



A Critique on the Usage of Mosher's Sexual Guilt Scale in Psychology and Psychiatry Researches in Islamic Societies: Cultural Differences in the Meaning of Sexual Guilt

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Abstract

Due to the increasing use of questionnaires as simple and accessible tools to measure psychological constructs it is necessary to evaluate these tools in terms of Cross-Cultural Adaptation. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine the Cross-Cultural Adaptation of the Mosher sexual guilt questionnaire. This research is a descriptive cross-sectional study. The statistical population of the study consisted of all sexual health psychologists who either they were seminary educated (educated at hawzah) or educated abroad. The study sample was selected in a purposeful manner. Each group consisted of 20 experts who they expressed their views on the Items of the Mosher Sex-Guilt scale. Data were analyzed using independent t-test for independent groups. The results showed that there is a significant difference between the seminaries educated specialists and educated abroad specialists. In other words, the thoughts, beliefs, and behaviors that indicate sexual guilt differ between the two groups of professionals. Sexual guilt is a culture-bounded concept. Behavior, thoughts, and beliefs that are considered as sexual guilt in one culture and their existence can harm one's sexual health may be considered acceptable in another culture.

Keywords: *Sexual Guilt; Mosher; Islamic Societies*

Introduction

The use of self-report questionnaires has been increasing rapidly in recent decades. In most cases, these questionnaires are a means, by which constructs that cannot be directly measured, can be evaluated. Constructs are the sum of several features or attributes that are measured and evaluated through specific items or criteria included in the questionnaire and completed by the individual. These questionnaires are often a composite measurement scales (CMS). The composite measurement scale includes several items or questions that are assessing one or more attributes. (Epstein, Miyuki, Santo, Guillemin, 2015). The widespread use of questionnaires and the astonishing speed of design and application of these affordable and low cost tools have made the process of designing or validating questionnaires with less accurate and sensitivity design or validate.

If we want to design a questionnaire in a two-step macro format, the first step is to define the construct and then to formulate the questions to best measure the desired construct and the second step is to evaluate the validity and reliability of the questionnaire to ensure that this tool accurately measures what we intend to measure. (Epstein et al., 2015). If a questionnaire is available in another language, it is better for the researchers to adapt it to their language and cultural requirements and to use the questionnaire after assuring the validity and reliability of the questionnaire, since compiling a questionnaire that needs spending time and cost. (Beaton, Bombardier, Guillemin, Ferraz, 2000). Of course, translating a questionnaire from another language is only true if the measured construct is present in the target culture and the assumed tool can accurately measure and evaluate the construct. (Beaton et al., 2000) Epstein et al. (2015) in their research extracted 31 Cross-Cultural Adaptation (CCA), which differed regarding their special area (expert translation, target group, concepts, etc.) but none were superior. Therefore, one of the most important measures in the use of external questionnaires that we intend to use in one culture and language is its Cross-Cultural Adaptation. The important thing about the Cross-Cultural Adaptation of the questionnaires is that the adaptation can be problematic because one item can have very different meanings in different cultures or even have no meaning at all. Not only such differences are important, but cultures can be so different that one culture's way of thinking is completely different from another culture's. (Jen and Lien, 2010).

It should be noted, however, that there is a clear distinction between translation, adaptation and cross-cultural validity. Translation has been defined as the process of producing a document from the original version to another language, while adaptation is the process of considering any differences between the source culture and the target culture to maintain the consistency of meaning and the concept of measured construct. Cross-cultural validation differs from cultural adaptation. The purpose of cross-cultural validation is to ensure that the new questionnaire has the intended function and has the same characteristics as the original questionnaire and that the original questionnaire is translated in the same way. Adaptation and validation are two separate steps in translating and using questionnaires of other languages. (Epstein et al., 2015).

One of the most widely used and translated questionnaires in English that is the only tool available for measuring the construct of sexual guilt is the Sexual Guilt Questionnaire of Mosher. Searching on reputable Iranian scientific databases such as Iran Doc, Magiran, SID, and Noormags, we can access to several dissertations and articles on sexual sin. (Teimurpour, Mushtaq Bidokhti, & Poorshahbaz, 1390; Mousavi Moghadam, Akbarzadeh, Babanejad, Soleimani, & Khairi Sattar, 1396; Tabibi, Karashki, Modarres Gharavi, and Sayyed Hosseini, 1394; Aman Elahi, Rajabi, and Refahi, 1395). One of the notable points in the mentioned researches is the use of sex guilt questionnaire of Mosher for measuring the construct of sexual guilt. This questionnaire is the only available Persian-language tool for measuring this construct. About 50 years ago, Donald Mosher introduced the initial measures of sexual guilt (1966, 1968). This questionnaire was revised in 1998 by Mosher himself, who has used a revised version of this scale in all Iranian investigations of sexual sin.

Mosher described guilt as an expectation of punishment for violating internal standards or foreseeing future violations. He believed that sexual guilt emotion is one of the barriers to sexual pleasure and arousal and an inhibitory and destructive emotional response (Bybee, 1998). Along with this attitude, research on the construct of sexual guilt is also based on the assumption that sexual guilt is one of the most annoying causes and barriers for sexual pleasure. This perception of guilt has led most psychological research in the field of sexuality to explore the relationship between sexual health threatening factors and sexual guilt feeling.

Anthropological and cross-cultural studies pay particular attention to the cultural differences between the concepts of guilt and shame and acknowledge that shame and guilt have different definitions in different societies and cultures. Shame and guilt are emotions that have different origins and

consequences in different cultures, so instead of trying to understand the universal and comprehensive definition of shame and sin, one should try to integrate cultural differences into this universal definition (Wong & Tsai, 2007). Benedict introduced some terms into the field of anthropological research in 1940, which is very interesting. He cited Japanese culture as a "culture of shame" and American culture as a "culture of sin." Following this turning point in the study of the construct of guilt and shame, various empirical studies have also shown that there are numerous cultural differences in the behavioral evaluation, definition and consequences of shame and guilt (Crystal, Parrott, Okazaki, and Watanabe, 2001; Fischer, Manstead, & Mosquera, 1999; Li, Wang, & Fischer, 2004).

In two ways, Iran has a profound cultural difference with other European and American countries that pioneered the design of psychometric tools and the originators of various psychological theories in the field of sexuality. First, Iran has an Eastern culture due to its location on the ancient Asian continent. Despite the many similarities between different nations and cultures in the sense of emotion and showing excitement, there are also differences. The reason for these differences is that excitement is not simply influenced by biological aspects. For example, in Western individualistic culture, high excitement emotions are more valuable and acceptable than low excitement emotions. But this is the case in Eastern and collectivist cultures (Lim, 2016). Second, Iran has fostered Islamic notions of shame and guilt by accepting the religion of Islam a few centuries ago, that regardless of them, using any instrument for measuring these constructs is wrong.

One of the prominent features of the guilt construct in Islamic culture is its division into two concepts: efficient sense of guilt (healthy or undesirable) and inefficient sense of guilt (unhealthy or desirable). For example, in 2005, a thesis on guilt was developed, in which a questionnaire was designed to examine healthy and unhealthy sense of guilt (Zarrabiha, 2005). Other studies have also done in Iran that approved this division and their results have shown that this notion does not necessarily have a negative relationship with mental health, but in many cases, there is a positive relationship between the two (Mar'ashi, Bavi and Davoodi, 1396). This is, of course, also found in non-Islamic research. For example, Carni, Petrocci, Miglio, Mancini, & Couyoumdjian (2013) research showed that guilt is rooted in one's concern about losing valuable social relationships. Thus, the sense of guilt is used as an incentive for apologizing and trying to compensate for the harm. Also, one study found that people who are prone to guilt are less likely to use alcohol and experience less alcohol-related problems. The results also show that guilt is a form of adaptive negative emotion (Patock-Peckham, Canning, & Leeman, 2018).

Based on the above, the authors believe that the sexual guilt questionnaire is not able to measure the feelings and thoughts of guilt that can damage healthy sex for two reasons. First, the questionnaire considers guilt as a negative emotion. Second, because of the cultural differences between Muslim and non-Muslim societies, the wrong behavior that should determine healthy and unhealthy guilt has not been considered. For example, premarital sex may be accepted as a behavior in Western culture and the sense of guilt is considered pathological, but in Iranian-Islamic culture such relationships are wrong and can hurt the marital life in the future and even feel guilty about premarital relationships without the legal and religious permission may help preserve the marital life. Therefore, the major weakness of the sexual guilt questionnaire of Mosher is that those who have defined it and confirmed its validity do not fit the construct of sexual guilt in its definition in Islamic and Iranian culture. The definition presented by these researchers is more in line with sexual freedom and lack of sexual restriction and not sexual guilt. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct research to explore the various aspects and weaknesses of the Sexual Guilt Questionnaire of Mosher for use in the context of an Eastern and Islamic country so the researchers address these issues. The aim of the present study is to investigate the cultural adaptation of the Mosher sexual guilt questionnaire and its ability to measure sexual guilt in Islamic societies, with an emphasis on Iranian society.

Methodology

The research method is descriptive-cross-sectional. Perhaps this study at first glance may seem like a re-validation or reassessment of the validity of the Mosher's sexual guilt questionnaire, but the purpose of the present study is to examine cultural adaptation, not cross-cultural validity. Regarding the purpose of the present study, the researchers have chosen a specific method to investigate this issue, which is explained below. The study population consisted of all psychologists who had clinical knowledge, skill and experience in the field of sexuality. In this methodological study, purposefully, two groups of researchers, experts and therapists were selected to examine the intercultural adaptation. One group of these scholars were those who were educated in the theological seminary and had higher education in psychology or educational sciences and had scientific knowledge and awareness in the field of sexuality. The second group included scholars who were educated abroad and differed in religious orientation and attitude from the first group. The second group also had higher education in psychology or educational sciences and had scientific knowledge and awareness on sexuality.

After selecting the sample, only items from the questionnaire were given to participants that indicated the sense of unhealthy sexual guilt in the form of the sexual guilt questionnaire of Mosher. This questionnaire is designed to complete 25 unfinished phrases with one of two predefined sentences. One set of these sentences indicates the presence of unhealthy sexual guilt. That is, if one completes the phrases with these sentences, it indicates that the person believes that the behavior is sinful and that he or she has the sense of unhealthy sexual guilt. Therefore, based on the scoring of Mosher's sexual guilt questionnaire, the answers that indicate the sense of unhealthy sexual guilt were extracted by the researchers and included in a separate questionnaire. Participants were then asked to what extent each of these items indicated a sense of unhealthy sexual guilt. The sense of unhealthy guilt is also defined as a person's thoughts, feelings, or behaviors that lead to sexual disorders and sexual problems. According to the approach developed in this questionnaire, none of the items should be considered as a healthy, acceptable feeling, thought, or behavior that would impair one's sexual health. Therefore, the difference in attitudes of individuals towards these items reflects the difference in the definition of sexual guilt and its criteria and rules.

TOOLS

Sexual Guilt Questionnaire of Mosher: One of the most commonly used questionnaires in the evaluation of sexual guilt worldwide and the most used tool for assessing this construct in Iran is the Sexual Guilt Questionnaire of Mosher. The scale is arranged so that one has to complete 25 unfinished phrases with one of the two specified sentences and also declare his agreement to the completed sentence with a 7-point Likert scale. The number 6 is "this is completely true about me" and number 0 is "this is never true about me". The authors did not find any Persian-language scientific databases investigating the psychometric properties of the Persian version of this scale. But Teimurpour et al. (1389) have cited evangelism research on the psychometric properties of the Persian version of this scale as "Investigating the Psychometric Properties of the Persian Version of the Revised Scale of Mosher's Guilt Sense" in which the coefficients of the Cronbach's alpha has been calculated for a sample of 917 students has.

Also, the convergent and discriminant validity of the Persian version of this scale was also evaluated by the judgment of 7 psychologists and Kendall's coefficient of agreement 0/82 has been calculated for it. The convergent and discriminant validity of the Persian version of the revised version of Mosher's guilt sense was calculated and validated through the simultaneous application of the Knowledge and Sexual Attitude Scale and the Mental Health Scale for the subjects.

With regard to the purpose of the present study, the Mosher's Sexual Guilt Questionnaire is as follows:

Masturbation 3- The act is wrong and it causes human ruin. 4. It helps to make people feel comfortable and relaxed.	Lewd jokes in different assemblies 1- It doesn't bother me. 2. It makes me very sad.
Premarital sex 7- Spoils the happiness of couples. 8. Good for me.	Premarital sex 5. Must be allowed. 6. It is false and immoral.
When I see sexual dreams 11- Sometimes I wake up excited. 12. I try to forget them.	Unusual sex acts. 9- They may be interesting. 10- In my opinion they are not interesting.
Hugging and kissing (in the presence of others) 15. Unfortunately, it is accepted. 16- It is suitable for expressing affection.	Lewd jokes in different assemblies 13. They are ugly and nasty. 14. They can be flavored depending on the type.
Sex (sex acts) 19. Good and enjoyable. 20. It should be done after marriage and for reproduction.	Unusual sex acts. 17- Not very unusual. 18. They are not interesting to me.
When we have sex 23. Like all healthy people, I enjoy it. 24. I fight them because I have complete control over my body.	Lewd jokes 21. They are really out of courtesy. 22- They are very funny.
Unusual sex 27- As long as it is against sex, it is okay. 28- They are usually not pleasant because my initial opinion is that they are untrue.	Unusual sex acts. 25- They are unwise and only cause trouble. 26. It depends on how you look at it.
Sex play for a baby 31- It's a kid's game. 32. He gets used to it badly.	Premarital sex 29- In my opinion it should not be. 30- If too much is done, it is not right.
When I have sexual mood 35. I try to suppress it. 36- It is very strong.	Unusual sex 33- They are dangerous for one's health and mental condition. 34. Whoever loves, does, has nothing to do with others.
Premarital sex 39- Helps people adapt. 40- It should not be recommended.	Hugging and kissing 37- Pre-marriage is not a good thing. 38. When love is allowed, it is permissible.
Masturbation 43. That's right (no problem). 44. It's kind of a self-destruction.	Masturbation 41- An act is wrong and it is a sin. 42. It is a natural way to satisfy your sexual desire.
If I had sexual relations 47. I think I felt comfortable. 48. I felt that I was being abused, not affectionate.	Unusual sex acts. 45- Very bad and unthinkable. 46. If both parties are satisfied, there is no point.
	Masturbation 49. That's right (no problem) 50. It should not be done.

Source: Jenda, Louise. Personality tests. Translated by Besharat and Habib Nejad. Aige Publishing, Spring 1388

In the statistics section, some descriptive indicators such as mean and standard deviation were used to show the data status. In the inferential statistics section, independent t-test was used to compare the means of the two groups. SPSS software was used for data analysis.

It should be noted that all legal and ethical permits for administering the questionnaire were obtained from the Ethics Committee of the Shahed University.

RESULTS

Table 1 provides descriptive information on people's attitudes toward sexuality by type of education.

Table 1. Descriptive findings related to participants' attitudes toward the type of education

The standard deviation	Average	number of samples	Type of education
0/405	1/97	20	seminary
0/230	4/26	20	Abroad

As can be seen in Table 1, the mean score of the seminary educated group is 1.97 and the mean score of the abroad educated group is 4.26. In other words, those in the seminary educated group disagree with the idea that questionnaire items, thoughts, beliefs, and behaviors that lead to sexual guilt sense and impair one's sexual health. In contrast, abroad educators agree that questionnaire items, thoughts, beliefs, and behaviors that lead to sexual guilt sense and impair one's sexual health.

Examination of the independent t-test hypotheses for comparing the two groups shows that the assumption of homogeneity of variances using the Levin test is true ($F = 3.277$ and $p > 0.078$). In addition, the normal distribution of the attitude variable on sexual guilt, as measured by the Kolmogorov-Smirnoff test, showed the natural distribution of this variable. The results of independent t-test are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Results of Independent t-Test for Differences of Attitude of Seminary Educated and Abroad Educated towards the Scales of Mosher's Sexual Guilt Questionnaire

Standard deviation difference	difference in averages	Significant level of restraint	Degree of freedom	the amount of t
0/104	2/296-	0/001	20	22/28-

As can be seen in Table 2, there is a significant difference ($P < 0.001$) between the attitudes of the seminary educated persons and the abroad educated persons regarding the items of Mosher's sexual guilt questionnaire. According to Table 1, since the mean scores of the seminary educated group are higher than the average scores of the abroad educated people, it should be said that the seminary educated people disagree with the idea that the items of the questionnaire measures the inefficient sexual guilt.

Discussion and Conclusion

The results of the present study showed that the seminary educated people and abroad educated people do not have the same views on sexual guilt criteria and the attitudes, behaviors, and thoughts that they represent, and this difference in attitude and definition of sexual guilt has a profound relationship with their cultural, educational and belief context. This finding is in line with the results of Brutus, Wu, and Boris, and Gorzalka (2012) who in their study concluded that there are many cross-cultural differences in the various aspects of sexuality of European and East Asian people including sexual knowledge and attitude. Similar findings were obtained in the study by Wu et al. (2011). These researchers found that there was a significant correlation between the dominance of cultures and the sexual desire.

Some research has shown that feeling guilty even in Western cultures is beneficial in reducing some of the health-threatening problems and has a desirable function. For example, a study in the United States (Patock-Peckham, Canning, & Leeman, 2018) found that people who are prone to guilt experience less alcohol and less alcohol-related problems. The researchers went on to say that guilt is a form of adaptation of negative emotion. In Iranian-Islamic culture, guilt seems to have such a place in relation to sexuality, and for experts trained in the socio-cultural context of Iran and having a religious background, guilt is a consistent negative emotion that maintains a person's sexual health, and even a broader perspective, helps maintain family cohesion.

The results of the present study showed that when designing the assessment scales for psychological constructs or when translating and reassessing the validity of foreign questionnaires, it is necessary to pay special attention to the cultural context in which the instrument is used. For example, Ioane (2017) found in his research that translation is a tool for use in Chinese culture because Chinese culture is very different from Western cultures. In other words, every culture and language imposes a different system of thinking. For example, the rigid structure of Chinese culture makes translation almost impossible. He goes on to point out that if concepts are understood and interpreted differently in different cultures, it is necessary to improve the research on psychological tools. This is also completely true about the Iranian culture and the tools used in psychological research. Therefore, considering the significant difference between the concept of sexual guilt in Western culture and Iranian-Islamic culture, it is recommended that scholars pay attention to cultural considerations when using this tool and even similar tools.

Based on the results of the present study, we conclude that cultural adaptation should be considered before using questionnaires developed in other cultures and societies. This is especially important for sexual health issues because sexual issues are very sensitive in Islamic societies and they are highly intertwined with ethical issues, values, and dos and don'ts.

The limitation of the present study is the lack of a well-known methodology for cultural adaptation assessment, which is due to the lack of such an accurate methodology and this gap has caused a wide variation in cultural adaptations. Other limitations of the present study are the use of self-reporting tools and the non-use of more comprehensive methods such as interviewing.

It is suggested that future research on sexual guilt construct or any other psychological construct be used in addition to expert opinions on the meaning and concept of construct and its conformity with the concept of construct in the source culture as well as general public opinion.

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