

Spiritual Health among Schoolchildren in Ireland

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INTRODUCTION

Besides physical, emotional, and social dimensions, spirituality is the fourth domain of health.¹ Access to sources of spiritual health is a basic human right of children,² and has been associated with happiness.³ To the best of our knowledge, no studies in Ireland have assessed children's spiritual health in a standardised fashion. The aim of this study was to test the suitability of the short Spirituality Scale devised specifically for adolescents.¹

METHODOLOGY

The Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) Study is a cross-national collaboration with 47 countries.⁴ To pilot the HBSC questionnaire developed for the 2018 data collection in Ireland, a non-probability sample of three primary and two post-primary schools was investigated. The 8 item Spirituality Scale¹ was administered to students from fifth class to fifth year (n=239). Four domains of spirituality (others, nature, self and transcendent) can be calculated using a five point Likert-type scale. Cronbach alpha values were computed for the total scale and domains. In line with Michaelson et al.'s approach,¹ the proportion of students was calculated for whom spirituality in general (≥ 32) or in specific domains (≥ 8) was important.

RESULTS

In general, all aspects of spirituality seem to be more important for girls than for boys. Differences across ages and classes also indicate that in general, spirituality is gradually less important for older children, however these results must be treated with caution due to the low subsample sizes.

Table 1 - Reliability of the Spiritual Health Total Scale and Factors, and Proportion of those for whom Spirituality is Important (%)

	n	Spiritual Health (full scale) ^a	Spiritual Health domain ^b			
			Others	Self	Nature	Transcendence
Alpha	211	.80	.70	.69	.74	.83
Overall	211	49.3	76.7	80.3	57.5	27.6
Gender						
Boys	98	38.8	67.9	75.5	50.0	23.1
Girls	112	58.9	85.4	85.2	64.8	32.1
Age						
11	24	66.7	90.9	84.4	71.9	52.0
12	56	62.5	81.0	90.3	76.2	32.2
13	28	46.4	75.0	67.9	50.0	11.9
14	42	33.3	70.5	70.5	43.2	20.7
15	29	31.0	68.8	81.3	46.9	23.5
16 or older	32	53.1	72.2	80.0	44.1	27.6
Class						
5th class	29	65.5	87.5	84.6	69.2	53.3
6th class	55	69.1	85.2	91.7	78.7	34.5
1st year	22	31.8	63.6	63.6	40.9	18.2
2nd year	49	34.7	71.2	67.3	46.2	16.3
3rd year	20	30.0	68.2	86.4	40.9	20.0
Tr. year	17	35.3	60.0	68.4	33.3	10.5
5th year	19	57.9	84.2	94.7	57.9	31.6

^a% scoring $\geq 32/40$ for the total scale. ^b% scoring $\geq 8/10$ for individual domains. Cut-off values from Michaelson et al (2016)

CONCLUSIONS

The Spirituality Scale and all domains showed good reliability. Proportions of young people for whom spirituality is important are similar to those of Canadian adolescents, as are gender and age differences.¹ The Spirituality Scale seems to be a valid and suitable measure to assess spiritual health in schoolchildren of Ireland.

REFERENCES

Available on request.

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