

Measures of Superstitious Beliefs: A Meta-Analytic Review of Research

Surekha Chukkali, Justine K. James, and Anjali M. Dey

Christ University, Bengaluru

Superstition is a term which is widely used across the globe but, is understood differently by people from different cultures. Superstitious beliefs are challenged by emerging scientific knowledge, and they continue to persist even among advanced societies. In recent years, superstitions are viewed as a belief in luck. The instruments that are available to assess this phenomenon are few and have insufficient psychometric properties. There is a need for developing new standardised measures which explore the complex, conceptual nature of superstitions. A meta-analysis of existing literature was done to explore the existing measures of superstitious beliefs and to examine the relationship between reliability of scales and the various attributes of scales. A literature search was conducted in relevant databases. Suitable transformation procedures for coefficient alpha were used. Meta-regression analysis was done to explore the heterogeneity of data. 41 scales measuring superstitions were analysed. Results indicate that reliability coefficients were from heterogeneous samples. Regression analysis revealed that few characteristics of scales predicted reliability.

Keywords: Superstitions, Luck, Beliefs, Meta-analysis, Reliability, Meta-regression

Superstition has always been a topic of great interest and has enticed researchers and philosophers alike for many years. Even in the present day, it is a widespread phenomenon with the strong presence and shows no signs of fading out (Jahoda, 1968; Kramer & Block, 2008; Vyse, 1997; Sagone & De Caroli, 2014). Apart from the mystery behind the topic, the quest of trying to fit the concept in to a clear box, separating it from paranormal or religious beliefs, it has made research in this area much more arduous. Interest in measuring superstitious beliefs across various groups of people has grown over the years. The individual or collective perspective of superstition was one of the main factors that influenced not only daily activities but also businesses, market economy and even medicine (Block & Kramer, 2009; Lindeman & Saher, 2007).

Scientific investigation of superstitions requires quantifying the phenomenon of superstitions. The availability of a sound instrument to measure superstition is vital for making significant strides in future research. Researchers have used diverse ways of studying superstitions. However, a detailed exploration of

these measures of superstitious beliefs and their measurement properties is lacking.

Over the years, different scales were developed to measure superstition. Many investigators used self-report questionnaires to understand and quantify the phenomenon, but most of these instruments are deficient in high psychometric properties (Gallagher & Lewis, 2001; Tsang, 2004). There are attempts made by few researchers that reviewed existing superstition scales. However, the adequacy of psychometric properties were not examined.

Measuring superstition has proved to be more difficult for varied reasons. The lack in defining the concept rigorously has been one of the significant limitations (Delacroix & Guillard, 2008). Many of the early researchers developed questionnaires and self-reports, but these instruments have an inaccurate understanding of the superstition. There was no consensus among authors about what constituted superstition. Effective empirical research should pay equal importance to conceptualise the construct in a manner, which is rigorous and is widely accepted.