

Spiritual Harm & Abuse Scale - Clinical Screener (SHAS-CS)

Client Name: _____

Date: _____

Instructions: Below you will find a series of statements about potentially harmful experiences you may have had throughout your life in Christian churches or groups (missions organizations, Christian schools, parachurch organizations, etc). Please indicate the extent to which you experienced each across your lifelong church/group experience:

1 = Never, 2 = Once or twice, 3 = Sometimes, 4 = Often, 5 = All the time.

- | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Being expected to consult my pastor/leader before making non-religious decisions | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. Behavior being excessively monitored by my pastor or group members | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. My pastor/leader explicitly claiming to speak on God's behalf | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. Being expected to follow my pastor/leader's personal rules/advice around dating, marriage, and sex | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. Experiencing extreme pressure to take on a role of pastor, missionary, or other spiritual leader | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. Vivid descriptions of Hell, Satan, Demons, or the end of the world being taught to young children | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. Seeing Scripture used to justify physical violence | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8. Terror or horror being used to motivate religious decisions | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 9. Seeing Scripture used to justify abusive parent-child behavior | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 10. Being shunned or ignored by my pastor or group | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 11. Being pressured to forgive an abuser while the abuse was ongoing | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 12. Seeing the leadership or group protecting or elevating abusive individuals | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 13. Being blamed for harm that I suffered, rather than blaming those who harmed me | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 14. My church community abandoning me in a difficult time | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 15. Being denied opportunities to serve because of my gender | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 16. Being treated as "less than" because of my gender | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

The following are internal states that you may have experienced as a result of negative religious experiences. Please indicate the extent to which you experienced each *as a result of negative religious experiences* throughout your life:

1 = Never, 2 = Once or twice, 3 = Sometimes, 4 = Often, 5 = All the time.

17. Feeling isolated	1	2	3	4	5
18. A lack of self-worth	1	2	3	4	5
19. Sadness over the loss of my faith/religious community	1	2	3	4	5
20. Self-hatred or self-loathing	1	2	3	4	5
21. Having trouble navigating life outside my religious community	1	2	3	4	5
22. A lack of spiritual direction or purpose	1	2	3	4	5
23. Anger upon reflecting on negative religious experiences	1	2	3	4	5
24. Personally avoiding religious activities or settings to reduce distressing feelings	1	2	3	4	5
25. Feeling betrayed by God	1	2	3	4	5
26. Feeling as if God harmed me directly	1	2	3	4	5
27. Distrust of God	1	2	3	4	5

Finally, please check all of the following that has ever applied to your experience in Christian churches or groups:

- I was treated as “less than” because of my race or sexual orientation
- I was pressured to stay in an abusive marriage by religious leaders
- I was deterred from seeking mental health care
- I had unwanted sexual experiences in a religious context
- I was taught that I would be risking Hell if I left my particular church
- I was taught to distrust my emotions or intuitions
- Mental or physical problems were interpreted as spiritual or moral weakness
- Love or acceptance was only offered if I performed well enough spiritually/morally
- I was made to feel like I was the crazy one for having doubts or questions
- I developed physical ailments from the stress of conforming to the leader or group’s expectations
- I was “cut off” by more religious family members

Interpretation and Scoring Instructions

The **most straightforward use** of this clinical screener is to look for items that your client endorses that are of therapeutic interest. Some items may be of interest based on other details you know about your client's experiences. Anything endorsed as "often" or "all the time" could also indicate significance. The "critical items" are included because any of these may be of clinical interest, regardless of how commonly they have been experienced.

A second **interpretive option** is to score the full scale and each of the subscales and compare them with the sample norms below ($N = 3,222$). *This sample is not representative* -- it is largely white and Protestant, and more theologically "liberal" than US averages -- but it can nonetheless provide some context for your client's scores. Score ranges are based on means and standard deviations. Below are descriptions of each of these subscales.

Controlling Leadership: Pastors/leaders may be significantly exalted above parishioners and considered to have a "direct line" to God. They may have increased access and control over the daily lives and minutiae of group members.

Embracing Violence: These communities may see violence in many forms as a necessary part of God's plan for the world. They may lack concern about what is appropriate for children in terms of fear, and they may often employ terror and horror to motivate religious commitment or moral behavior.

Maintaining the System: Both leadership and group members tend to act in ways that maintain the status quo. This can take many forms: victim-blaming, shunning, protecting leaders from consequences, social isolation, and more.

Gender Discrimination: Women (usually) can be denied service or involvement opportunities or be discriminated against more broadly. Other types of discrimination were not common enough in this sample for statistical inclusion, but are listed in the "critical items."

Internal Distress: The most common responses to spiritually abusive experiences show up on this scale: depression, anxiety, self-image issues, social isolation, anger, lack of meaning, and more.

Harmful God-image: In essentially all Christian understandings, God is seen as benevolent and loving (at least in theory). For clients scoring high on this scale, God has become the villain of their story in some meaningful way.

Client Scores & Norms

Scale	Score	Low*	Medium*	High*
Full 27-item Scale:		27 - 38	39 - 87	88 - 135
Controlling Leadership (#1-5) :		5 - 6	7 - 16	17 - 25
Embracing Violence (#6-9) :		4 - 5	6 - 14	15 - 20
Maintaining the System (#10-14) :		5 - 6	7 - 15	16 - 25
Gender Discrimination (Female) (#15-16) :		2 - 3	4 - 8	9 - 10
Internal Distress (#17-24) :		8 - 14	15 - 30	31 - 40
Harmful God-image (#25-27) :		3 - 4	5 - 9	10 - 15

*There are no established clinical norms for these values. Low, Medium, and High scores are based on mean and standard deviations in a sample of 3,222 English-speaking Christians and former Christians. Low = less than 1 standard deviation below mean; Medium = between 1 standard deviation below and 1 above the mean; High = more than 1 standard deviation above the mean. This scale is primarily meant to be an aid in therapeutic conversation.