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The Spiritual Well-Being Scale

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Instrument Review

I. General Information

- A. Title- The Spiritual Well-Being Scale
- B. Author- Craig W. Ellison, Raymond E. Paloutzian
- C. Publisher- Life Advance Inc.
- D. Forms, groups to which applicable- This scale is offered in one form directed at an adult population
- E. Practical Features- This is a paper and pencil scale with approximately 20 items. Ten of these items are specifically targeting religious well-being; ten target existential well-being (D'Costa, 1995).
- F. General Type- This scale is designed to be a measure of spiritual well-being as defined by religious and existential factors.
- G. Date of Publication- 1982-1991
- H. Costs, Booklets, Answer sheets, scoring- The specimen set for this scale costs \$20. This set includes the scale, the manual, scoring information and research information and bibliography of related research. There is no electronic scoring service available for this scale. The price for a single instrument is \$2.25 per scale. There are volume and student discounts available from the publisher. ("Life Advance, Inc," 2002)
- I. Time required to administer- A participant could complete the SWBS in 10-15 minutes ("Life Advance, Inc," 2002).

J. Purpose for which evaluated- For use with adults in assessing self-reported relationship with God and life satisfaction ("Life Advance, Inc," 2002).

II. Purpose and Nature of the Instrument

- A. Stated purpose- This scale was “developed as a general indicator of the subjective state of religious and existential well-being.” ("Spiritual Well-Being Scale," 1995)
- B. Description of test, items, and scoring- This is a self-report inventory and implies that the answers participants give will reflect their personal beliefs about their own well-being. The items are constructed in a modified Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree (numerical value of 1) to Strongly Agree (numerical value of 6) with no middle value. The items are equally phrased in positive and negative terms to reduce “response set bias” (D'Costa, 1995, p. 984). To score the test, the numerical values for each response are added for each of the subscales (Existential Well-Being: EWB and Religious Well-Being: RWB). Both values for the subscales are then summed to reveal the total SWBS value. Scores will range from 10 to 60 on the subscales and 20 to 120 on the SWBS value. Higher scores reflect a higher perception of well-being while lower scores reflect a lesser perception. (Ledbetter, Smith, Vosler-Hunter & Fischer, 1991, p. 50)
- C. Use in counseling- The publishers of this test recommend its use for clinical and counseling purposes in both individual and group settings. The relatively high instance of spiritual issues noted in counseling populations lends merit to the use of this instrument to enhance a counseling relationship. This tool can help practitioners identify and access the strengths a client may have which are

grounded in the clients' personal spiritual experience. ("Life Advance, Inc," 2002, p. Applications section Pr.1)

III. Practical evaluation

- A. Usefulness of manual- The manual contains the basic normative information regarding the scale that one would expect, indicating norm groups and samples used (Schoenrade, 1995, p. 985). The manual is short, around 6 pages. There is some concern that it does not cover important scholarship extensively enough regarding the understanding and administration of this scale. D'Costa recommends a more extensive technical manual and a practical manual which would address these needs (D'Costa, 1995, p. 984). The publisher's website indicates there is an available bibliography containing such research information that is bundled with the specimen set and can be purchased separately as well. Perhaps this bibliography would help respond to this requirement. ("Life Advance, Inc," 2002)
- B. Adequacy of directions for administering the instrument- "The authors provide clear instructions for the relatively straightforward scoring; they readily acknowledge that the scale assesses perceived spiritual well-being" (Schoenrade, 1995, p. 985).
- C. Qualifications of examiners- This test is self-administered and can be self-scored. D'Costa expresses concern that the manual does not provide enough information to adequately prepare either the researcher or the participant for an appropriate administration of this scale (D'Costa, 1995, p. 984).

D. Scoring provisions- Ten items for each subscale reflect the authors' ideas regarding the dimensions of existential and religious well-being (Schoenrade, 1995, p. 985). Ellison speaks of Moberg's conceptualization of vertical and horizontal elements of spiritual well-being; the former reflecting a sense of relationship to God, the latter an overall sense of life satisfaction (Ellison, 1983, p. 331). Ellison's EWB and RWB attempt to reflect these two dimensions. These two scales, though independent, together form the SWBS score.

IV. Technical Considerations

A. Normative sample- Original research by the authors used varied participants to develop their study. Ellison (1983) cites using "men, women, housewives, college students, young adults, and senior citizens, high school students, married and single persons, religious and non-religious people, people from large cities, small cities and rural areas." (Ellison, 1983, p. 334) Bufford et al. (1991) noticed the absence of established norms for this instrument and set out to establish such with a number of different groups. They included groups of pastors and seminary students, church members from a number of denominations, college students from the University of Idaho and other California Christian colleges, counseling patients from outpatient mental health centers, sociopathic convicts in a state penitentiary, medical patients in outpatient care with a group of family practitioners, and a group of caregivers for the terminally ill. The primary issue that came up over and over in the literature was the presence of ceiling effects in religious populations with this scale. There was no way to determine the true differences in scores for groups that scored extremely high. The data was highly

negatively skewed and there was found little variability between items on the religious well-being portion of the scale for this population (Bufford, Paloutzian & Ellison, 1991). "The authors have acknowledged the need for better describing norm groups, and for items with greater sensitivity" (D'Costa, 1995, p. 984).

- B. Reliability- "Test-retest reliability coefficients obtained from 100 student volunteers at the University of Idaho were .93 (SWB), .96 (RWB), and .86 (EWB). Coefficient alphas...were .89 (SWB), .87 (RWB), and .78 (EWB)" (Ellison, 1983, p. 333). These numbers show that there is sufficiently high reliability and internal consistency (Bufford, et al., 1991, p. 57).
- C. Validity- Several authors stated that this test has good face validity. (Ellison, 1983) (Bufford, et al., 1991) (D'Costa, 1995) (Schoenrade, 1995) There appears to be sufficient content validity regarding the items in the test. Ellison (1982) reported that the correlation between the subscales for the 20 item version of the scale was $.32(p < .001)$, the correlation between RWB and SWB is ($r = .90$) and between EWB and SWB is ($r = .59$). Criterion validity is being explored as is noted in the literature. D'Costa (1995) states that concurrent validity is being established by numerous studies with this scale but that limitations still warrant further research. Schoenrade 1995 reveals that "concurrent validity is difficult to pinpoint, as few measures of spiritual well-being exist. Correlations with related measures such as Crumbaugh's (1969) Purpose in Life Test (for the EWB, $r = .68$) and Allport and Ross's (1967) measure of Intrinsic Religion (for the RWB, $r = .79$) are encouraging." (Schoenrade, 1995, p. 985) She also mentions that predictive validity has not been established yet but further research is encouraged by the

authors of this test. Construct validity appears to be one of the strong points of this instrument. Bufford et al. state that "a factor analysis of the SWBS revealed that the items loaded on two factors. All the RWB items loaded on the first factor, and several of the EWB items clustered on the second factor. The remaining EWB items clustered together but did not have an eigenvalue greater than 1.0." (Bufford, et al., 1991, p. 57) Regarding construct validity, in her study of the SWB and college students, Genia found that "For all participants, the item groupings corresponded to the RWB and EWB subscales as designed by the scale's developers. In addition, differential patterns of correlations suggest that RWB and EWB are measuring unique constructs" (Genia, 2001, p. 31). Ellison also notes a strong negative correlation of the SWBS to the UCLA Loneliness Scale as well as those correlation values mentioned by Schoenrade above which would indicate a reasonable measure of construct validity exists (Ellison, 1983). The strong correlations between the SWBS and other measures such as those above, however, may be more of a liability to the instrument rather than an asset if there is not a easily perceived advantage of the SWBS over these other measures (Ledbetter, et al., 1991). More work is yet to be done to establish stronger validity for this instrument (Ellison, 1983).

D. Generalizability- Evidence for this instrument shows little that is not generalizable excepting that it has not been extensively tested in populations that are not from the Western religious tradition. There may be some difficulty in using this instrument in populations where there is little or no importance placed on a relationship with a personal God (Schoenrade, 1995). Ellison states the

instrument could be used in such populations only “if they can meaningfully interpret the statements about relationship with God.” (Ellison, 1983, p. 338)

V. Evaluation

A. Comments of reviewers- The authors of the instrument overall have made an admirable attempt to create a measure of a construct that is difficult to define. "The SWBS has good reliability, reasonable validity, and a sound conceptual basis. This reviewer noted commendable professionalism and effort on the part of the authors in developing a sound instrument and in avoiding undue claims for it." (D'Costa, 1995, p. 984) Schoenrade echoes this idea saying “The authors are to be commended for willingness to venture into an area that some regard as too subjective for quantitative assessment” (Schoenrade, 1995, p. 984). This test, though not perfect, has great potential to be used to measure spiritual well-being. With some measure of development, this instrument could overcome some of these apparent weaknesses. (D'Costa, 1995)

As it currently stands, this instrument has been established as a potentially useful measure, particularly for the low end scores. With some work to differentiate the items further, this instrument could become more helpful to religious populations to distinguish those who may actually exhibit greater spiritual well-being as opposed to those who may only self-report it. D’Costa (1995) notes that this scale would not be able to distinguish who might have the potential for spiritual leadership which could be a valuable use should these problems be addressed successfully. Ledbetter notes that "these results indicate that the usefulness of this instrument is limited to low SWBS scores. In its

present form, this instrument does not appear to be helpful in identifying high scoring individuals. Nor is the scale able to distinguish between average and high scores." (Ledbetter, et al., 1991, p. 55) A change in the type or number of items may be warranted given the negative skew in religious populations. Careful attention to developing items which would expose faking would also be helpful as this scale is particularly vulnerable to faking. (D'Costa, 1995)

B. General Evaluation- This test has been carefully developed and researched to determine its usefulness regarding assessing spiritual well-being. Because this is a difficult construct to define, the authors' efforts toward the development of a valid and reliable instrument have been noted. However, the literature shows that there are still issues regarding the skewness of the data that are collected with this instrument that must be addressed. Because of this result, the high end of the scoring is rendered meaningless. It is only the lack of spiritual well-being that has been found to be statistically viable information. Should the authors be able to adjust the items either in number or in kind to address this ceiling effect, this instrument could truly become a useful tool. There have been adequate norm groups tested with this scale, but there are still groups out there who may benefit from further analysis. Genia (2001) in particular suggests further work with ethnic groups and groups other than those from the Judeo-Christian perspectives. With continued work toward this end, this test can become even more useful.

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