the analysis is conducted separately for each group and uses observed scores, which contain measurement error (Byrne, 1998). A more valid approach is to use multi-group CFA as this approach tests for invariance for both groups simultaneously, and uses latent scores that are free of measurement error. So far there are no data on how females and males compare on the SWBQ factors of personal, communal, environmental

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