

Members' views and practices concerning the Association for Assessment in Counseling

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Vacc, N., Myers, J.E., Von Steen, P., & Usher, C. (1995). Members' views and practices concerning the Association for Assessment in Counseling. *Measurement and Evaluation in Counseling and Development*, 27(4), 227-238.

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Abstract:

ASSESSMENT IN ACTION

This article reports the results of a survey of 391 Association for Assessment in Counseling (AAC) members concerning the organization's activities; its journal, *Measurement and Evaluation in Counseling Development*; AAC Newsnotes; strategic planning goals; and convention activities.

"The pure and simple truth is rarely pure and never simple."

--Oscar Wilde

Article:

As a profession matures, new issues develop that need to be examined whereas many old ones need continual reexamination. The Association for Assessment in Counseling (AAC) has, over the years, addressed the challenges that lie ahead for the association. In 1984, Vacc edited a special issue of *Measurement and Evaluation in Counseling and Development (MECD)* that focused on past and current issues that concern AAC, and what needs to be done and why. More recently, Thompson (1992) helped to crystalize the current status of measurement and evaluation by examining the issues confronting AAC. With the recent name change from the Association for Measurement and Evaluation in Counseling and Development (AMECD) to the Association for Assessment in Counseling, there is a fresh opportunity to examine AAC practices and plans and to evaluate accepted solutions and resolutions to some new issues. Similar undertakings have been engaged in by the National Council on Measurement in Education (Jaeger & Camp, 1991a, 1991b, 1991c).

To evaluate the "truth" concerning AAC activities, the association's Executive Council authorized a survey to examine members' views and practices. For example, a general assumption seems to exist that AAC members share a common viewpoint on their interest in assessment, measurement, statistics, and research design. Although such commonality may be the case among some members, the presumed similarity is more than likely unwarranted. Therefore, a summary of members' attitudes about issues viewed as important to AAC, its role, and its function would (a) provide a concise means for sharpening the awareness of the membership, the Executive Council, and the editors of *MECD* and *AAC Newsnotes*, and (b) help to determine whether the association is meeting important needs of members. Four general questions with important implications for the association were raised:

1. What are the members' views concerning the association's activities?
2. What are the members' judgments concerning *MECD* and *AAC Newsnotes*?
3. What are the members' attitudes toward the strategic planning goals?
4. What is the level of membership involvement in the association?

METHOD

A mail survey of AAC membership was developed and conducted with the assistance of the AAC Executive Council during the spring of 1992. A random sample of 391 of the 1,331 AMECD members was mailed the questionnaire; 147 responded yielding an overall response rate of 38%. The analysis of data was based on a usable data set of 138 questionnaires. This rate of response compared favorably with another AAC survey conducted by Elmore, Ekstrom, Diamond, and Whittaker (1993) that yielded a 33% return.

Of the 138 respondents, 76 (55%) were men, 53 (38%) were women, 9 (7%) did not indicate sex, 5 (4%) were African American, 3 (2%) were Asian American, 1 (1%) was American Indian, 5 (4%) were Hispanic, 103 (75%) were Caucasian, and 21 (15%) indicated other ethnic backgrounds. A majority (N = 77) of the respondents had been associated with AAC for 6 years or fewer, with 11 indicating that they were new members. Of the respondents, 72 (52%) worked in academic settings (i.e., public school and postsecondary institutions), whereas 53 (38%) worked in practice settings such as hospitals, community centers, research facilities, or private practice. Information about work setting was not provided by 13 (9%) of the respondents. Concerning educational background, 57 (41%) had completed doctoral degrees, 11 (8%) had completed specialist degrees, 55 (40%) held master's degrees, and 4 (3%) held bachelor's degrees.

Respondent demographics are similar to those of the general AAC membership, which are as follows: men (52%), women (48%), African American (6%), Asian American (2%), American Indian (1%), Hispanic (3%), Caucasian (83%), other ethnic background (3%), employed in academic settings (50%), and employed in private/practice settings (43%). Degrees held by AAC members are as follows: 37% doctorate, 4% specialist, 50% master's, and 9% bachelor's.

RESULTS

The results are presented by the survey categories of organizational activities of AAC, MECD, AAC Newsnotes, strategic planning goals, and member involvement in the ACA/AAC national convention. Reported are mean ratings and standard deviations, but interested readers may obtain response frequencies for each item from the senior author. To compare the three independent variables of length of membership (fewer than or equal to 6 years vs. more than 6 years), highest degree (nondoctorate vs. doctorate), and work setting (school/academic vs. agency/private practice) on the 70 survey items, 210 independent t tests were conducted. Use of the Bonferroni correction to adjust the alpha level to determine statistical significance (alpha level/c where c = the number of comparisons) resulted in a Type I error rate of .00071 (.05/70). Because of the severity of this correction rate, the authors used a less restrictive alpha (.005) to determine statistical significance.

Organizational Activities

Respondents rated the organizational activities of AAC using a Likert scale of 1 to 4, with 1 = deemphasize and 4 = strongly emphasize. Table 1 summarizes the mean responses to survey items related to organizational activities of AAC. Items with a mean score of three (3) or more reflect members' beliefs that a moderate to strong emphasis should be placed in that area. Items with the highest mean scores include sponsoring assessment training for members, working with research organizations, providing assessment information to policymakers, monitoring assessment legislation, advocating for assessment concerns with other organizations, and working with state legislators. Only three (11%) of the t test analyses completed for the items in Table I were significant ($p < .005$). Respondents who had been members of AAC for 6 years or fewer were more favorable toward increasing the number and the size of publications than were respondents who had been members for 7 years or more. Respondents with a doctoral degree reported more concern for increasing minority membership in AAC than did respondents without a doctoral degree.

Respondents also indicated yes or no to five items concerning the association's activities. Approximately 65% indicated that AAC should not hold an annual meeting separately from ACA, 73% believe that AAC should hold meetings at ACA state and regional conferences, 80% indicated that AAC should provide workshops and programs at the annual ACA meeting, and 82% and 80%, respectively, supported continuing to publish MECD and AAC Newsnotes.

Publications

Respondents rated their (a) use of and contribution to and (b) satisfaction with characteristics of MECD and AAC Newsnotes, using a scale that ranged from 1 = not satisfied, to 4 = very satisfied. The 10 categories included were editorial policies, timeliness of articles, appropriateness of format, aesthetic qualities, frequency of publication, relevance of content, quality of writing, quality of research, scope of content, and reader friendliness.

MECD journal. Respondents' satisfaction with the journal, their rating of the importance of various editorial concerns, and the frequency with which they use the journal are reported in Table 2 (p. 232). On average, respondents read the journal three times a year or "regularly," used the journal occasionally for scholarly or professional activities, and reported authoring fewer than one publication in the journal.

The respondents' judgment of satisfaction, on average, was 2.85. The areas of greatest satisfaction, from highest to lowest, include editorial policies, appropriateness of format, quality of writing, quality of research, and timeliness of articles. Respondents reported the least satisfaction with reader friendliness, scope of content, relevance of content, and aesthetic qualities. Areas of greatest importance were quality of research, relevance of content, quality of writing, scope of content, timeliness of articles, reader friendliness, and editorial policies. The items rated least important included aesthetic qualities, appropriateness of format, and frequency of publication.

One (1%) of the t tests completed for the items listed in Table 2 was significant. Members with a doctorate were more likely to use MECD in their scholarly and professional pursuits.

AAC Newsnotes. Respondents read this periodical regularly and used it occasionally in scholarly or professional activities. Their responses to other questions concerning Newsnotes are shown in Table 3 (p. 234). The highest satisfaction mean scores (and also lowest standard deviations) were for editorial policies, timeliness of information, and appropriateness of format. The lowest satisfaction ratings were for scope of content, reader interest, and aesthetic qualities. Respondents rated the following items as most important: relevance of content, reader interest, scope of content, and coverage of AAC news events. Items rated lowest in importance were aesthetic qualities, appropriateness of format, editorial policies, and frequency of publication.

Two (3%) of the t-test analyses completed for the items relating to Newsnotes were significant. There were no differences based on years of membership, but differences existed by highest degree completed and by work setting. As Table 3 indicates, persons with a doctoral degree provided a higher rating on how frequently Newsnotes is read. Respondents working in academic settings provided higher ratings on the coverage of AAC news events.

AAC Strategic Planning Goals

Respondents rated the relevance of each of the stated goals of AAC, using a 4-point scale, with 1 = not relevant and 4 = very relevant. The goals were derived from a strategic planning session held at the Executive Council Meeting in October 1991, and were viewed by the AAC Board as appropriate to the association. Evaluated were goals that serve to promote the following:

1. Assessment, evaluation, and research regarding the efficacy of developmental paradigms and approaches for optimizing human potential
2. Concern for human rights as part of all assessment activities
3. Collaboration among assessment organizations and individuals on a national and international scale
4. The organizational structure, membership, management, and necessary resources to fulfill our mission

5. Professional development that enhances the competence of members in assessment, evaluation, and research
6. Standards for assessment as an integral part of the professionalization of counseling and development
7. Public awareness of and support for the use of assessment as an integral part of counseling and development
8. Support for public policy and legislation that enhances the use of assessment in optimizing human potential
9. The advancement of the dissemination of knowledge about assessment in counseling and development

The perceived relevance of the proposed AAC strategic planning goals is shown in Table 4 (p. 236). All nine goals received a mean rating between 3 and 4 on a 4-point scale, with standard deviations ranging between .51 and .85. The goals perceived as most relevant were professional development for assessment competence and promotion of standards for assessment in counseling. The lowest-rated goals were organizational structure, national and international collaboration among assessment organizations, and public policy and legislation that advance assessment usage. There were no significant differences among the goals.

National Conventions

Five items in the survey, which addressed members' involvement in ACA and AAC, focused on attendance at and participation in national conventions. (Because AAC does not have its own national convention, all national meeting activities are held concurrently with ACA's meeting.) Responses to those five items were clearly the most variable of all items in the survey, and 10 (67%) of the t-test analyses yielded significant differences ($p < .005$).

On average, respondents had attended one ACA annual meeting in the last 4 years. Fewer respondents reported having presented a paper or poster session or having participated as a session chair, discussant, or reactor. Respondents seldom attended a content session sponsored by AAC, or an association luncheon, business meeting, or committee meeting.

Persons who had been AAC members for more than 6 years were more likely to have attended an ACA national convention, attended a content session sponsored by AAC, and attended an association luncheon, business meeting, or committee meeting. Persons with doctoral degrees and those working in academic settings also were more likely to have been involved in national meeting activities (see Table 5 on page 237).

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

There are a number of interesting areas for discussion and conjecture related to the results of this survey. Although the reader has undoubtedly drawn some conclusions, our intent is to focus on a few key areas that have relevance for association policy and planning.

According to the survey results, there are no definite recommendations for change in any of AAC's publications. There is, however, a clear mandate to continue publishing both MECD and Newsnotes. Members also indicated that AAC (a) meetings should not be separate from those of ACA, (b) should hold meetings at ACA state and regional meetings, and (c) should sponsor content sessions at state, regional, and national conventions. It seems that AAC members have a loyalty to the parent counseling association, and view the ACA structure as an appropriate one within which to receive continuing education in assessment issues. Overall, the respondents believed that the strategic planning goals of AAC are relevant (see Table 4). Widespread support for the AAC strategic plan was reflected in more than 95% agreement with the mission and identity statements, and the perceived importance of all nine planning goals. The highest-rated goals (i.e., professional development and standards for assessment) are similar to those found by Nejedlo, Hansen, &

Myers (1994). Nejedlo (1989) prepared a survey published in the ACA Guidepost to solicit member input into the strategic planning process. Although only 1% of the ACA membership responded, the sample was representative of the overall ACA membership and thus permitted tentative conclusions to be drawn.

The results of this survey do not indicate a need for a radical revision of the AAC structure, although they suggest that there are differences in member satisfaction--by education level, work setting, and years of membership in AAC. The fewest significant differences were in the work setting category. Differences due to years of membership in AAC may prove to be the greatest challenge. Considering that a majority of the respondents were newer members, perhaps the association's leadership should examine activities in which differences exist and determine what, if anything, the association can do to accommodate newer members.

TABLE 1 Organizational Activities of AAC by Years of Membership, Highest Degree, and Work Setting

Information is presented in the following order: AAC Activity; Mean Emphasis Ratings, Total Sample M; Mean Emphasis Ratings, Total Sample SD; Mean Emphasis Ratings, Total Sample N; Mean Emphasis Ratings, AAC Member <= 6 Years; Mean Emphasis Ratings, AAC Member > 6 Years; Mean Emphasis Ratings, Highest Degree Non-Doctorate; Mean Emphasis Ratings, Highest Degree Doctorate; Mean Emphasis Ratings, Work Setting School/Academic; Mean Emphasis Ratings, Work Setting Agency/Private practice.

Increase number of publications; 2.14; .91; 102; 2.43[*]; 1.77[*]; 2.28; 1.98; 2.11; 2.17

Increase size of publications; 2.54; .92; 123; 2.74[*]; 2.23[*]; 2.44; 2.64; 2.52; 2.53

Sponsor assessment training; 3.40; .77; 134; 3.38; 3.50; 3.41; 3.41; 3.51; 3.32

Increase minority membership; 2.90; .92; 125; 2.65; 3.00; 2.72; 3.12; 2.97; 2.71

Monitor assessment legislation; 3.29; .83; 133; 3.25; 3.49; 3.26; 3.41; 3.31; 3.29

Provide assessment information to policy makers; 3.34; .76; 134; 3.31; 3.49; 3.30; 3.44; 3.27; 3.47

Work with state legislators; 3.20; .82; 136; 3.26; 3.22; 3.23; 3.18; 3.14; 3.25

Advocate for assessment with other organizations; 3.26; .77; 120; 3.26; 3.35; 3.20; 3.33; 3.16; 3.35

Work with research organizations; 3.35; .69; 120; 3.30; 3.44; 3.35; 3.36; 3.35; 3.35

Note. Items were based on the following scale: 4 = strongly emphasize; 3 = moderately emphasize; 2 = minimally emphasize; 1 = deemphasize. AAC = Association for Assessment in Counseling.

* p < .005.

TABLE 2 Satisfaction, Importance, and Use of MECD[a] Journal by Years of Membership, Highest Degree, and Work Setting

Information is presented in the following order: Journal Activity/Content; Total Sample, M; Total Sample, SD; Total Sample, N; AAC Member, <= 6 Years; AAC Member >6 Years; Highest Degree, Non-Doctorate; Highest Degree, Doctorate; Work Setting, School/Academic; Work Setting, Agency/Private Practice.

Mean Rating for Level of Satisfaction

Editorial policies; 3.05; .69; 111; 3.14; 2.95; 3.00; 3.04; 3.10; 3.00

Timeliness of articles; 2.95; .66; 112; 2.94; 3.00; 2.88; 3.04; 2.97; 3.00

Appropriateness of format; 3.04; .70; 126; 3.09; 2.98; 3.03; 3.09; 3.11; 2.92

Aesthetic qualities; 2.73; .81; 114; 2.66; 2.80; 2.65; 2.81; 2.85; 2.57

Frequency of publication; 2.80; .80; 128; 2.72; 2.98; 2.73; 2.91; 2.87; 2.71

Relevance of content; 2.68; .91; 120; 2.79; 2.54; 2.68; 2.63; 2.62; 2.77

Quality of writing; 3.03; .78; 130; 3.13; 2.84; 3.02; 2.95; 3.04; 3.00

Quality of research; 2.99; .70; 116; 3.14; 2.82; 3.04; 2.95; 3.05; 3.00

Scope of content; 2.64; .89; 127; 2.70; 2.51; 2.65; 2.53; 2.63; 2.63

Reader friendliness; 2.59; .90; 116; 2.64; 2.55; 2.54; 2.63; 2.66; 2.51

Mean Rating for Level of Importance

Editorial policies; 3.05; .87; 111; 3.10; 3.02; 2.89; 3.23; 3.20; 2.85

Timeliness of articles; 3.25; .75; 118; 3.36; 3.18; 3.19; 3.38; 3.26; 3.29

Appropriateness of format; 2.79; .78; 119; 2.91; 2.69; 2.84; 2.73; 2.80; 2.79

Aesthetic qualities; 2.55; .81; 119; 2.69; 2.44; 2.66; 2.45; 2.54; 2.63

Frequency of publication; 2.94; .77; 117; 3.02; 2.85; 2.92; 3.00; 3.05; 2.81

Relevance of content; 3.46; .79; 125; 3.45; 3.48; 3.35; 3.61; 3.53; 3.36

Quality of writing; 3.38; .65; 118; 3.44; 3.28; 3.34; 3.42; 3.48; 3.27

Quality of research; 3.62; .62; 123; 3.62; 3.57; 3.62; 3.63; 3.69; 3.50

Scope of content; 3.35; .74; 119; 3.43; 3.26; 3.30; 3.45; 3.48; 3.13

Reader friendliness; 3.09; .92; 124; 3.12; 3.23; 3.17; 3.25; 3.25; 3.08

Mean Frequency for Use

Read MECD; 3.19; 0.89; 121; 3.15; 3.28; 3.06; 3.36; 3.23; 3.19

Use MECD in scholarly or professional activities; 2.40; 1.15; 134; 2.32; 2.70; 2.18; 2.80[*]; 2.49; 2.34

Number of MECD articles authored/coauthored; 0.71; 1.22; 136; 0.47; 1.04; 0.43; 0.89; 0.87; 0.40

Note. Items are based on the following scale: 4 = very satisfied or very important; 3 = satisfied or important; 2 = somewhat satisfied or somewhat important; 1 = not satisfied or not important. The frequency items were based on the following scale: 4 = 4 or more; 3 = 3 or regularly; 2 = 2 or occasionally; 1 = 1 or seldom; 0 = none or never.

a MECD = Measurement and Evaluation in Counseling and Development.

* $p < .005$.

TABLE 3 Satisfaction, Importance, and Use of AAC Newsnotes by Years of Membership, Highest Degree, and Work Setting

Information is presented in the following order: Activity/Content; Total Sample, M; Total Sample, SD; Total Sample, N; ACC Member, ≤ 6 Years; Acc Member, > 6 Years; Highest Degree, Non-Doctorate; Highest Degree, Doctorate; Working Setting, School /Academic; Work Setting, Agency/Private Practice.

Mean Rating for Level of Satisfaction

Editorial policies; 3.06; .59; 93; 3.06; 3.10; 2.98; 3.15; 3.22; 2.87

Timeliness of information; 3.04; .62; 106; 3.02; 3.07; 2.95; 3.14; 3.13; 2.91

Appropriateness of format; 3.04; .68; 109; 3.05; 3.02; 2.93; 3.15; 3.12; 2.89

Aesthetic qualities; 2.75; .74; 108; 2.78; 2.73; 2.71; 2.78; 2.89; 2.60

Frequency of publication; 2.80; .74; 110; 2.74; 2.94; 2.68; 2.92; 2.95; 2.67

Relevance of content; 2.83; .78; 109; 2.76; 2.96; 2.65; 3.02; 3.02; 2.64

Quality of writing; 2.90; .68; 110; 2.92; 2.89; 2.84; 2.96; 2.93; 2.84

Coverage of AAC news events; 2.80; .76; 106; 2.79; 2.84; 2.64; 2.96; 2.95; 2.64

Scope of content; 2.68; .83; 112; 2.67; 2.70; 2.54; 2.82; 2.83; 2.48

Reader interest; 2.71; .77; 108; 2.66; 2.80; 2.55; 2.88; 2.82; 2.60

CSCGI reports; 2.86; .94; 90; 2.94; 2.81; 2.72; 3.02; 2.93; 2.85

Mean Rating for Level of Importance

Editorial policies; 2.89; .85; 104; 2.84; 2.98; 2.77; 3.02; 3.03; 2.70

Timeliness of information; 3.31; .75; 128; 3.34; 3.31; 3.20; 3.52; 3.45; 3.22

Appropriateness of format; 2.81; .80; 114; 2.87; 2.77; 2.76; 2.87; 2.85; 2.77

Aesthetic qualities; 2.51; .79; 115; 2.65; 2.38; 2.54; 2.47; 2.53; 2.53

Frequency of publication; 2.94; .80; 115; 2.90; 2.98; 2.76; 3.13; 3.00; 2.85

Relevance of content; 3.55; .67; 115; 3.57; 3.49; 3.46; 3.64; 3.63; 3.39

Quality of writing; 3.31; .67; 114; 3.37; 3.20; 3.25; 3.35; 3.41; 3.17

Coverage of AAC news events; 3.37; .76; 115; 3.37; 3.44; 3.17; 3.55; 3.56[*]; 3.11[*]

Scope of content; 3.37; .71; 115; 3.35; 3.38; 3.31; 3.43; 3.50; 3.15

Reader interest; 3.46; .70; 110; 3.49; 3.41; 3.48; 3.43; 3.58; 3.36

CSCGI reports; 3.19; .80; 96; 3.16; 3.33; 3.04; 3.34; 3.33; 3.10

Mean Frequency for Use

How frequently do you read Newsnotes?; 2.98; 1.10; 116; 2.92; 3.16; 2.73[*]; 3.33[*]; 3.08; 2.96

Use Newsnotes in scholarly or professional activities; 1.79; 1.42; 112; 1.70; 2.09; 1.64; 2.04; 1.87; 1.78

Note. items were based on the following scale: 4 = very satisfied or very important; 3 = satisfied or important; 2 = somewhat satisfied or somewhat important; 1 = not satisfied or not important. The frequency items were based on the following scale: 4 = 4 or more; 3 = 3 or regularly; 2 = 2 or occasionally; 1 = 1 or seldom; 0 = none or never. CSCGI = Committee to Screen Career Guidance instruments.

* $p < .005$.

TABLE 4 Relevance of AAC Strategic Planning Goals by Years of Membership, Highest Degree, and Work Setting

Information is presented in the following order: Journal Activity/Content; Total Sample, M; Total Sample, SD; Total Sample, N; AAC Member, </6 Years; AAC Member >6 Years; Highest Degree, Non-Doctorate; Highest Degree, Doctorate; Work Setting, School/Academic; Work Setting, Agency/Private Practice.

Assessment, evaluation, and research regarding developmental paradigms; 3.59; .60; 127; 3.61; 3.52; 3.62; 3.51; 3.59; 3.60

Concern for human rights as part of all assessment activities; 3.47; .69; 124; 3.43; 3.50; 3.37; 3.55; 3.63; 3.27

National and international collaboration among assessment organizations; 3.12; .77; 129; 3.21; 3.00; 3.11; 3.09; 3.17; 3.10

Organizational structure and resources to achieve our mission; 3.10; .81; 119; 3.11; 3.12; 3.05; 3.14; 3.14; 3.08

Professional development for assessment competence; 3.75; .51; 118; 3.73; 3.73; 3.68; 3.80; 3.76; 3.70

Standards for assessment in counseling; 3.60; .58; 131; 3.62; 3.58; 3.56; 3.67; 3.64; 3.56

Public awareness of an support for assessment as integral to counseling; 3.37; .72; 120; 3.29; 3.43; 3.36; 3.35; 3.38; 3.37

Public policy and legislation that enhances assessment use; 3.16; .85; 120; 3.11; 3.29; 3.10; 3.23; 3.20; 3.13

Advancement of knowledge about assessment in counseling; 3.55; .65; 119; 3.54; 3.54; 3.47; 3.63; 3.60; 3.50

Note, Goals were based on the following scale: 4 = very relevant; 3 = relevant; 2 = somewhat relevant; 1 = not relevant.

TABLE 5 Extent of Involvement in ACA and AAC by Years of Membership, Highest Degree, and Work Setting

Information is presented in the following order: Journal Activity/Content; Total Sample, M; Total Sample, SD; Total Sample, N; AAC Member, </6 Years; AAC Member >6 Years; Highest Degree, Non-Doctorate; Highest Degree, Doctorate; Work Setting, School/Academic; Work Setting, Agency/Private Practice.

Attended ACA meeting; 1.33; 1.52; 135; 1.08[*]; 1.91[*]; .87[*]; 1.93[*]; 1.81[*]; .75[*]

Presented a paper or poster session at ACA meeting; 0.75; 1.20; 134; 0.61; 1.04; .38[*]; 1.18[*]; 1.04[*]; .37[*]

Participated as a session chair, a discussant, or a reactor at ACA meeting; 0.73; 1.26; 120; 0.58; 1.02; .39[*]; 1.11[*]; 0.94; .48[*]

Attended a content session sponsored by AAC; 1.10; 1.36; 121; 0.85[*]; 1.59[*]; .69[*]; 1.57[*]; 1.50[*]; .67[*]

Attended an AAC luncheon, business meeting, or committee meeting?; 0.71; 1.13; 119; 0.45[*]; 1.13[*]; .48; 0.95; 0.92; .47

Note. Items were based on the following scale: 4 = 4 or frequently; 3 = 3 or regularly; 2 = 2 or occasionally; 1 = 1 or seldom; 0 = none or never.

* $p < .005$.

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