This was paper was published in the
International Journal of Children's Spirituality, 11(3):165-177, 2006 as
**Using secondary students' views about influences on their spiritual well-being
to inform pastoral care.**

Author: Dr John W. Fisher

e-mail: j.fisher@ballarat.edu.au)

Brief biography:

John Fisher has worked with schools over the last forty years, during the last 13 of which he has researched the nature of spiritual well-being and factors influencing its nurturance in schools and wider community. John is a qualified pastor and is currently the Research Manager of projects in palliative care, in the Grampians Health Region, Victoria, Australia, where he is extending his studies in quality of life. He is associated with the School of Education, University of Ballarat, and is a part-time teacher.

Abstract

Spiritual well-being is reflected in the quality of relationships that each person has in up to four different domains, namely with self, with others, with the environment and/or with God. This study investigated how secondary students perceived relationships with family, friends, school and church community (including God) impacted on their spiritual well-being. This paper reports the views of 1002 secondary school students aged from 12 to 18 years in Catholic, Christian Community and other non-government schools in Victoria, Australia. ANOVA and multiple regression analyses of students' responses on the Quality Of Life Influences Survey developed in this study, and the Spiritual Health And Life-Orientation Measure, a spiritual well-being questionnaire for secondary students, revealed significant differences in perceptions students held about influences on their spiritual well-being. Findings from this study have implications for pastoral care of young people.

Key words: Spiritual well-being
Secondary students
Quality of life

Using secondary students' views about influences on their spiritual well-being to inform pastoral care.

Introduction

The idea that there are four key domains of spiritual well-being, first proposed by the National Coalition on Aging, Washington DC (NICA, 1975), has been supported recently by studies with primary school pupils (in Hay & Nye, 1998 p.120), with secondary school educators (Fisher, 1999a, 2001), university students (Fisher, 2000) and primary school teachers (Fisher, Francis and Johnson, 2002; Elton-Chalcraft, 2002) and Australian 16-20 year-olds (deSouza et al, 2004). The four key domains refer to four different sets of relationship that people have with Self, Others, Nature and/or with God. Nye's term 'relational consciousness' mirrors Fisher's 'quality of relationships' in each of four domains, which reflect a person's spiritual well-being.

As people embrace each of these different domains to varying extents, depending on their beliefs and world-view, Fisher developed spiritual well-being questionnaires (SWBQs), which help ascertain the relative importance of each domain. The Spiritual Health And Life-Orientation Measure (SHALOM) was initially developed with secondary school students in Victoria (Fisher, 1999b) and validated with secondary school and university students (in Australia, UK and Hong Kong), and nurses (in Australia) (Gomez and Fisher, 2003). SHALOM comprises 20 items, with five in each of four domains of Personal, Communal, Environmental and Transcendental well-being.

Wagener et al. (in Bond, 2003, p.5) 'argued that religious involvement contributed to the development of networks of support ...which had a direct impact on wellbeing'. Mackay (2003) found 'that processes that operate at the family level – including ...family belief systems, especially those based on spiritual or religious values – are important means by which families manage to cope with adversity.' In initial findings from a study on youth spirituality Bond (2004, p.4) reported, 'The importance of significant relationships...cannot be overemphasised.' It is apparent that relationships are an essential ingredient for spiritual well-being (an aspect of quality of life).

A research question for this study was, 'How do young people perceive that relationships in each of four areas, namely home, school, community and Church, provide support, which influences their spiritual well-being? That is, enhance their relationship with Self, Others, Nature and/or with God?'

Fisher's (1999a) study with secondary educators in Victoria showed

parents and families have primary responsibility for young people's spiritual health...[and] the students can progressively take responsibility for the development of their own spiritual well-being. But, they need guidance and nurture to help develop the necessary foundation for this life-long journey. (p. 45).

Another study by Fisher (2001) with chaplains, RE and welfare coordinators showed

All of the secondary school staff expressed high levels of concern for their students' nurturance in the Personal and Communal domains of spiritual well-being. Staff in the Catholic schools expressed consistently high concern ...in each of the four domains. The staff in the Independent schools showed that...although their concerns on the Transcendental/God factor did not differ significantly from staff in Catholic schools, their concerns ...in the other [three] domains were lower than Catholic schools, equating with that of State school staff (page 117).

Davies' (2001) study with Headteachers in UK found

Almost all the respondents (95.1%) felt that [children's spiritual development] was the responsibility of the home. The vast majority also felt that it should also be the responsibility of religious groups such as churches (84.8%)....(73.5%) felt that it should be the responsibility of the school. (page 355).

The Quality Of Life Influences Survey (QOLIS) was developed by considering who, within each of four *categories*, had greatest influence on young people. Twenty two groups of people were selected based on the author's pastoral involvement with students over several decades. The people in each *category* are:

<i>Home:</i>	<i>School:</i>	<i>Community:</i>	<i>Church:</i>
mother	teacher	male friend	youth leader
father	religion teacher	female friend	Sunday/Sabbath
self	school chaplain	sport coach	school teacher
sister	school welfare person	doctor	religious leader
brother	school principal	counsellor	(pastor/priest)
grand-parent	school office staff	musical artist	God

Students were instructed to indicate 'how often does the [each] person help you:

- feel good about yourSelf
- relate to the Natural world around you
- get along well with Other people
- get to know your God better'

Responses were scored: 0 = never 1 = sometimes 2 = most of the time 3 = all of the time.

Methodology

Following ethics approval from the University of Ballarat, further approvals were gained from Directors of Catholic Education Offices, school principals and school Boards, as well as parents and students. A convenience sample of 10 secondary schools agreed to participate in this study, with students in Years 7 to 12 (aged 12 to 18 years) being included.

The survey was completed in religious education classes in each school with 1002 students participating. The students firstly completed the SHALOM spiritual well-being questionnaire, comprised of 20 items with 5-point Likert responses:

Please respond to each of the following items, by circling a number, to show

- a. how important you think each area is for an **ideal** state of **spiritual well-being**, AND
- b. **how you feel** each item reflects your personal experience most of the time.

Each response is graded:

1 = very low **2** = low **3** = moderate **4** = high **5** = very high.

These items are grouped in fives to give measures for four domains of spiritual well-being:

Personal domain of swb

Developing

5. a sense of identity
9. self-awareness
14. joy in life
16. inner peace
18. meaning in life

Communal domain of swb

Developing

1. a love of other people
3. forgiveness toward others
8. trust between individuals
17. respect for others
19. kindness toward other people

Environmental domain of swb

Developing

4. connection with nature
7. awe at a breathtaking view
10. oneness with nature
12. harmony in the environment
20. sense of 'magic' in the environment

Transcendental domain of swb

Developing

2. personal relation with the Divine/God
6. worship of the Creator
11. oneness with God
13. peace with God
15. prayer life

Students also answered demographic questions on gender, age, grade and frequency of attending Church/religious group, with responses *Often*, *Sometimes*, *Never*. They then completed QOLIS, followed by the Revised Junior Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (JEPQR)(Francis, 1996), comprised of 48 items which require Yes or No responses. These 48 items give measures of Extraversion, Neuroticism, Psychoticism and the Lie Scale, designed to detect socially desirable responding. Students also completed the Oxford Happiness Inventory (OHI) comprised of 29 items scored 0-3. The respondent chooses one of four sentences constructed to reflect incremental steps defined as: unhappy or mildly depressed, a low level of happiness, a high level of happiness, and mania (Argyle et al).

Results

Participants

Responses were gathered on SHALOM, QOLIS, JEPQR and OHI from 1002 pupils aged from 12 to 18 years in 10 secondary schools (3 Catholic, 6 Christian Community Schools (CCS), 1 Independent school) in Victoria, Australia during 2002-3.

Catholic secondary schools come under the auspices of Regional Catholic Education Offices. The majority of teachers and parents associated with these schools are adherents, if not members, of the Catholic Church. CCS are low-fee, Christian schools, most of which have been established within the last 25 years by Church groups, or concerned Christians in the community, who constitute boards of management of these independent schools. Staff in these schools are required to be active members of Christian churches. Some of the CCS require at least one parent to be a church member, whereas others have open enrolment policies, but all families must support the Christian ethos of these schools. Other Independent schools in Australia are well-established, higher fee, educational institutions, each with a religious base that provides a Chaplain for the school. They are traditional Church schools, established by Anglican, Baptist, Lutheran, Presbyterian and Uniting Churches, etc. at least 50 years ago. Staff in these schools are expected to support Christian values upon which these schools are based, but staff are not required to be church members. Religious affiliation is not generally an enrolment criterion for these schools, except for children of clergy, who are often offered discount on fees.

Participation rates in the schools ranged from 30 to over 90 per cent (see Table 1 for a summary of participants). Participation rate appeared to be mainly influenced by the extent of visible and verbal support given the project by each principal.

Table 1 Summary of participants

School type	gender	Year level						total
		7	8	9	10	11	12	
Catholic	female	51	42	49	57	50	49	298
	male	19	11	35	18	41	43	167
	total	70	53	84	75	91	92	465
CCS	female	38	23	52	30	23	13	179
	male	39	40	50	21	24	15	189
	total	77	63	102	51	47	28	368
Independent	female	22	19	21	11	10	10	93
	male	17	12	19	7	13	8	76
	total	39	31	40	18	23	18	169
Total		186	147	226	144	161	138	1002
Average age (yrs)	f=m	12.5	13.4	14.4	15.4	16.3	17.4	

All data in this study were analysed by the SPSS for Windows 12.0 statistical package. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) of students' responses on individual items revealed more similarities than differences between schools in each of three school types, namely Catholic, CCS and Independent schools and at junior secondary (Years 7-9) and senior secondary (Years 10-12). For convenience, these three school types and two school levels will be used for comparative purposes although it must be kept in mind that these results are not claimed to be representative of all students in each of these schools.

Levels of Spiritual Well-Being

Table 2 contains the mean scores for the students' responses on SHALOM. ANOVA revealed significant variations: Catholic students were most idealistic as well as reporting highest lived experience in the Personal domain with Independent school students lowest. The Christian students were most idealistic in the Communal domain, but there were no significant differences between any of the school types for the lived experience in this domain. The rank order for both the ideal and feel categories for the Environmental domain went Catholic> Independent> Christian. In the Transcendental domain, the order for both categories went Christian> Catholic>

Independent. On all but the Personal and Communal domains for Independent school students, the ideals were significantly higher than the lived experiences (feels) ($p < .000$).

Table 2 Students' levels of spiritual well-being by school type - SHALOM

category	<i>Personal SWB</i>		<i>Communal SWB</i>		<i>Environmental SWB</i>		<i>Transcendental SWB</i>	
	ideal	feel	ideal	feel	ideal	feel	ideal	feel
School								
Catholic	4.10	3.88	4.22	4.05	3.51	3.24	3.31	2.66
CCS	4.06	3.76	4.33	3.98	2.92	2.77	4.49	3.92
Independent	3.82	3.74	3.99	3.95	3.25	3.07	2.74	2.30
Total	4.04	3.81	4.22	4.01	3.25	3.04	3.65	3.06
ANOVA F=	8.78	3.74	13.04	1.79	43.0	28.1	204.7	210.6
p	<.000	<.05	<.000	ns	<.000	<.000	<.000	<.000

QOLIS

Each item in QOLIS correlates significantly with students' responses on each of the four corresponding domains of spiritual well-being (as measured by SHALOM) (eg influence of yourself relating with Self compared with Personal swb Pearson $r = .245$, $p < .000$, Others with Communal swb $r = .280$, $p < .000$, Nature with Environmental swb, $r = .501$, $p < .000$, God with Transcendental swb $r = .718$, $p < .000$). These results support the idea that quality of relationships in the four areas is important for, and indicators of, students' spiritual well-being.

A full analysis of the influence of all these people on students' relationships is beyond the scope of this paper, so only a summary of most significant influences and/or variations will be included.

Students' views about influences on them relating with Self

Stepwise multiple linear regression analysis was done to determine which key influences on students accounted for variation in Personal spiritual well-being. The results show consistent patterns in students' responses on SHALOM and QOLIS. Variation in Personal spiritual well-being was attributed to self (22%), gender (15%), mothers (10%), teachers (9%), grand-parents (8%), female friends (7%) and God (8%).

Students' views about influences on them relating with Others

Consistent patterns were once again found on students' responses to SHALOM and QOLIS. Stepwise multiple linear regression analysis shows that variance in students' Communal spiritual well-being was attributed to themselves (21%), gender (19%), female friends (14%), mothers (13%), and religion teachers (11%).

Students' views about influences on them relating with Nature

Stepwise multiple linear regression analysis results show that the greatest variation of this aspect of students' spiritual well-being was attributed to self (37%), belonging to Catholic schools (15%), grand-parents (15%) and youth leaders (14%).

Students' views about influences on them relating with God

Stepwise multiple linear regression analysis results show that variance in this aspect of students' spiritual well-being was attributed to self (37%), God (24%), type of school (14%), youth leaders (11%), mothers (9%) and attending religious groups (8%).

Discussion

Personal differences in students accounts for greatest variation in relationships which affect their swb in each of the four domains studied here. There are also differences in the way students relate with themselves and others based on gender. Differences between mothers and grand-parents also account for variance in various domains of swb. Female friends, teachers and

religion teachers have differing effects on students, depending on their gender and type of school, thus their swb. Participation in religious groups, hence youth leaders, significantly influence students' relations with the environment and God. Differences in students' perceived relationship with God account for variance in their personal and transcendental well-being, that is, relationships with self and God. All this shows that there are differences between students' views in different schools, as there are within schools.

Use of students' views for pastoral care

Almost all spiritual well-being measures ask for a single response to each item, eg how does this reflect your view? An advantage of SHALOM is that it asks for two responses, that is, each person's ideal for an item as well as how it is reflected in their lived experience. This means that each person becomes the standard against which they are compared, rather than taking some arbitrary group norm or other externally-imposed standard. The SHALOM instrument can therefore be used to indicate which students have major dissonance between their ideal and lived experience in each of the four domains of spiritual well-being. QOLIS can be used in conjunction with this SWBQ to identify the areas of support, or lack thereof, for students who present with problems in their relationships.

A difference in score of 0.6-0.8 between the ideal and feel categories of well-being yielded statistically significant results for small groups of students, so taking a slightly larger difference of greater than 1.0 should be a useful critical value to investigate dissonance in each factor. Results in Table 3 show that nearly 10 percent of the students have marked dissonance in the Personal domain of spiritual well-being. At junior and senior secondary levels, more Christian school students reveal greater variance between their ideals and how they feel in the Communal domain than students in other schools (who reveal a modest 5 percent with marked variance). There is less dissonance between ideal and feel in the Environmental domain, than in the other three areas. There is marked dissonance on the God-factor at junior secondary level, which is even higher at senior secondary. For one in five students at the junior level and for nearly one in three at the senior level, their lives are not reflecting the beliefs which they express. As each of the schools investigated here had a religious base, this result indicates a move away from the belief system in all of these schools among students as they age.

Table 3. Percentage of students with variance >1.0 between 'ideal' & 'feel' in 4 domains of SWB

	Junior secondary			Senior secondary		
	Christian	Other	Chi-square sig	Christian	Other	Chi-square sig
n	243	313		125	317	
<i>Domain of swb</i>	%	%		%	%	
<i>Personal</i>	8.6	7.7	.175 ns	10.4	7.9	.721 ns
<i>Communal</i>	9.5	5.1	3.98 p=.046	16.0	5.0	14.4 p<.000
<i>Environmental</i>	4.9	8.6	2.82 ns	5.6	11.4	3.83 ns
<i>Transcendental</i>	19.9	21.4	.518 ns	28.0	28.1	.000 ns

As well as these general trends, which can be used to take the spiritual temperature of the schools compared with their ethos, the results can also be used to interpret the situation and needs of individual students.

Case study

For convenience, we will call a 15 year-old girl, who is in Year 10 in a Christian school, Jane. What is Jane's state of spiritual well-being? She holds relatively high ideals for relating with Self and Others (3.8 and 4.0 on scales from 1 to 5). However Jane scored her lived experience in each of these areas at 1.8 (which is between low and very low). Jane reported reasonable levels of support from home and school with very positive feedback about help from friends in relating with both Self and Others, so how could she feel so poorly? The telltale signs are revealed on close inspection of how much influence Jane reports having on herself - only sometimes on Self, Others and God, and never with Nature. With such a low opinion of herself,

and marked differences in scores between the ideal and feel for Self and Others, it is likely that Jane is depressed. Other results support this view, for example, a score of 13/87 on the Oxford Happiness Inventory, with the following subsets - 3/15 for satisfaction in life, 2/18 on self-efficacy, 3/18 on sociability/empathy, 2/18 for positive outlook, 0/9 for well-being, 4/9 for cheerfulness and 1/6 for self-esteem, and with a score of 6/12 on the Psychoticism scale of JEPQR (group mean=2.71).

With the ideal and feel (lived experience) at the lowest possible score for the environment (both at 1.0), it is not surprising that Jane reports negligible help from anyone in relating with Nature.

Neither Jane, nor her family, attends Church, but she indicated that school staff always help her relate with God, and male friends do sometimes and female friends do often. She also said that God sometimes helps her relate with Self, Others and God but never with Nature. It appears that the staff and friends at the Christian school are trying to help Jane relate with God, as indicated by her ideal score (of 4.6/5), but she has not embraced a personal relationship with the Transcendent Other (feel score = 1.2) to such an extent that it assists in any area of her spiritual well-being.

Jane could benefit from a medical or psychological assessment for depression and be helped to build on her positive relationships at home and school to assist her spiritual well-being in the Personal and Communal domains. The school staff would do well to look closely at the impact the ethos of the school is having on Jane's lived experience. Some personal, sensitive and open discussion with this young woman could help her clarify the reasons for the marked dissonance on the God-factor, as well as Personal and Communal well-being.

We must keep in mind that it is a privilege and responsibility to carefully interpret and make judicial use of the innermost thoughts and feelings expressed on these questionnaires, which have been developed to help teachers identify needs and nurture students' spiritual well-being. This study has shown that SHALOM and QOLIS provide a convenient and effective way to identify students' views about their relationships with Self, Others, Nature and God and perceived influences on their spiritual well-being in each of these domains. These instruments are not exhaustive, but they are comprehensive. In the 10-15 minutes that it takes to complete them, we cannot cover every aspect, but they do provide valuable information on key aspects, of relationships which can aid understanding of students' swb and pastoral care of students in our schools.

These instruments can help identify students who have little support with relationships at home, at school, and at church, with themselves and with friends, as well as with God. Besides being an aid to pastoral care of individuals, they can be used as evaluation instruments, helping to gauge influences on students' swb in a whole school, Year levels or groups. They provide a balanced approach to investigating students' spiritual well-being, allowing for differing emphases on each of four domains, to suit the needs in various schools.

Acknowledgement

The author is thankful for the support from students, families and staff in these schools, without which this project would not have been possible.

References

- Argyle, M. &
Bond, S. (2003) Religion in the life and times of generation Y. *Pointers. Bulletin of the Christian Research Association*, 13(4), pp.1-5.
Bond, S. (2004) Me, Me, Me... Me Too! *Pointers. Bulletin of the CRA*, 14(1), pp.1-6.
Davies, G. (2001) The influence of headteachers' backgrounds, experiences and beliefs on their perceptions of the nature of children's spirituality. *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*, 6(3), pp. 341-360.
de Souza, M., Cartwright, P., McGilp, E.J. (2004) The Perceptions of Young People who Live in a Regional City in Australia of their Spiritual Well-being: Implications for Education. *Journal of Youth Studies*. 7(2), pp. 155-172.

- Elton-Chalcraft, S. (2002) Empty wells: how well are we doing at spiritual well-being? *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*, 7(3), pp. 309-328.
- Fisher, J.W. (1999a) Helps to fostering students' spiritual health. *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*, 4(1), pp. 29-49.
- Fisher, J. W. (1999b) *Developing a spiritual health and life-orientation measure for secondary school students*. In Proceedings of University of Ballarat Annual Research Conference, 15 October, pp. 57-63.
- Fisher, J.W. (2000) Tertiary students' career choice and SHALOM. Paper presented at the *International Seminar on Religious Education and Values (ISREV XII)*, Israel, 23-28 July.
- Fisher, J.W. (2001) Comparing levels of spiritual well-being in State, Catholic and Independent schools in Victoria, Australia. *Journal of Beliefs and Values*, 22(1), pp.113-9.
- Fisher, J.W., Francis, L.J. & Johnson, P. (2002) The personal and social correlates of spiritual well-being among primary school teachers. *Pastoral Psychology* 51(1), pp.3-11.
- Francis, L.J. (1996) The development of an abbreviated form of the revised Junior Eysenck Personality Inventory. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 21, pp. 835-844.
- Gomez, R. & Fisher, J.W. (2003) Domains of spiritual well-being and development and validation of the Spiritual Well-Being Questionnaire. *Personality and Individual Differences* 35, pp. 1975-1991.
- Hay, D. & Nye, R. (1998) *The Spirit of the Child* (London, Fount)
- Mackay, R (2003) Family resilience and good child outcomes; an overview of the research literature. *Social Policy Journal of New Zealand*, 20, pp. 98-118.
- NICA (1975) *Spiritual well-being: a definition*. (Athens, Ga., Author)