THE UTILITY OF THE ASSESSMENT OF SPIRITUALITY AND RELIGIOUS SENTIMENTS (ASPIRES) SCALE WITH CHRISTIANS AND BUDDHISTS IN SRI LANKA

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Abstract

The Assessment of Spirituality and Religious Sentiments (ASPIRES) Scale represents spirituality as a universal source of motivation. Psychometric evidence for this argument is demonstrated when scores on the scale remain reliable and structurally valid across cultures and religious contexts. The psychometric qualities of the ASPIRES Scale was examined within a diverse religious sample from Sri Lanka. The results demonstrated the structural validity and applicability of the measure within this ethnic group. The data provided further support for cross-cultural applicability of the instrument and for the assumption of spirituality as a universal aspect of the human experience.

Keywords: ASPIRES, Spiritual Transcendence Scale, religiosity index, cross-cultural, reliability, factor structure.

It has long been noted that most scales that measure spiritual and religious constructs reflect a mostly Christian-based theological perspective (Gorsuch, 1984; Hall, Tisdale, & Brokaw, 1994). As Piedmont and Leach (2002) have noted, the lack of theological pluralism negatively impacts the field in two ways. First, it restricts the field’s ability to identify the full value of spiritual/religious constructs by identifying their core, universal elements. Second, such narrowly defined constructs compromise our ability to develop comprehensive models of spiritual development and experience that have both practical significance and ecological validity. One way to counter this conceptual myopia is to actively include other cultures and religious traditions in the research process. There are two ways that this can be done.

The first approach is to use “emic” techniques to develop new measures of spirituality that are reflective of specific cultural and religious contexts. Moberg (2002) has argued that spirituality is best measured...
through religion and ideology-specific assessments. The result is a family of measures that each captures the specific (unique) aspects of each culture and faith tradition. Although this approach may provide great specificity within very circumscribed contexts, it does not address the more important issue of identifying those universal elements of spirituality that underlie all numinous experiences. It also forces researchers to develop scales for each new context encountered. This can be a time-consuming endeavor that may not always allow for the development of a cumulative information base.

The second approach to creating theological pluralism is to use “etic” approaches in the examination of spiritual constructs. The etic approach attempts to determine the extent to which the constructs of one culture or religious tradition can be fruitfully applied to understanding behavior in another context. The value of this approach is that it attempts to identify universal qualities that motivate human behavior. Rather than focusing on what is unique, the etic approach instead seeks to identify what is common. Examining spiritual and religious constructs originating from Western and/or Christian perspectives across diverse cultures and religious contexts helps to determine the ultimate value of these measures. Demonstrating the constructs from a Judeo-Christian approach have relevance and predictive value for understanding the experiences and behaviors of those from other religious groups helps to enhance conceptual diversity and pluralism in current measures of spirituality.

The Assessment of Spirituality and Religious Sentiments (ASPIRES) Scale (Piedmont, 2004a) was developed explicitly to identify those fundamental, motivational aspects of spirituality that underlie all religious traditions. The ASPIRES provides very specific operationalizations for the constructs of religiosity and spirituality. The former is defined as a sentiment, an emotional tendency that develops out of social traditions and educational experiences. Thus, the extent to which one is involved in the rituals and practices associated with a particular faith tradition is a function of what has been learned and valued in a social context. The ASPIRES has two scales that capture these religious sentiments: Religious Involvement, an 8-item measure that queries the extent to which an individual is involved in ritual practices and feels that these values are important in his or her life; and Religious Crisis, a 4-item scale that measures the extent to which someone feels they are isolated from the God of their understanding and their religious community. The Spiritual Transcendence Scale (STS) was designed to capture the universal,