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*“A Vital Christian Presence in Social Work”*

**DEVELOPING A TOOL TO MEASURE SOCIAL WORKERS’  
PERCEPTIONS REGARDING THE EXTENT TO WHICH THEY  
INTEGRATE THEIR SPIRITUALITY IN THE WORKPLACE**

**Rick Chamiec-Case, Ph.D., MSW**

**Presented at:  
NACSW Convention 2007  
March, 2007  
Dallas, TX**

**Developing a Tool to Measure  
Social Workers' Perceptions  
Regarding the Extent to Which They  
Integrate their Spirituality in the  
Workplace**

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Rick Chamiec-Case  
NACSW/Calvin College  
March 10, 2007

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**Research Problem**

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- Although there as been an increasing amount of attention paid to spirituality in social work over the past 15-25 years . . .

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**Research Problem**

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. . . most of this focus has been on direct practice with clients

Social work has paid little attention to the broader topic of spirituality *in the workplace* which also encompasses:

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**Research Problem**

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Non-direct practice aspects of their jobs, such as social worker's:

- relationships with colleagues
- workplace behavior and attitudes
- commitment to the mission and goals of their organizations

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**Research Problem**

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- By contrast, spirituality in the workplace has become a red hot topic in the organizational leadership and management literature

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**Research Problem**

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- Claims abound that spirituality in the workplace is "one of the most significant issues currently faced by work organizations" (Bell & Taylor, 2001, p. A1)

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**Research Problem**

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Many argue that that when workers incorporate their most deeply-felt spiritual beliefs and values in the workplace, it leads to:

- increased motivation, and creativity
- improved job satisfaction and job commitment
- more effective overall work performance

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**Research Problem**

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However, arguments for the benefits of integrating spirituality in the workplace have been primarily at a *conceptual* level - with very little empirical support to back them up

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**Research Problem**

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What might be one explanation for the dearth of empirical research in this area?

- The lack of reliable instruments that measure the integration of spirituality in the workplace

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**Purpose of Study**

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The purpose of this study, therefore, will be to develop and test a scale that measures social workers' perceptions regarding the extent to which they integrate their spirituality in the workplace.

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**Methods**

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The following represents a summary of the multistage research methodology that was utilized to operationalize and develop a measure of this construct . . .

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**Methods**

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1. Review of the results of a literature review and preliminary qualitative research conducted in anticipation of this study

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Methods

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Prior to the qualitative research, an extensive literature review led to the development of a conceptualization that sorted spirituality into 3 functional categories or domains . . . . .

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Methods

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**A. Spirituality Preconditions or Catalysts**

- Describes phenomena that serve as precursors or preconditions for, and/or act as catalysts or tipping points moving persons to actions, behavior, or experiences related to the search for meaning and purpose

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Methods

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**B. Spirituality Actions, Behaviors, or Experiences**

- Describes persons' actions, behavior, or experiences that involve seeking, searching for, connecting with, exploring, or evaluating that which is ultimately meaningful in their lives

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Methods

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**C. Spirituality Outcomes or Consequences**

- Describes personally-meaningful *outcomes or consequences* following from the actions, behavior or experiences related to the search for meaning and purpose

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Methods

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Preliminary qualitative research provided some provisional confirmation of this conceptualization of spirituality in the workplace

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Methods

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2. Conduct a focus group and structured individual interviews to obtain feedback re:

- (a) conceptualization of spirituality
- (b) potential scale items - assist with the generation of an item pool
- (c) working definition of spirituality in the workplace to use for the field test

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Methods

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3. Obtain feedback from a group of expert judges to refine and pare down the item pool generated during the study literature review and the focus group and individual interviews

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Methods

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4. Use the results of the expert judges review to prepare an initial draft of the Integration of Spirituality in the Workplace Scale (ISWS) and blend the ISWS into a larger field test survey that included:

(a) Selected Demographic Questions

- Gender
- Race/ethnicity
- Age
- Religious Affiliation
- Self-perception of Level of Spirituality
- Types of Workplaces
- 9 Additional Variables

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Methods

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(b) Other scales to test convergent, discriminant, and response bias validity of the ISWS

- To Test Convergent Validity: *Inner Life and Meaning at Work Subscales of the Ashmos Duchon Spirituality Scale*
- To Test Discriminant Validity: *Tsahuridu Organisational Anomie Scale*
- To Test Response Bias Validity: *13-item Crowne-Marlowe Social Desirability Scale*

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Methods

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5. Conduct a field test by administering this survey to a sample of social workers

- Recruited primarily by researcher's colleagues with focus on diversity in several identified areas
- On-line and paper copy formats

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Methods

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6. Conduct a second survey within 10-18 days of the initial field test with a selected subset of the initial sample to evaluate test-retest reliability of the ISWS

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Methods

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7. Subject the data collected during the field test to statistical tests to evaluate the reliability of the ISWS

- Internal Consistency (Cronbach's alpha)
- Test-retest Reliability

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Methods

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8. Subject the data collected during the field test to statistical tests to evaluate the criterion-related validity of the ISWS

- Convergent
- Discriminant
- Social Desirability

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Methods

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9. Subject the data collected during the field test to exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to evaluate the construct validity of the ISWS

- Determine the optimum number of items and factors to retain to maximize the validity and reliability of the ISWS

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Methods

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10. Subject a final version of the ISWS and its subscales to statistical tests to determine their:

- Internal Consistency
- Test-retest Reliability
- Convergent and Discriminant Validity
- Response Bias Validity
- Factor Structure

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**Methods**

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11. Conduct bivariate tests of association between ISWS scores and selected socio-demographic variables

- Evaluate the validity and generalizability of the ISWS with respect to variable subgroups
- Explore potential relationships for further investigation in future research studies

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**Results**

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- What did this study find?

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**Results**

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Focus group and individual interviews - feedback re:

- (a) Conceptualization of spirituality
  - Raised questions about usefulness
- (b) Example items
  - Affirmed basic utility of examples items provided
- (c) Working definition of spirituality
  - Questioned use of "God" or reference to deity

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**Results**

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Feedback from expert judges:

- Forty out of 105 items had means of 4.0 or greater (importance)
- Highest rated definition of spirituality in the workplace was adapted for use in the field test survey

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**Results**

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Prepared an initial (35-item) draft of the ISWS

- Five of the 40 items (means > 4.0) were eliminated because of duplication
- Seven (or 20%) of the items were reversed to prevent respondents from rating all items in the same direction
- Final items were placed in random order original

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**Results**

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Blended the ISWS into a larger field test survey, which was administered to a sample of social workers

- Sample demographics
  - 745 respondents in total, out of which 574 met the study criteria
  - Of the 745, 118 did not have social work degrees, and data were missing for 53 respondents

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**Results**

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**Social workers in the sample were mostly:**

- Female (79%)
- Caucasian/White (72%)
- Protestant (identified denomination) - 32%
- Considered themselves spiritual persons (50%)
- Worked for a private, non-profit (36%)
- Had a mean age of 43 (SD = 12.7)
- Had a MSW degree (64%)

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**Results**

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**Sample demographics, continued**

- Social workers in the sample mostly:
  - Worked in child and family services (24%)
  - Believed in a higher power (92%)
  - Considered themselves practitioners (49%)
  - Worked in organizations with more than 500 employees (32%)
  - Lived in a mid-Atlantic or southwestern state (22%)
  - Had been in their position for 8.6 years (SD = 8.4)
  - Did not work for a faith-based organization (69%)

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**Results**

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**Reliability of the 31-item ISWS (after 4 items had been removed from the analysis)**

- Internal consistency
  - Cronbach's alpha: .978
- Test-retest reliability
  - Strong ( $r = .955$ ;  $p = .001$ ) correlation between scores of the ISWS taken by the same respondents 10-18 days apart

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**Results**

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**Criterion-Related Validity of the 31-item ISWS**

- Convergent validity
  - Strong positive correlation ( $r = .81$ ;  $p < .001$ ) between scores on the ISWS and the Inner Life subscale of the Ashmos-Duchon Scale
  - Weaker ( $r = .326$ ) but still significant ( $p < .001$ ) correlation between scores on the ISWS and the Meaning at Work subscale

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**Results**

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**Criterion-Related Validity of the 31-item ISWS**

- Discriminant
  - Small negative correlation ( $r = -.133$ ;  $p = .002$ ) between scores on the ISWS and the Tsahuridu Organisational Anomie scale
- Social desirability
  - No correlation ( $p = .434$ ) between scores on the ISWS and the Crowne-Marlowe Social Desirability scale

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**Results**

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**Exploratory Factor Analysis – Unrotated**

- Evidence re a provisional decision about the number of factors to retain
  - Eigenvalues:
    - First factor: 19.34
    - Second factor : 1.40
    - Third factor: 1.11
  - The amount of variance explained:
    - First factor: 62.37%
    - Second factor : 4.51
    - Third factor: 3.57%
  - Scree plot in Figure 1 appeared to show one major break in the slope of the plot line

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## Results

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- Figure 1: Scree Plot

Scree Plot

Eigenvalue

Component Number

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## Results

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### Exploratory Factor Analysis - Rotated

- Factor Loadings

- Eight items loaded  $>.40$  only on Factor 1
- Five items loaded  $>.40$  only on Factor 2
- Three items loaded  $>.40$  only on Factor 3

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## Results

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### Factor Loadings, Continued

- Each group that loaded on only one factor was examined for a common theme, after which that factor was assigned a name reflecting that theme

- Factor 1 - Spirituality's Support of Persons at Work
- Factor 2 - The Role of Spiritual Beliefs and Values in Integration
- Factor 3 - The Role of Work/Workplace in Integration

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**Results**

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**Factor Loadings, Continued**

- For all of the items that had high loadings (>.40) on multiple factors, an evaluation was made regarding whether that item fit well conceptually with at least one of the factors on which it was highly loaded
- If a good conceptual fit was identified, this item was provisionally added to that factor, after which that factor (with the newly added item) was subjected to inter-item reliability analysis.

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**Results**

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After this factor refinement process, the final ten items for Factor 1 ( $\alpha = .957$ ) were:

- q14 - Positive Attitude
- q21 - Guidance from Greater Source
- q26 - Motivation When Frustrated
- q29 - Harmony or Inner Peace
- q31 - Cope with Difficult Situations
- q32 - Prayers Helps
- Q2 - More Effective
- q20 - Spirituality Energizes Work
- q22 - Spirituality Influences Interactions
- q6 - Help Be Ethical

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**Results**

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After this factor refinement process, the final six items for Factor 2 ( $\alpha = .934$ ) were:

- q1 - True to Myself
- q9 - Choices and Actions
- q10 - Less Effective If Ignore Values
- q13 - Spirituality into Practice
- q17 - Tap Spiritual Beliefs
- q7 - Guide Actions and Decisions

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**Results**

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After this factor refinement process, the final five items for Factor 2 ( $\alpha = .825$ ):

- q33 - Work as Way to Live Out Spirituality
- q5 - Spiritual Growth
- q19 - No Spiritual Activities
- q23 - Do Not Integrate Spiritual Life
- q 18 - Work and Spiritual Path

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**Results**

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Finally, subjected the final 21-item version of the ISWS and its subscales to statistical tests to determine their:

- internal consistency
- test-retest reliability
- convergent validity
- response bias validity
- factor structure

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**Results**

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Reliability of the 21-item ISWS and Its Subscales

- Internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha)
  - ISWS: .967
  - Factor 1: .957
  - Factor 2: .934
  - Factor 3: .826

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**Results**

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Reliability of the 21-item ISWS and Its Subscales

- Test-retest reliability
  - ISWS: .942 ( $p < .001$ )
  - Factor 1: .936 ( $p < .001$ )
  - Factor 2: .919 ( $p < .001$ )
  - Factor 3: .852 ( $p < .001$ )

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**Results**

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Criterion-Related Validity of the 21-item ISWS

- Convergent Validity: Inner Life subscale
  - ISWS: ( $r = .798$ ;  $p < .001$ )
  - Factor 1: ( $r = .628$ ;  $p < .001$ )
  - Factor 2: ( $r = .683$ ;  $p < .001$ )
  - Factor 3: ( $r = .694$ ;  $p < .001$ )

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**Results**

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Criterion-Related Validity of the 21-item ISWS

- Convergent Validity: Meaning at Work subscale
  - ISWS: ( $r = .320$ ;  $p < .001$ )
  - Factor 1: ( $r = .300$ ;  $p < .001$ )
  - Factor 2: ( $r = .221$ ;  $p < .001$ )
  - Factor 3: ( $r = .432$ ;  $p < .001$ )

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**Results**

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Criterion-Related Validity of the 21-item ISWS

- Discriminant Validity
  - ISWS: ( $r = -.128$ ;  $p = .002$ )
  - Factor 1: ( $r = -.114$ ;  $p = .007$ )
  - Factor 2: ( $p = .187$ )
  - Factor 3: ( $r = -.223$ ;  $p < .001$ )

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**Results**

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Criterion-Related Validity of the 21-item ISWS

- Response Bias Validity (all non-significant)
  - ISWS: ( $p = .646$ )
  - Factor 1: ( $p = .229$ )
  - Factor 2: ( $p = .442$ )
  - Factor 3: ( $p = .527$ )

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**Results**

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Exploratory Factor Analysis

- Eigenvalues:
  - First factor: 13.16
  - Second factor : 1.18
  - Third factor: .99
- The amount of variance explained:
  - First factor: 63%
  - Second factor : 5.62%
  - Third factor: 4.69%

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**Results**

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**Bivariate Tests of Association**

- Relationships between ISWS scale scores and nine socio-demographic variables were found to be non significant
  - race/ethnicity
  - work setting
  - field of work
  - education
  - social work degree
  - primary role
  - years in position
  - size of organization
  - state/province

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**Results**

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**Bivariate Tests of Association**

- Relationships between ISWS scale scores and five socio-demographic variables were found to be significant
  - gender
    - average mean for male social workers was 95.43 (SD=23.19); average mean for female social workers was 89.33 (SD=26.25)
  - age
    - weak, positive correlation ( $r = .161$ ;  $p < .001$ ) between ISWS scores and age

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**Results**

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**Bivariate Tests of Association**

- Religious Affiliation
  - Average mean on the ISWS for social workers who were:
    - Protestant: Non-Denominational - 99.81 (SD=18.18)
    - Protestant: Denomination Identified - 97.42 (SD=18.81)
    - Roman Catholic - 87.41 (SD = 25.81)
    - Who were affiliated with religious traditions other than those specified in the survey options - 85.75 (SD=25.88)
    - Have no religious affiliation - 75.57 (SD=34.86)
    - Jewish - 63.33 (SD=33.04)

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**Results**

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**Bivariate Tests of Association**

- Level of Spirituality
  - Average mean for social workers who consider themselves to be *very* spiritual persons was 104.36 (SD=16.75) . . .
  - . . . which was significantly greater than for social workers who consider themselves to be spiritual persons (91.63; SD=21.11), or who consider themselves somewhat/not spiritual persons (57.20; SD=26.53)

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**Results**

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**Bivariate Tests of Association**

- Work for a faith-based organization
  - Average mean for social workers who work for a faith-based organization was 99.48 (SD=19.77) . . .
  - . . . which was significantly greater than the average mean for social workers who do not work for a faith-based organization (85.76; SD=27.70)

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**Discussion**

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**ISWS Reliability**

- The ISWS and its three subscales demonstrated strong:
  - (a) internal consistency
  - (b) test-retest reliability
    - However - retest data was only available for 16% (79 out of 579) of the social work respondents
- This provides solid support that the ISWS is a reliable, stable measure of this study's construct

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**Discussion**

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**Convergent Validity**

- A strong positive correlation between the ISWS and the Inner Life subscale of the Ashmos Duchon Spirituality Scale provided solid evidence for the convergent validity of the ISWS
- Moderate to strong correlations between the Inner Life subscale and the three subscales of the ISWS provided solid evidence for the convergent validity of these three subscales as well

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**Discussion**

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**Convergent Validity**

- Somewhat weaker correlations between the ISWS and the Meaning at Work subscale of the Ashmos Duchon Spirituality Scale provided additional evidence for the convergent validity of the ISWS
- Similar moderate correlations between the Meaning at Work subscale and the three subscales of the ISWS provided additional evidence for the convergent validity of these three subscales as well

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**Discussion**

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**Discriminant Validity**

- A weak, negative correlation between scores on the ISWS and the Tsahuridu Organisational Anomie scale provided some evidence for the discriminant validity of the ISWS
- Similar weak, negative correlations between two of the ISWS subscales (Spirituality's Support of Persons at Work and Role of the Workplace/Work in Integration) provided support for the discriminant validity of these two subscales as well

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**Discussion**

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**Response Bias Validity**

- The absence of a significant correlation between the ISWS (as well as its three subscales) and the Crowne-Marlowe Social Desirability Scale provided evidence that the ISWS was not significantly influenced by social desirability bias

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**Discussion**

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**ISWS Factor Analysis**

- Early goal of unrotated factor analysis: to determine the number of factors to retain
  - Ambiguous evidence
    - Three factors had eigenvalues greater than 1
    - These three factors were required to explain 70% of the variance
    - But - the scree plot only appeared to show one major break in the slope of the plot line (suggesting only one or two factors)

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**Discussion**

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- Evidence about the number of factors remained somewhat ambiguous even after rotated factor analysis and factor refinement
  - Preponderance of variability was explained by Factor 1
  - Factors 2 and 3 had much smaller eigenvalues and accounted for a relatively small percent of the total variance
  - Scree plot only appeared to show one major break in the slope of the plot line

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**Discussion**

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Reasons for deciding in favor of a three-factor solution

- Seven (out of 21) items loaded at > .40 *only* on Factor 2 or 3
- Some of the items that loaded on multiple factors appeared to fit better conceptually with either Factor 2 or 3
- Retaining three factors contributed to a more nuanced scale that is richer in content validity than it would have been if it had retained fewer factors

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**Discussion**

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Evaluation of Proposed Conceptualization of Spirituality

- Study's original conceptualization was only partially confirmed

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**Discussion**

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Factor 1 - seems to combine elements from the original conceptualization's Domain 2 and 3

- Factor 1 emphasizes the support provided by persons' spirituality - including their spiritual actions and behavior - within the workplace setting

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**Discussion**

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Factor 2 is most closely related to the original Domain 1

- Factor 2 emphasizes what a person brings to the workplace that serves as a precondition or catalyst for the integration process - especially his or her spiritual beliefs and values

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**Discussion**

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Factor 3 - Role of the Workplace/Work in Integration does not appear to have been anticipated in the original conceptualization

- Factor 3 emphasizes either the contributions of work to the integration process, or the workplace setting as the locus of persons' integration efforts

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**Discussion**

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- Because this third factor was not originally anticipated, there was no deliberate effort made during the item generation process to identify items that captured this emphasis
  - This could partially explain why this was the factor:
    - (a) on which the fewest items had high loadings
    - (b) that had the lowest item to total correlations
    - (c) that had the lowest Cronbach's alpha

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**Discussion**

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- Yet the fact that this third factor managed to emerge out of items proposed for other domains - despite a lack of attention during the item generation phase - suggests the need for additional investigation of this factor in future research and ISWS validation efforts

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**Discussion**

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Relationships between Socio-Demographic Variables and ISWS Scale Scores

- Results showing non-significant relationships between ISWS scale scores and nine of the demographic variables provided valuable evidence for the validity and generalizability of the ISWS across the various subgroups or categories that comprise these variables

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**Discussion**

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This study found significant relationships between ISWS scale scores and gender, age, religious affiliation, level of spirituality, and working for a faith-based organization

- It will be important in future research to determine whether these relationships reflect meaningful differences among these groups or whether they represent a threat to the validity and generalizability of the ISWS

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**Study Strengths**

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Most of the scholarship in this area has been conceptual rather than empirical in nature.

- This study provided evidence that the ISWS can make a valuable contribution to future *empirical* research on spirituality in the workplace as a valid and reliable measure of this phenomenon

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**Study Strengths**

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2. The primary focus of the spirituality in the workplace literature to date has been on persons working in corporate or for-profit business settings; this study focused on *social workers* in social service organizations

3. The sample size well exceeded the minimum criteria set by most researchers for conducting a factor analysis (10 subjects for every item on the scale being studied)

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**Study Strengths**

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4. This appears to be one of the first empirical studies on spirituality in the workplace that:

- (a) directly evaluated the potential impact of social desirability bias on study results
- (b) assessed test-retest reliability
- (c) explored potential relationships between integrating spirituality in the workplace and a range of socio-demographic variables

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## Study Strengths

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5. Extensive efforts were made throughout this study to recruit participants representing significant diversity in terms of race/ethnicity, religious affiliation and interest in spirituality. As a result, this study had:

- a higher percentage of people of color than the % of members of NASW who are people of color
- a respectable percentage of participants that had no religious affiliation (and the rest represented a comparatively broad array of religious affiliations)
- a respectable number of participants who identified themselves as being only somewhat or not spiritual persons at all

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## Study Limitations

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1. This study used a non-probability sample, which may have contributed to either invitation and/or response bias

- Recruiters more likely to invite persons they felt were interested in/receptive to the topic of spirituality
- Social workers most likely to agree to participate were those with an interest in spirituality in the workplace

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## Study Limitations

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2. Many social workers were recruited by word of mouth or social work listservs with an unknown # of subscribers, so the actual number of persons invited to participate in this study was unknown

- As such, it was not possible to determine the survey response rate and any implications this might have had with regard to response bias

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**Study Limitations**

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3. About 20% of the returned surveys were not included in factor analyses and inter-item reliability analyses because of missing data

- This contributed to a reduction in the sample size for these tests
- *Note: even with this reduction in sample size, there were still more than 10 subjects per ISWS item*

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**Study Limitations**

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Fortunately, less than 2% of the affected surveys were missing responses for more than two items on the 21-item version of the ISWS

- Also, none of the individual items on the ISWS were missing from more than 2% of the surveys.
- As a result, 98% of the surveys could be included in analyses evaluating test-retest reliability, convergent, discriminant, and response bias validity

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**Study Limitations**

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4. Although the study recruited a higher percentage of people of color than is found within the membership NASW, at the same time, social work is disproportionately represented by women who are white/Caucasian

- As a result, the study participants had a large number of Caucasian (72%) woman (79%), who affiliated with an identified Protestant denomination (32%)

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**Study Limitations**

It is possible that this might limit the validity and applicability of the ISWS with regard to social workers who are male, or who represent other ethnic/racial groups and/or religious traditions, an important issue to evaluate in future research

- The fact that the number of men, people of color, and various religious affiliations were fairly substantial bodes well for the prospects of this evaluation

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**Implications for Social Work**

1. Study findings provide evidence that many social workers perceive that they integrate their spirituality and their work

- Social workers have a responsibility to evaluate the implications of such integration on their work, especially regarding valued client outcomes

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**Implications for Social Work**

2. For social service organizations, these findings provide an impetus to seek to understand more about the ways in which social workers' integration of spirituality in the workplace impacts organizational culture, worker effectiveness, and mission fulfillment

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**Implications for Social Work**

3. For social work educators - faculty need to help prepare their students to be aware of spirituality as having an impact, at least for some social workers

- Inclusion in curriculum
- Guided discussion on key themes

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**Implications for Social Work**

4. Findings of this study are potentially meaningful for other fields such as business/management, psychology, sociology, education and religion

- These fields may benefit from using and/or adapting the ISWS to further their research on the integration of spirituality in the workplace

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**Recommendations for Future Research**

1. Replicate this study with an eye toward

- Use a probability sample to determine whether this study's findings would be supported
- Cross-validate this study's findings with groups of social workers particularly interested in spirituality (for example, the Society for Spirituality and Social Work)

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Recommendations for Future Research

2. Future research should analyze the data collected in this study from non-social workers (as well as conduct additional studies) in order to evaluate the reliability and validity of the ISWS with persons in other professions and occupations

- A sizable number of persons who were not social workers (N = 118) participated in the study's field test

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Recommendations for Future Research

3. Qualitative studies exploring a deeper understanding about:

- what social workers *mean* when they say they integrate their spirituality
- *how* social workers integrate their spirituality
- the *quality* of their integration
- the perceived *appropriateness* of their integration
- *why* they integrate their spirituality

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Recommendations for Future Research

4. Future research should use the ISWS to explore potential relationships between the integration of spirituality in the workplace and a variety of variables including:

- job satisfaction
- job longevity
- organizational culture
- worker effectiveness
- Ultimately - client outcomes

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Recommendations for Future Research

5. Concluding, open-ended question yielded the following suggestions:

- Be sensitive to the differences between how some people understand "spirituality" as opposed to "values"
- Be sensitive to the differences between how some people understand "spirituality" as opposed to "religion"

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Recommendations for Future Research

- Ask respondents to define what they mean by spirituality so that they do not feel constrained by the researcher's definition
- Focus on *how* and/or in *what ways* social workers integrate spirituality in the workplace and whether persons' experiences with spirituality in the workplace have been largely positive, negative, or both

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