

Spiritual Assessments

With increased recognition of the importance of spirituality and religion, there has been increased interest in spiritual assessments (Bullis; Canda & Furman; Sherwood, as cited in Hodge, 2001a). Assessment of spirituality is a new and growing area for clinicians in areas such as counseling, social work, psychology, mental health, hospice, and addiction counseling.

According to Kelley (as cited in Standard et al., 2000), spiritual assessments are useful to practitioners in diagnosis and treatment planning. These spiritual assessments also constitute a critical element of the strengths-based perspective, and enable social workers to tap clients' spiritual strengths (Ronnau & Poertner, as cited in Hodge, 2005). Hodge notes that spiritual assessments provide practitioners an "interpretative framework for eliciting and synthesizing the full potentiality of strengths extant in clients' spiritual lives" (Hodge, 2001b, p. 203).

Spiritual assessments benefit clients by helping them with self understanding and exploration, and assists them in adjusting their perspectives required for planning and making decisions (Standard et al., 2000). Northcut (2000) notes that "the act of taking a religious or spiritual history can validate religion as an important part of the client's life and may identify it as a potential coping resource (p. 161). Simply expressing the stories that emphasize their spiritual strengths is, of itself, an effective intervention (Hodge, 2001b). It is significant to note that some spiritual assessments are also effective as interventions (Hodge, 2005).

Performing spiritual assessments

Richards and Bergin (as cited in Standard et al., 2000) offer five reasons for including spiritual assessment:

1. Better understand client's worldview and spiritual orientation
2. Determine if religious orientation is healthy and its impact on presenting problems and disturbances
3. Determine if client's spiritual beliefs and faith-community can be a source of help
4. Establish which spiritual interventions are helpful
5. Decide if client's problems are related to spiritual issues and if these issues should be addressed in treatment.

Brief spiritual assessment

Len Sperry, M.D. (2001) contends that a brief spiritual assessment should be performed on all clients, "because of demonstrated health consequences of religiosity and spirituality" (Gorsuch & Miller; Matthews, as cited in Sperry, p. 111).

Four simple questions can be used:

1. Is religion or spirituality important to you?
2. Do your religious or spiritual beliefs influence the way you look at your problems and the way you think about your health?
3. Are you a part of a religious or spiritual community?
4. Would you like me to address your religious or spiritual beliefs and practices with you? (Matthews, as cited in Sperry, pp. 111,112).

If clients answer no to the first question, it could be valuable to find out if the clients had *ever* found religion or spirituality important to them. Apparently the rejection of religion is associated with higher rates of substance-

related disorders and a decline in self-satisfaction and happiness. Sperry (2001) notes “this information may be a useful prognostic indicator” (p. 112).

Indications for full spiritual assessment

Indicators for a full spiritual assessment are when: 1) “client declares that religious/spiritual issues are important in his or her life; 2) a spiritual issue or concern is evident in the presenting complaint; 3) the clinical issue involves morality and guilt; or 4) persistent concern regarding meaning or purpose in life are noted” (Sperry, 2001, p. 112). Other reasons may be when there are indications of religious abuse present or when somebody uses religion to control the client.

Elements of a full spiritual assessment

Many professionals have described the content of a full spiritual assessment (Bullis; Gorsuch & Miller; Josephson, Larson & Juthani; Richards & Bergin, as cited in Sperry, 2001). Here are some minimum suggestions:

1. Detailed spiritual history including developmental factors relevant to religious and spiritual development
2. Involvement in a spiritual and religious community and the extent of social and spiritual support
3. Client’s God representation
4. Role of prayer and meditation in the client’s life
5. Place of other spiritual practices and rituals in the client’s life
6. Specific values and beliefs held by the client (Sperry, p. 112).

For a fuller description of these suggestions see Sperry (2001).

Types of spiritual assessments

Simple assessment instrument

There are a number of spiritual assessment instruments that have been developed. One simple type is to allow the

client to relate his or her spiritual life story in a manner similar to a family history (Hodge, 2001b). Horovitz (2002) suggests a history taking assessment that asks questions about the

- Religious affiliation
- Changes in religious affiliation
- When changes took place and circumstances that around the change
- Level of present involvement in faith-based community
- Type of relationship with spiritual leader, pastor, rabbi, priest, etc.
- Meaningful religious practices
- Kind of relationship with God
- What gives client special strength and meaning
- Involvement of God in their problems
- Feelings of forgiveness from God

following:

Other questions ask about the religious and/or spiritual events, i.e., conversions, spiritual awakenings, transpersonal communion, peak experiences, baptism, confirmation, bar mitzvah, and rites of passages.

Art therapy assessment tool

An interesting assessment tool using art therapy has been offered by Horovitz (2002). Clients are asked to draw, paint or sculpt what God means to them. Then they are asked to explain what they have made and what it means to them, if they have ever witnessed or seen God as delineated in their artwork, and how they feel about their artwork (p. 179).

Note: For considerations and guidelines in evaluating the artwork, see Horovitz (2002) p. 32-34.

Quantitative assessment instrument

Standard et al. (2000) have reviewed the following quantitative instruments:

- 1) Spiritual Assessment Inventory (SAI; Hall & Edwards, 1996)
- 2) The Index of Core Spiritual Experiences (INSPIRIT; Kass, Friedman, Leserman, Zuttermeister, & Benson, 1991)
- 3) Spiritual Well-Being Scale (SWBS; Ellison, 1983)
- 4) Spiritual Health Inventory (SHI; Veach & Chappel, 1992)
- 5) Brown-Peterson Recovery Progress Inventory (B-PRPI; Brown & Peterson, 1991)
- 6) Spirituality Scale (SS; Jagers, Boyking, & Smith)
- 7) Spirituality Assessment Scale (SAS; Howden, 1992).

Sperry (2001) offers a review of the aforementioned SWBS, SHI, and INSPIRIT, as well as the God Image Inventory, the Spiritual Transcendence Scale and the Spiritual Experience Index.

Qualitative assessment instrument

In a review of assessment instruments, Hodge (2001b) observes that “spirituality seems better served by qualitative assessment methods” (p. 204). These instruments tend to be more process oriented and holistic, promoting a collaborative strengths-based atmosphere (Hartman, as cited in Hodge).

He notes that Pruyser’s (1976) (Fichett, as cited in Hodge, 2001b) instrument has received wide support. This assessment tool delineates seven areas for exploration: (1) “‘Awareness of the Holy:’ What does one experience, or hold to be, sacred? (2) ‘Providence:’ How does trust or hope function in client’s life? (3) ‘Faith:’ What does one commit oneself to? (4) ‘Grace or Gratefulness:’ For what is the client thankful? (5) ‘Repentance:’ How does client handle personal transgressions or guilt? (6) ‘Communion:’ Who does client feel connected to? (7) ‘Sense of Vocation:’ What sense of purpose is found in life and work?” (p. 60). Using category-specific questions, clients’ stories are listened to with the idea of

understanding how their narratives relate to the each category.

Hodge (2001b) also presents a new qualitative spiritual assessment tool (The Interpretive Anthropological Framework) with a multi-dimensional framework, using both a narrative framework and an interpretive framework. Recognizing three dimensions of spirituality—communion, conscience, and intuition—this instrument “is designed to evoke a number of empirically based spiritual strengths” (p. 209). These are identified as: relationship with the Ultimate, rituals, participation in faith-based communities, cognitive schemata associated with spiritual belief systems, intuition, and methods for alleviating guilt.

Diagrammatic spiritual assessment instruments

Clinicians may supplement histories with diagrammatic instruments such as spiritual ecomaps, spiritual genograms and spiritual maps to organize the data (Bullis, Hodge, Rey, as cited in Hodge 2001b). Clients and clinicians may construct them together, or a client can construct it as homework. The act of doing the diagram itself may have therapeutic value. Needless to say, each of these need to be explained and permission secured before constructing them.

Spiritual timelines

A spiritual timeline is a simple graph or chart chronologically placing a client’s religious or spiritual experiences. It allows both client and clinician to view a client’s spiritual journey over long period of time, thus placing everything in perspective (Bullis, 1996). Clients are asked to draw a time line of their religious experiences, using an elaborate or simple graph or chart to chronologically depict their beginning spiritual experiences, principle spiritual events, and current experiences. Photos or a collage of pictures or drawings can also be used to supplement the timeline (Bullis, 1996, p. 35).

Spiritual lifemaps

Spiritual lifemaps include much of the same information as a spiritual genogram, but depict it in terms of the spiritual journey the client has traveled. They illustrate the contours of the spiritual journey. They accomplish in geographic analogy what spiritual genograms accomplish in genetic analogy, and can be as varied as those depicting their journeys.

Most maps will include a time line or a space line of their spiritual journey showing important events and places of the journey, such as the client's first communion, confirmation, or bar mitzvah; the "born again" experience; or some other intense and significant spiritual awakening. It also can include photos of significant events and people, mementoes, tokens, or remembrances of the spiritual journey. Clients may begin constructing their maps at some early point in their lives or with a crucial spiritual event.

Practitioners need to have a good supply of media readily available (Horovitz-Darby, as cited in Hodge, 2005). The article gives a list of supplies and details on how to construct lifemaps, and also suggestions on interventions to use after constructing the lifemap.

See article by Hodge (2005) for instructions in constructing lifemaps.

Spiritual eco-maps

Spiritual eco-maps may be useful where more present-focused assessment approaches better suit clients' desires due to the here and now orientation and their relatively rapid construction.

See Hodge (2000a) for information on eco-maps.

Spiritual genograms

Spiritual genograms depict the spiritual heritage of clients. It is a diagram of the important spiritual persons and influences in the client's life, a modified diagrammatic family tree that illustrates the flow of historically rooted patterns through time. It

provides social workers with a tangible graphic representation of complex expressions of spirituality over three generations. It depicts religious affiliations, religious beliefs, spiritual events, notable spiritual relationships, flow of spiritual resources, and spiritual conflicts—persons, places, ideas, and experiences that have formed a client's current spiritual identity or a perceived lack of one (Bullis, 1996, p. 34-35). It is most useful if the genogram indicates how these key persons, ideas, and events have changed, modified, or negated earlier spiritual positions.

It can include spiritual mentors or teachers, significant ideas or passages from sacred writings or other sources, and key events such as conversion or other peak experiences that have shaped the client's spiritual orientation. Spiritual genograms offer an assessment that highlights the spiritual and religious strengths that may exist within clients' families and depicts how these multi-generational dynamics inform current spiritual functioning (Hodge, 2001a, p. 35).

For information on how to construct a spiritual genogram see article by Hodge (2001a).

Concerns

Hodge (2001b) warns that clinicians need to avoid becoming spiritual directors for their clients. "The point of therapy should always remain on marshaling resources to ameliorate the presenting problem" (p. 212). Coholic (2002) says, "My role as a social worker is not spiritual teaching as such, my role is to help them recover" (p. 15). Hodge also recommends clinicians be careful in doing spiritual assessments with clients who are likely to hold widely differing values. For example, "feminists who are strongly committed to an egalitarian family structure should be careful with Muslim families who commonly affirm complementary gender roles" (Smith, as cited in Hodge, 2001b).

Finally, given the sacred nature of spirituality for many clients, it is important to obtain client's consent before exploring the

issue by asking: “Does spirituality feel like something you wish to explore?”

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