

Article

Psychometric Characteristics of Croatian Version of the Daily Spiritual Experience Scale

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Abstract: Background: The Daily Spiritual Experience Scale (DSES) has been developed through extensive and qualitative research. Numerous studies have confirmed the reliability and validity of the DSES among different populations. Most of the studies have shown association of the DSES with physical and psychological well-being. Purpose: The current study aimed to evaluate the psychometric properties of the DSES in the Croatian population. Method: The 16-item scale was translated through standard translation/back-translation procedures. The scale was afterwards applied to a sample of 535 test subjects (49% men and 51% women), mean age 42.6 years. Results: The coefficient of reliability (Cronbach alpha = 0.945) is very high. The coefficients of discriminant validity were satisfactory for 15 items, whereas only one item (14) has a coefficient of less than 0.30. The factor analysis after oblique rotation resulted in two related factors: the relationship with God and relationship with others. Using these two factors explained the 66.1% of the variance. Conclusion: Based on the data, it can be concluded that DSES has satisfactory psychometric characteristics and can be applied to the Croatian population, but its correlation with other religious and non-religious constructs should be verified in further research.

Keywords: spirituality; spiritual experience; daily spiritual experiences scale; psychometric characteristics; Croatian

1. Introduction

Every religion, whether monotheistic, polytheistic or most primitive animistic, has its religious dogma, its rites, prayers and spirituality. There is no religion or man without spirituality, at least in the broad sense of the word, regardless of which belief he belongs to [1].

Spiritual experience can be analyzed as a specific set of feelings, processes, or effects that occur in people in specific situations.

The contemporary use of the word “spirituality” is sometimes vague and difficult to define, because it is increasingly detached from religious traditions. Despite it being vague, it is possible to suggest that the word “spirituality” refers to the deepest values and meanings by which people seek to live. In other words, “spirituality” implies, a vision of the human spirit and what will aid it in meeting its full potential [2]. Through humanism, values and morals, spirituality is distinguished from all other things by its connection to the sacred and transcendent. The transcendent is that which is outside of the individual and yet also within them. Spirituality is intimately connected to the supernatural and religion, although it also extends beyond religion. Spirituality includes a search for the transcendent, and so involves traveling along the path that leads from staunch non-belief, questioning, belief, devotion and finally to surrender [3]. Connectedness with the transcendent includes seeking unity with the “sacred”, an Ultimate Reality, a higher power, or God. Connectedness with one’s self is expressed in several ways such as authenticity, sense of wholeness, meaningful identity, self-knowledge, and among other things, the ability to draw from one’s inner strengths. Connectedness with others and with nature is related to a sense of community, compassion, altruism, caring, gratitude and wonder [4]. Generally, spirituality is thought of as having to do with how people think, feel, act, or interrelate in their efforts to find, conserve, and if necessary, transform the sacred in their lives [5]. Spirituality can be understood as a search for the sacred, a process through which people seek to discover, hold on to, and, when necessary, transform whatever they hold sacred in their lives [6]. Spirituality can be defined broadly as the aspect of humanity that refers to the way individuals seek and express meaning and purpose, and the way they experience their connectedness to the moment, to one’s self, to others, to nature, and to the significant or sacred [7].

Experience is the process of receiving perceptual, mnemonic, introspective or testimonial information, based on which human perceptions, beliefs and knowledge about consciousness are formed [8]. In the psychological sense, the word experience can be described as direct experience. Just experienced. It is identified as the knowledge acquired from such direct exposure. Finally, experience indicates the totality of an individual, everything gained in everyday life, in direct contact with reality [9]. Experience in one hand represents the action and life as it is concretely realized and on the other hand indicates what man has gained thanks to his own abilities. In this sense, experience means a finding that does not stem primarily from discursive thought, but from the fact that we have some impression or experience directly experienced. From a cognitive point of view experience is a sort of

open subject that perceives something about a worldly or transcendent fact. Experience of the transcendent is always richer than any attempt to find an expression for it. From the theological point of view, the term “experience” can be applied to personal contact with God [10].

Spiritual experience is a complex concept and demanding subject, not only because of its depth, but also because of multiple views with which one can observe. Content of spiritual experience is a reality that in its transcendence or the ineffable person can see as the foundation, center and purpose of existence. Daily spiritual experience can be defined as the relationship of personal perceptions and emotions with the transcendent in everyday life.

LG Underwood has developed a Daily Spiritual Experience Scale (DSES) (Appendix A1) through extensive qualitative research [11]. Numerous studies conducted in different populations have confirmed the reliability and validity of the DSES [12].

The DSES has been used in more than 200 studies, and most of them examined the association of the DSES with physical health outcomes and psychological well-being. The DSES is negatively related to measures of psychosocial stress, anxiety and depression, while positively correlated with assessments of optimism, perceived social support and satisfaction in life [13]. The goal of the DSES is to estimate the person’s sense of interaction with that which they believe is transcendent in everyday life. The other purpose of DSES was to obtain a measure of various qualities of the spiritual life as it plays out in the experiences and emotional details of daily life [11]. The DSES does not measure someone’s inner beliefs or certain behaviors, but rather tries to assess the personal spiritual experience of the individual. As such, the scale is not tied to any particular religion [14].

2. Methods

2.1. Subjects

The study sample was convenient and has included a total of 535 respondents of which 49% were men and 51% women. The age range was 18–85 years and the mean age was 42.6 years. The largest number of participants, 57.6% were married, 30.7% of them said that they were not married, 5.2% of the participants consisted of widows, 5% were divorced, while 1.5% lived in common-law marriage. Regarding the level of education, 37.6% graduated from high school, 31.4% have a university degree or Masters degree in their profession, while 16.3% have a college degree, that is, they have completed undergraduate studies and have attained a baccalaureate. Furthermore, 8.2% of the participants have not graduated from primary school, while 6.5% of them had finished a master’s degree and/or doctorate. Regarding religion, 95.5% of the participants were of Catholic religion, 1.7% were of other religions (Orthodox or Muslim), while 2.6% of the participants identified themselves as atheists and agnostics. This is approximately true for the entire population in Croatia, since Croatia is still predominantly a Catholic country (at least according to its tradition). When asked to what extent do they consider themselves a religious person, 81.4% responded that they completely or mostly consider themselves to be religious, 12.4% assessed themselves as being moderate, while 6.2% of participants said that they are mostly not or not religious at all.

2.2. The Validation Procedure

After gaining the license from the author of DSES, the scale was translated faithfully through standard translation/back-translation procedures. Involvement of the author of the scale in the back translation process helped confirm construct validity. We noticed that the translated responses (where respondents estimated the frequency of their own individual experiences) on a scale of 6 degrees, in the Croatian language there were no significant mutual differences. In consultation with a psychologist, statistician and the author, we decided to modify some answers. So from the total of 6 replies, 3 remained the same and 3 were modified. “Most days” was replaced with “several times a week”, “Some days” with “a few times a month”, and “Once in a while” with “once a month or less often”. “Many times a day”, “Every day”, and “Never or almost never” remained unchanged.

3. Measures

Data was collected using a socio-demographic questionnaire with general information regarding the participants, such as age, gender, job title, years of service, their own assessment of their financial status, *etc.*, Also included were two questions that were related to religion and religiosity.

The translated Daily Spiritual Experience Scale (DSES) consists of 16 items that describe different spiritual experiences (Appendix A2). The task of the subjects was to assess on a scale of 6 degrees (from many times a day to almost never or never) how frequently they experienced the stated forms. Only the 16th item, which refers to how close participants perceived God, had 4 degrees (from “not close” to “as close as possible”). Therefore, in accordance with the instructions for scoring [13], it had to be recoded so that the lower scores on the DSES, point out the frequency of spiritual experiences. The theoretically possible range of responses was from 16 to 94.

4. Results

The DSES items and their properties.

Means of answers on individual items ranged from 2.02 to 3.37 (Table 1). Testing the normality of distribution using the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test showed that the distribution of items significantly deviates from normal, since most of the participants assessed their spiritual experience more frequent and therefore the distribution of answers to almost all items was positively asymmetric. However, there were no extreme results that would be necessary to exclude from further analysis, as was determined by visual inspection of the distribution.

Table 1. Means (M) and standard deviations (sd) of individual items of the questionnaire are ordered by the size of the arithmetic means.

Item	M	sd
3	3.37	1.421
6	3.00	1.332
8	2.98	1.490
9	2.87	1.496
11	2.87	1.451
2	2.86	1.513

Table 1. *Cont.*

Item	M	sd
1	2.85	1.414
10	2.85	1.362
14	2.77	1.196
15	2.76	1.469
5	2.72	1.406
4	2.69	1.416
7	2.66	1.446
13	2.62	1.085
12	2.47	1.273
16	2.02	0.854

In order to calculate reliability of the DSES, we used the method of internal consistency. The resulting reliability coefficient was very high (Cronbach's alpha = 0.945), which indicates the consistency and stability of measurement and indicates that all items measure the same construct. Cronbach α values for the DSES, in the case where individual items were removed, ranged from 0.938 to 0.950 (Table 2). We also calculated the discriminant validity coefficient, i.e., the correlation of each individual item with total scores of the DSES, which ranged from 0.278 to 0.855 (Table 2).

Table 2. Coefficients of discriminant validity (correlation between the participant's score on the particular item and the total score on the DSES) and reliability coefficients (Cronbach α) for the DSES, if the individual items were deleted.

Item	Correlation	α
1	0.809	0.939
2	0.556	0.945
3	0.770	0.940
4	0.822	0.939
5	0.828	0.939
6	0.632	0.943
7	0.779	0.940
8	0.855	0.938
9	0.845	0.938
10	0.721	0.941
11	0.684	0.942
12	0.749	0.941
13	0.473	0.946
14	0.278	0.950
15	0.723	0.941
16	0.672	0.943

The overall result of the DSES ranged from 16 to 90, with a mean of 44.37 (SD = 16.157), and a median of 40, which indicates a moderate frequency of spiritual experiences in our sample.

5. The Construct Validity

In order to determine the construct validity of the DSES, we conducted an exploratory factor analysis. Eligibility of the correlation matrix for factorization was checked using the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin and Bartlett tests. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measures the statistics showing the proportion of the variability of variables included in the analysis that could be caused by latent factors. The value of 0.946 indicates a high partial correlation, and with the correlation being larger, the matrix was more suitable for analysis. Bartlett's test of sphericity ($\chi^2 = 6391.642$; $df = 120$; $p < 0.01$) shows the difference between our correlation matrix and the identity matrix. This distinguishes our correlation matrix from 0. Since the resulting chi-square is significant at the 1% level we concluded that our matrix is appropriate and that there is no collinearity among the variables and therefore it is justified to continue with further analysis.

We used the method of principal components and according to the Kaiser-Guttman criterion, which says that it is justified to retain only those factors whose characteristic root (the amount of total variance of the manifest variables explained by individual factors) is higher than 1, we had to retain two factors that together account for 66.08% of the variance (Table 3).

Table 3. Total variance explained after the principle components analysis of the 16 items.

Component	The Initial Characteristic Roots			Extracted Sum of Squares		
	Total	% Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% Variance	Cumulative %
1	9.070	56.686	56.686	9.070	56.686	56.686
2	1.503	9.394	66.080	1.503	9.394	66.080
3	0.802	5.010	71.090			
4	0.660	4.124	75.214			
5	0.574	3.589	78.803			
6	0.493	3.082	81.884			
7	0.490	3.063	84.948			
8	0.458	2.865	87.812			
9	0.376	2.350	90.162			
10	0.331	2.072	92.234			
11	0.313	1.954	94.188			
12	0.258	1.616	95.804			
13	0.237	1.483	97.286			
14	0.183	1.144	98.431			
15	0.159	0.992	99.423			
16	0.092	0.577	100.000			

Only items 13 and 14 have higher saturation on the second factor, while the remaining 14 items before rotation were very clearly on the first factor (Table 4). The same happened in previous research [12,14,15] where items 2 and 6 were also found on the second factor and therefore, a two-factor structure was used.

It is interesting to notice that if we would use mild criteria and decide to keep items that have a factor saturation higher than 0.30, only item 14 ("I accept others even when they do things I think are wrong") has a lower saturation than that on the first factor (0.292) (Table 4). It could be that this item

conceals some deeper meaning that involves forgiveness and is a very important part of Christian tradition, which is dominant in Croatia. It could also be that this item is not completely understandable to the participants or that it has different interpretations for different people. All the other items could be kept on the first factor and then without rotation we could have one-factor structure. Further research into participants' understanding of this item is needed.

Table 4. Overview of the factor structure (components) before rotation.

Item	Component	
	1	2
8. God's guidance	0.885	-0.060
9. Direct love of God	0.876	-0.020
5. Comfort	0.868	-0.197
4. Power	0.866	-0.230
1. The presence of God	0.846	-0.101
7. Help of God	0.830	-0.236
3. Joy	0.813	-0.113
12. Gratitude	0.787	0.013
15. Yearning	0.771	-0.140
10. God's love through other	0.760	0.055
16. The closeness with God	0.727	-0.286
11. Esteem beauty	0.714	0.266
6. Deep inner peace	0.669	0.192
2. Connection	0.590	0.383
14. Accepting others when they are wrong	0.292	0.744
13. Selfless care	0.490	0.645

After the oblique rotations (because it is expected that the factors are at least moderately associated, which analysis demonstrated ($r = 0.381$)) with Kaiser normalization and based on the matrix of the form (pattern matrix) containing the regression coefficients of variables on each of the factors [16], which is usually interpreted in oblique rotation [17], in addition to items 13 and 14, the second item was also found on the second factor (Table 5).

Table 5. Overview of the structure of the form (pattern matrix) after oblique rotation.

Item	Component	
	1	2
4. Power	0.932	-0.109
5. Comfort	0.916	-0.073
7. Help of the God	0.901	-0.120
8. God's guidance	0.855	0.077
1. The presence of the God	0.842	0.026
16. The closeness with God	0.834	-0.190
9. Direct love of God	0.825	0.118
3. Joy	0.817	0.008
15. Yearning	0.793	-0.028
12. Gratitude	0.724	0.139

Table 5. Cont.

Item	Component	
	1	2
10. God's love through other	0.675	0.180
11. Esteem beauty	0.515	0.398
6. Deep inner peace	0.514	0.312
14. Accepting others when they are wrong	-0.142	0.842
13. Unselfish concern for others	0.096	0.768
2. Connection	0.336	0.504

Unlike the other 13 remaining items in the DSES, which were directly related to the relationship with God and functions of religiosity/spirituality, the 3 items that are on the second factor are related to the relationship with others as a result of spirituality/religiosity (second: "I experience a connection to all of life"; 13th: "I feel a selfless caring for others"; 14th: "I accept others even when they do things I think are wrong"). Therefore, we decided to keep two factors, but due to the connection between factors, it is reasonable to sum up responses of participants on all items, and get a total score on the DSES.

As the part of the construct validity, we carried out a *t*-test to determine a difference between the sexes in the frequency of spiritual experiences. The *t*-test showed to be significant ($t = 3.19$, $df = 507$, $p < 0.01$), where as theoretically expected, women ($M = 42.14$) reported a somewhat higher frequency of spiritual experiences than men ($M = 46.68$).

6. Criterion Validity

As the criterion variable, we used the 8th question in the socio-demographic questionnaire "To what extent do you consider yourself a religious person?", in which participants were able to respond on a scale from 1 (completely) to 5 (not at all). Correlation between total score on the DSES (the strength of religious beliefs) and the extent to which participants assess themselves to be religious is 0.62 ($p < 0.01$), which is a significant moderate correlation.

7. Discussion

During the validation of the DSES in the Croatian sample we followed all the steps recommended in the literature, retaining comparability with the original scale. The coefficient of reliability (Cronbach $\alpha = 0.945$) was very high, which indicates that each individual item measures the same construct as the whole DSES. The coefficients of discriminant validity were satisfactory for 15 items, whereas only one item (14) had a coefficient of less than 0.30. This indicates a low correlation with the total score of the DSES. Eliminating this item would in a very small extent increase the homogeneity of the whole DSES. In order to examine the construct validity of the DSES, a factor analysis was carried out. After oblique rotation, we obtained two related factors: the relationship with God and the relationship with others. The above mentioned differs from the single-factor structure proposed by the authors. Using these two factors 66.1% of the variance was explained. These two factors are moderately correlated ($r = 0.381$), which may be logical if it is true that a relationship with God

reflects itself in our relationship with others and *vice versa*. Items on the second factor refer to the connection and appreciation of all the living that God has created, caring for people around us and forgiving them, which means accepting others even when we do not agree with them. This is in accordance with the teaching of the Catholic Church. The majority of participants declare themselves to be Catholic (95.5%), while 81.4% of them consider themselves to be completely or mostly religious. It can be argued then, that they are probably trying to live in accordance with God's laws in their relationship with Him, but also in relation with people around them. Although it is possible to calculate a separate result on these two factors, because only three items are included on the second factor (the relationship with others), which undermines its reliability, we consider it to be reasonable to have an overall result on the DSES. Also, further research is needed on the different samples to establish if this two-factor structure is stable, at least in the Croatian context. It would also be interesting to perhaps do qualitative research on content validity of these three items on the second factor to establish how exactly participants understand their meaning because some of the original meaning could be lost in the translation process.

After checking the validity of the criterion considering the general estimate of religiosity of the participants, moderate correlation was obtained ($r = 0.62$; $p < 0.01$). It follows from the above mentioned that the spiritual experiences that DSES examines are a more complex and more comprehensive phenomenon than the general evaluation of religiosity. The theoretically expected difference between the sexes in terms of the slightly greater religiosity of women and a greater frequency of their spiritual experiences was also confirmed. To gain the full psychometric validation of the DSES in the Croatian context, in further research, which is much needed, it would certainly be necessary to correlate DSES to other religious and non-religious measures, such as religiosity, life satisfaction, anxiety, depression and/or stress, and to verify whether there is a connection in the theoretically expected direction. Nevertheless, based on the presented data, we can conclude that DSES has satisfactory psychometric characteristics and that it can be applied to the Croatian population. Hence, we find this research to be a significant contribution to the field of spirituality in Croatia since there is a serious lack of valid psychometric instruments to measure different aspects of spiritual life.

8. Concluding Remarks

To gain the full psychometric validation of the DSES in the Croatian context, in further research, which is much needed, it would certainly be necessary to correlate DSES to other religious and non-religious measures, such as religiosity, life satisfaction, anxiety, depression and/or stress, and to verify whether there is a connection in the theoretically expected direction. Nevertheless, based on the presented data, we can conclude that DSES has satisfactory psychometric characteristics and that it can be applied to the Croatian population. Hence, we find this research to be a significant contribution to the field of spirituality in Croatia since there is a serious lack of valid psychometric instruments to measure different aspects of spiritual life.

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Author Contributions

Željko Rakošec designed the study, participated in the acquisition and interpretation of data and wrote the manuscript. Štefica Mikšić and Brankica Juranić contributed to the design of the study and acquisition of data. Lana Batinić contributed to analyzing and interpretation of data. All authors contributed to the review and revisions of the manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Appendix

Appendix A1. The Daily Spiritual Experience Scale (A).

“The list that follows includes items you may or may not experience. Please consider how often you directly have this experience, and try to disregard whether you feel you should or should not have these experiences. A number of items use the word ‘God.’ If this word is not a comfortable one for you, please substitute another word which calls to mind the divine or holy for you.”

	Many Times a Day	Every Day	Most Days	Some Days	Once in a While	Never or Almost Never
1. I feel God’s presence.						
2. I experience a connection to all of life.						
3. During worship, or at other times when connecting with God, I feel joy which lifts me out of my daily concerns.						
4. I find strength in my religion or spirituality.						
5. I find comfort in my religion or spirituality.						
6. I feel deep inner peace or harmony.						
7. I ask for God’s help in the midst of daily activities.						
8. I feel guided by God in the midst of daily activities.						
9. I feel God’s love for me directly.						
10. I feel God’s love for me through others.						
11. I am spiritually touched by the beauty of creation.						
12. I feel thankful for my blessings.						
13. I feel a selfless caring for others.						
14. I accept others even when they do things I think are wrong.						

15. I desire to be closer to God or in union with the divine.

Appendix A1. The Daily Spiritual Experience Scale (B).

	Not close	Somewhat close	Very close	As close as possible
16. In general, how close do you feel to God?				

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Appendix A2. Croatian translation of the DSES (A).

“Sljedeće tvrdnje odnose se na iskustva koja ste možda imali, a možda i niste. Molimo Vas da razmislite koliko ste često iskusili navedeno i pritom pokušajte zanemariti osjećaj jeste li to trebali iskusiti ili niste. Određeni broj tvrdnji sadrži riječ ‘Bog’. Ukoliko Vam ta riječ ne odgovara, molimo Vas da ju zamijenite riječju koja za Vas predstavlja božansko ili sveto.”

	Mnogo Put Dnevno	Svaki Dan	Nekoliko Put Tjedno	Nekoliko Put Mjesečno	Jednom Mjesečno ili Rjeđe	Gotovo Nikad ili Nikad
1. Osjećam Božju prisutnost.						
2. Osjećam povezanost sa svim živim oko sebe.						
3. Tijekom bogoslužja ili u drugim prigodama kada sam povezan/a s Bogom, osjećam radost koja me izdiže iznad svakidašnjih briga.						
4. Pronalazim snagu u svojoj religiji ili duhovnosti.						
5. Pronalazim utjehu u svojoj religiji ili duhovnosti.						
6. Osjećam duboki unutarnji mir ili sklad.						
7. Tražim Božju pomoć tijekom svakidašnjih aktivnosti.						
8. Osjećam Božje vodstvo tijekom svakodnevnih aktivnosti.						
9. Izravno osjećam Božju ljubav prema meni.						
10. Osjećam Božju ljubav prema meni kroz druge osobe.						
11. Duhovno sam dirnut/a ljepotom stvaranja.						
12. Zahvalan/na sam za svoje blagoslove.						
13. Osjećam nesebičnu brigu za druge.						
14. Prihvaćam druge čak i kada rade stvari koje smatram pogrešnima.						
15. Čeznem za time da budem bliže Bogu ili božanskome.						

Appendix A2. Croatian translation of the DSES (B).

	Nije mi Blizak	Donekle Bliskim	Vrlo Bliskim	Koliko God je Moguće Bliskim
16. Općenito, koliko bliskim doživljavate Boga?				

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