

Editorial

# Measures of Spirituality/Religiosity—Description of Concepts and Validation of Instruments

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Why do we need some more questionnaires to measure aspects of spirituality/religiosity when we already have so many well-trying instruments in use?

One answer is that research in this field is growing and that new research questions continuously do arise. Several of these new questions cannot be easily answered with the instruments designed for previous questions. The field is expanding and, consequently, the research topics.

A further answer is that several of the already established and conceptually very clear instruments are rather ‘exclusive’ as they are specific for distinct groups with circumscribed views and religious orientations. The disadvantage is that they are not inclusive enough to be used for persons with distinct spiritual views or even secular perspectives. To overcome this problem, multidimensional instruments were developed which cover existential, prosocial, religious and non-religious forms of spirituality, hope, peace and trust—and several more. The disadvantage of these ‘inclusive’ instruments is the fact that some are conceptually broad and rather unspecific, but they might be suited quite well for culturally and spiritually diverse populations when the intention is to compare such diverse groups. On the other hand, some of the instruments may be ‘contaminated’ with personality traits and dimensions of mental health and wellbeing, and thus the results might be ‘false positive’ because they do not measure specific aspects of spirituality (with the multiple attempts made so far to define it).

In fact, there is a multitude of definitions, ranging from ‘exclusive’ to ‘inclusive’ definitions. Two statements may exemplify this:

- Spirituality means “the succession of Christ (...) in a life enwrought by the Holy Spirit, which also includes the experience of the world and responsibility for the world” [1].
- Spirituality is “a search for the sacred” [2] and “has to do with the paths people take in their efforts to find, conserve, and transform the sacred in their lives.” [3]

For research it might be unsatisfactory that researchers cannot rely on one consented definition. However, when the points of view are so heterogeneous, we may talk about different spiritualities (plural) which might be relevant for persons (either religious or non-religious). This approach opens the field of research and makes it even more attractive.

Further, we need conceptually plausible instruments for research, but also for practical use in various settings. Maybe there is not one perfect instrument to measure a multifaceted dimension such as spirituality, but several instruments, to cover: (1) the behavioral components of spirituality; (2) the attitude components; and (3) the ‘background’ (the numinous) which is often difficult enough to operationalize and to measure. We also need instruments to measure spiritual coping strategies and spiritual needs on the one hand, and spiritual wellbeing on the other hand, as independent and additional measures. We also need sensitive and intelligent cultural adaptations of established questionnaires in order to acquire data from different societies and cultures. However, we should retain the original items, structure and scaling in order to compare such findings later on.

This is the reason why more research on new instruments is needed as can be found in this Special Issue, and to stimulate a critical debate about their pros and cons.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The author declares no conflict of interest.

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