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Kelley Pugh

East Tennessee State University

Andrea D. Clements

East Tennessee State University, clements@etsu.edu

Jameson K. Hirsch

East Tennessee State University, hirsch@etsu.edu

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The Surrender to God Scale: Psychometric Validation and Psychological Correlates

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The Surrender to God Scale: Psychometric Validation and Psychological Correlates

Kelley C. Pugh, B.A., Andrea D. Clements, Ph.D., & Jameson K. Hirsch, Ph.D.
 Department of Psychology, East Tennessee State University

ABSTRACT

- Surrender to God (STG), is a construct which quantifies the extent to which an individual willingly relinquishes control to God.
- An STG scale has been developed, yet remains unvalidated, as it relates to psychological constructs.
- Utilizing undergraduate participants ($N=249$), we conducted a psychometric validation of the STG scale, and examined its potential relation with depression, anxiety, stress, and suicide risk.

INTRODUCTION

- Religiosity research has grown exponentially in recent decades, particularly in relation to mental health outcomes (Park et al., 2016).
- Surrender is salient to many major world religions (Kang, 2017), and involves submission to God's will when in conflict with one's own will, and "abandonment to divine providence" (Dyslin, 2008, p. 43).
- The STG scale was developed by Wong-McDonald and Gorsuch (2000); in their study of undergraduate students ($N=121$), surrender emerged as an additional factor of religious coping, from Pargament and colleagues' Religious Problem Solving Measure (1998).
- Since that time, the STG scale has only been used in a limited amount of studies; for instance, Surrender to God is related to reduced stress in high-risk pregnant women and undergraduates (Clements & Ermakova, 2012), and to less worry and intolerance of uncertainty (Knabb et al., 2017).
- Yet, further validation of this scale is warranted, to enhance our understanding of the construct and to support potential future studies examining surrender.
- In addition, surrender's relation to mental health remains unclear; for example, whereas some evidence suggests it may evoke a passive perspective (e.g., learned helplessness, external locus of control), other studies suggest a salubrious effect, as a form of religious coping.

HYPOTHESES

- We hypothesized that the Surrender to God Scale would be unifactorial in nature, and demonstrate sound psychometric properties, such as strong internal reliability, strong discrimination value, convergent validity with measures of intrinsic religiosity and measures emphasizing relationship with God (e.g., daily spiritual experiences, feeling forgiven by God, and coping), and divergent validity (lower correlations) with religious attendance, self-forgiveness, other-forgiveness, gratitude, awe, and wellness behaviors (Silvia et al., 2008).
- We also hypothesized that surrender would be inversely related to depression, anxiety, stress, and suicide risk.

METHOD

Participants:

- Sample:** ($N=249$) college students from a public university in rural Appalachia
- Age:** $M=21.05$, $SD=5.203$
- Sex:** Female ($n=161$, 64.7%)
- Race:** White ($n=194$, 77.9%); Black ($n=29$, 11.6%)
- Affiliation:** Protestant ($n=139$, 55.8%); Other ($n=31$); Unsure ($n=22$); Agnostic ($n=19$); Nonreligious ($n=12$); Catholic ($n=12$); Atheist ($n=8$); Muslim ($n=5$); Jehovah's Witness ($n=1$)

Measures:

- Surrender to God Scale (STGS)
- Religious Attendance
- Brief Multidimensional Measure of Religiousness
 - Daily Spiritual Experiences
 - Forgiveness
 - Religious and Spiritual Coping
- Gratitude Questionnaire
- Dispositional Positive Emotions – Awe Subscale
- Wellness Behaviors Inventory
- Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scales (DASS)
- Suicide Behaviors Questionnaire – Revised (SBQR)

ANALYSES

- Principle Factor Analysis, followed by Confirmatory Factor Analysis (SPSS v24.0)
- Cronbach's internal reliability estimate (alpha; α)
- Discriminant coefficients; determined by independent samples t-tests
- Pearson product-moment correlations

RESULTS

- Factorial: One underlying factor (scree plot and PFA)
- Cronbach's Alpha = .98 (excellent internal reliability)
- Discrimination = High; between upper 1/3 and lower 1/3, with item differences ranging from 2.577-2.830
- Convergent Validity: strong significant positive relation ($r>.60$) to daily spiritual experiences, positive & overall coping, & feeling forgiven by God
- Divergent Validity: (1) significantly positively related, at a moderate level ($r<.50$), to religious attendance, forgiving the self, forgiving others, gratitude and awe; (2) Unrelated to negative coping and wellness behaviors; (3) Inversely related to psychopathology and suicide risk, at $p<.001$ level.

DISCUSSION

- Supporting hypotheses, the STGS was unifactorial, suggesting one true underlying construct (Costello & Osborne, 2005), and demonstrated excellent internal reliability ($\alpha=.98$) (Ponterotto & Ruckdeschel, 2007) and strong discrimination values, categorizing those low and high in surrender.
- Also supporting hypotheses, the STG scale demonstrated convergent validity with measures of intrinsic religiosity; that is, surrender is related to measures assessing a relationship with God, suggesting that, although it is a measure of religious obedience and commitment, the STGS may also evoke aspects of spirituality.
- Finally, supporting hypotheses, the STGS demonstrated divergent validity (Henseler, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2015), evidenced by weakened positive correlations with religious attendance, self- and other-forgiveness, gratitude, and awe.
- Surrender was unrelated to wellness behaviors, which is surprising considering many religions promote stewardship of physical bodies (Hoffman, 1995; Powers, 2013).
- Surrender was also unexpectedly unrelated to negative coping, suggesting that while it may foster positive religious experiences, it may not, necessarily, protect against negative ones (Pargament et al., 2011).
- Regarding depression, anxiety, stress, and suicide risk, surrender may lessen symptoms via the reduction of rumination or worry, facilitated by trust in God's control (Frederick & White, 2015; Knabb et al., 2017), or as a result of doctrinal beliefs regarding suicide or the sanctity of life (Disayavanish & Disayavanish, 2007; Torgler & Schaltegger, 2014).

LIMITATIONS & FUTURE DIRECTIONS

- Our collegiate sample was primarily white and Christian, limiting generalizability; future research with diverse populations is needed.
- A culturally sensitive version of the STGS should be developed (e.g., surrender to deity, surrender to Allah), with items reflecting varied religious doctrines.
- Future research should examine the mechanisms by which surrender is related to mental health and suicide risk.

IMPLICATIONS

- The STGS has strong psychometric qualities, supporting its use in future studies, and our findings highlight the relation between surrender and specific aspects of mental health (Park et al., 2016).
- The cognitive-emotional state of surrender could be leveraged therapeutically, when appropriate, by encouraging spiritual exploration and enhancing appraisals of trust in a higher power (Lovejoy, 2010; Rosequist et al., 2012).

SURRENDER - VALIDITY	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>
Daily Spiritual Experiences	.747	<.001
Positive Coping	.725	<.001
Negative Coping	-.055	.365
Overall Coping	.678	<.001
Forgiven by God	.692	<.001
Forgiveness - Self	.293	<.001
Forgiveness - Others	.238	<.001
Attendance	.485	<.001
Gratitude	.278	<.001
Awe	.224	<.001
Wellness Behaviors	.059	.330

SURRENDER - CORRELATES	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>
Depression	-.347	<.001
Anxiety	-.255	<.001
Stress	-.349	<.001
Suicide Risk	-.319	<.001

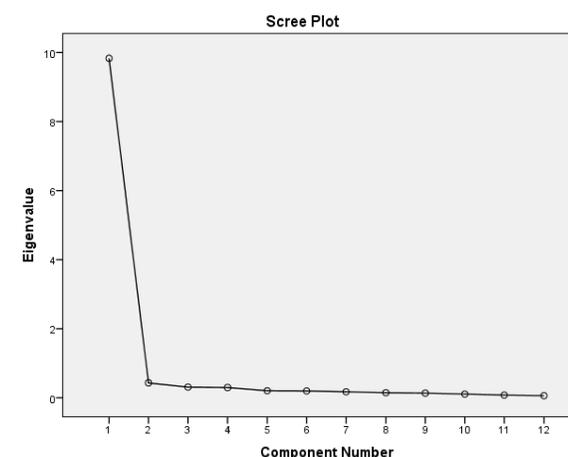


Figure 1. Scree plot for the Surrender Scale. The "crook" of the elbow lands clearly at the second component number, indicating the presence of one factor.