

Inside the Creation of the R3 Institute Spiritual Wellness Assessment Scale

Introduction

The R3 Institute Spiritual Wellness Assessment was developed in response to a growing body of evidence demonstrating the significant influence of faith, spirituality, and religious practice on health outcomes. Research across psychology, behavioral science, and epidemiology consistently shows that spiritual engagement is associated with improved addiction recovery, enhanced mental health, greater emotional resilience, and increased longevity. Studies such as David DeSteno's work on spiritual practices and prosociality, as well as findings from the Nurses' Health Study showing reduced mortality among individuals engaged in regular religious practice, highlight spirituality as a measurable protective factor influencing both health span and life span.

Given this evidence, many authors have encouraged clinicians to address spirituality in routine healthcare, much like nutrition, exercise, and sleep, because of its demonstrated impact on well-being. Motivated by these findings, the R3 Institute Spiritual Wellness Assessment was created as a brief, accessible screening tool designed to help clinicians initiate conversations about spirituality, encourage patient introspection, and integrate spiritual wellness into whole-person care.

Purpose of the Instrument

The assessment was designed with four primary goals:

1. **Create an entry point for dialogue** between providers and patients about spirituality, meaning, and purpose.
2. **Foster introspection and curiosity** among patients regarding their spiritual life and how it influences their well-being.
3. **Explore whether different sources of spiritual connection**—God, a higher power, nature, or the universe—are associated with differences in other domains such as peace, resilience, values alignment, and community support.
4. **Assess change over time** and examine whether changes in spiritual wellness correlate with changes in other domains of health, including depression, anxiety, and metabolic wellness.

Conceptual Foundation

The scale is grounded in widely recognized domains of spiritual wellness, including:

- **Transcendent connection**
- **Meaning and purpose**
- **Inner spiritual or reflective practice**
- **Values-based decision-making**
- **Peace and emotional resilience**
- **Community or tradition-based support**

These domains appear consistently in validated spirituality frameworks and reflect universal aspects of spiritual experience. While many individuals experience these domains through a relationship with God, others experience them through nature, meditation, or philosophical belief systems. The scale was intentionally designed to be inclusive while still allowing exploration of how different sources of meaning relate to wellness outcomes.

Item Development Process

The development of the R3 Institute Spiritual Wellness Assessment followed a structured, evidence-informed process:

1. Evidence Review

A comprehensive review of research on spirituality, faith, and health outcomes informed the selection of core domains. Studies demonstrating the impact of spiritual practice on mental health, addiction recovery, resilience, and mortality provided the rationale for creating a clinically relevant screening tool.

2. Identification of Universal Constructs

Domains consistently associated with spiritual well-being were identified across multiple frameworks. These domains served as the foundation for item development.

3. Inclusive Language with Optional Sub-Selections

Items were crafted using broad, neutral language to ensure accessibility across belief systems. Optional sub-selections (e.g., God, higher power, nature, universe) allow respondents to identify their personal source of connection without imposing a specific worldview.

4. Clinical Utility and Brevity

The scale was intentionally limited to six items to ensure ease of use in primary care, behavioral health, and wellness settings. Items were designed to be immediately understandable and to facilitate meaningful conversation.

5. Exploratory and Longitudinal Capacity

Items were structured to allow future analysis of whether the *source* of spiritual connection correlates with outcomes in other domains, and whether changes in spiritual wellness over time correspond with changes in mental health or metabolic wellness.

Item-Domain Alignment

Each item corresponds to a core domain of spiritual wellness:

1. **Connection** *“I feel connected to something larger than myself.”* Optional sub-selections allow respondents to identify whether this connection is rooted in God, a higher power, nature, or the universe.
2. **Meaning and Purpose** *“I find meaning and purpose in my daily life.”* Supports exploration of whether different sources of meaning relate to greater purpose or direction.
3. **Inner Practice** *“I take time to reflect, meditate, or pray in ways that nourish my inner self.”* Captures spiritual disciplines across traditions.
4. **Values Alignment** *“My beliefs and values help me make important life decisions.”* Allows examination of whether different belief systems correlate with stronger decision-making coherence.
5. **Peace and Resilience** *“I experience a sense of peace and calm even in difficult times.”* Enables exploration of whether any particular source of connection—God, nature, universe, higher power—is associated with greater emotional stability.
6. **Community Support** *“I feel supported by a spiritual or faith-based community, tradition, or practice.”* Measures perceived support across religious and non-religious communities.

Response Format and Scoring

The instrument uses a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *Not at all true* to 5 = *Completely true*), producing a total score range of 6–30. Conceptual score categories were defined as:

- **Low Spiritual Wellness (6–12)**
- **Moderate Spiritual Wellness (13–18)**

- **High Spiritual Wellness (19–24)**
- **Very High Spiritual Wellness (25–30)**

These categories reflect increasing levels of connection, meaning, inner practice, values alignment, peace, and community support.

Conclusion

The R3 Institute Spiritual Wellness Assessment was developed as a brief, inclusive, and clinically practical tool grounded in evidence-based research on spirituality and health. Its design supports meaningful dialogue between providers and patients, encourages introspection, and allows exploration of how different sources of spiritual connection—God, a higher power, nature, or the universe—may relate to emotional resilience, meaning, peace, and community support.

Importantly, the instrument was also designed to assess change over time and to explore whether increases in spiritual wellness correspond with improvements in depression, anxiety, and metabolic health. This pre-validation description establishes the conceptual foundation for subsequent psychometric testing and future research examining the relationship between spiritual orientation, mental health, lifestyle behaviors, and overall wellness.

-Allison Hull, DO

© R 3 , 2024-2026, All rights reserved.