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## MEASURING IMAGE OF GOD IN CHILDREN

### **abstract**

The goal of this two-staged study was to better understand how children conceive of God. In the first stage of this study children were asked, “what comes to mind when you hear the word God’?” Their answers to this question were organized according to frequency and classified into three separate groups according to the nature of the response. In the second stage of this study a questionnaire was developed by surveying the literature in the field in connection to the responses obtained from the children. The original questionnaire of 58 items was then reviewed on the basis of other research in the field and sent to experts for comment. The final questionnaire used in this study was reduced to 50 items and was prepared for implementation. This questionnaire was then given to a group of 600 people selected for this study. The results of this preliminary test were then subjected to an exploratory factor analysis with attention to the theoretical structure of the questionnaire. On the basis of these results, the questionnaire was reduced to 28 items with four sub-scales, and its validity was determined. In order to determine the reliability of the questionnaire, the internal correlation of its items was calculated, with a Cronbach alpha ( $\alpha$ ) value of 0.73. Additionally, the questionnaire was implemented in a different 20-person group on two separate occasions and

findings showing the test re-test reliability of the questionnaire were obtained. For the confirmatory factor analysis, a separate group of 398 students, of similar characteristics to the sample group was selected. As part of the 398 participant reliability study of the confirmatory factor analysis, the internal consistency coefficient for responses obtained for Item 28 was 0.78.

**keywords:** Allah, Childhood, God image scale, Confirmatory Factor Analysis, Religious Development.

## öz

### Çocuklarda Tanrı İmajının Ölçülmesi

Bu araştırma da çocukların zihinlerinde oluşturdukları Tanrı imgelerini daha iyi anlamak amacıyla iki aşamalı bir çalışma yapıldı. İlk aşamada çocuklara “Allah denildiğinde ne düşündükleri” soruldu ve verdikleri cevaplar kendi içinde ilişkili olduğu düşünülen üç bölüme ayrılarak frekansları doğrultusunda sıralandı. İkinci aşamada çocuklardan alınan cevaplar ve alanyazın taranarak bir ölçek oluşturuldu. Araştırmalar dikkate alınarak ölçek maddeleri gözden geçirilmiş ve uzmanlara gönderilmiştir. Ölçek formu 58 adet algı ifadesiyle oluşturulmuş uzman görüşlerinden sonra 50 maddeyle uygulanmaya hazır hale gelmiştir. Araştırma için seçilen 600 kişilik gruba 50 maddeden oluşan ön deneme formu uygulanmıştır. Ölçeğe ilişkin kuramsal yapı dikkate alınarak açılımlayıcı faktör analizi yapılmıştır. Buna göre elde edilen 24 maddelik ve 4 alt boyuta sahip tanrı imgesi ölçeğinin geçerliği belirlenmiştir. Ölçeğin güvenilirliğini belirlemek için madde toplam test korelasyonu hesaplanmış ve ölçeği oluşturan maddelere ilişkin Cronbach alfa ( $\alpha$ ) değeri 0,73 olarak bulunmuştur. Ayrıca 20 kişilik farklı bir grupta iki farklı zamanda ölçek uygulanmış ve test tekrar test güvenilirliğine ilişkin bulgular elde edilmiştir. Doğrulayıcı faktör analizi için örneklem grubunun özelliklerine benzer olarak farklı bir gruptaki 398 öğrenci seçilmiştir. Doğrulayıcı faktör analizinde güvenilirlik çalışması 398 katılımcının, ölçeğin 28 maddesine verdikleri yanıtlardan elde edilen iç tutarlık katsayısı 0.78 olarak belirlenmiştir.

### anahtar kelimeler

Allah, Çocukluk Dönemi, Tanrı İmgesi Ölçeği, Doğrulayıcı Factor Analizi, Dini Gelişim.

## Introduction

Serious research on religion and spirituality in children dates back to the mid-1970s, but One of the first people to carry out serious work in this field with

children was Hall. In 1891 Hall started the journal *Pedagogical Seminary*. Barnes' article "Theological Life of the Californian Child," published in Hall's journal the following year, was the first research-based article to specifically address the question of the way children think about religion (Ratcliff, 2008; Thorndike, 1925: 139, 146). Hall used the technique of questionnaires, which he had learned in Germany, and developed a total of approximately 194 questionnaires in his research on children (Schultz and Schultz, 2007: 319; Hall, 1917: 9; Hall, 1921; Thordike, 1925: 138-141).

In their 1928 study Hartshorne and his colleagues showed that there was no difference between the ethical conduct of children who had received religious instruction and those who had not. This led to a debate in the West as to how appropriate the religious education being offered to children was. While some viewed Hartshorne's work as an attack on religion, a number of other scholars who emphasized the ineffectiveness of contemporary children's religious instruction and the necessity of altering it so as to be more suited to children's needs and their level of development. This latter view even led to a number of new initiatives in Sunday schools (Ratcliff, 2008).

One of the most noteworthy studies in the field in the 1940s is that of Harms. Harms was the first person to use children's drawings in research on religious belief in children (Ratcliff, 2008: 11). Harms believed that verbal expression was an insufficient means of obtaining information about children's deeper religious lives. For children who had not yet reached a stage of intellectual maturity, religious imagery proved a surer means of communication than did verbal expression. Harms thus had children draw pictures and explain them, on the basis of which he obtained important results (Harms, 1944: 112). Based on his research with children ages 3-18, Harms developed a theory of religious development divided into three stages: the fairy tale stage, the realistic stage, and the individualistic stage.

Harms and Loomba's work on religious belief in children and the three-staged theory they developed were used in hundreds of studies in the 1960s and 1970s, and formed the basis of Piaget's staged theory of cognitive development (Ratcliff, 2008).

Piaget's theory of cognitive development is the most comprehensive and detailed theory to date. In one of his most important contributions to the field, Piaget showed that child's faculties of thinking and reasoning had their own laws, different from those in adults (Stratton and Hayes, 1996: 36).

Piaget first discovered the rich world of children's thought while working in the laboratory of Janet, Piéron, and Simon in Paris. He took classes in clinical psychology from Dumas and Simon. There he formed the general framework

of the clinical method that he would use in the future. According to Elkind Piaget's work, in terms of its biologically-oriented focus and its attempt to understand the nature of mental processes, exhibited strong parallels to that of Freud (Munari, 2000: 1-5; Hopkins, 2005: 523; Beilin, 1992: 191; Burman, 2008: 164, Elkind, 1981: 239; Evans, 1999: 150).

After Piaget, a number of important researchers, such as Goldman, Fowler, and Elkind, adopted Piaget's staged developmental theory and applied to it the development of religious belief, producing important works in the field of cognitive religious development and defining developmental stages of their own (Elkind, 1970: 36; Goldman, 1965: 40; Fowler, 1995).

It is generally acknowledged that people's childhood experiences have a great impact on their attitudes and behaviors as mature adults. Studies have shown that people's conceptions of God are significantly influenced by a wide variety of factors, including one's experiences as a child and the attitudes of the adults in one's life during childhood (Kirkpatrick, 1992).

There are a great number of different models for measuring the way in which people conceive of and imagine God in the international scholarly literature. These include Gorsuch's (1968) "Adjective Ratings of God," Vergote et al. and their "Concepts of God and Parental Images," Rizzuto's (1979) sentence completion test in "God/Family Questionnaires," Lawrence's (1991) "God Image Inventory," Benson and Spilka's (1973) "Loving and Controlling God Scales," Miaello's "Degrees of Belief in God: A Measure of Belief for Use in Cross Culture," and question forms designed to measure preschool-age children's image of God (De Roos; Meidema and Iedema, 2001).

In Turkey there have also been a number of studies in the field. These include Güler's (2007) "God Image Scale," Mehmedođlu's (2011) "God Description Scale," the adjective list that Kuşat's (2006) prepared for use in studies on adolescents, and the 18-question form Yıldız (2007) prepared for use in students on elementary school children. The present study was carried out in an effort to meet the need for a questionnaire and scale for use in studies on school-age children on matters relating to their image of God. The goal of this study is to put forward a scale that will simplify the task of research on the subject of the way in which children conceive of God.

## Methods

### Sample

The sample for this study was a group of 600 students between grades four and seven from a primary school in Ankara, Turkey, who volunteered to participate

in the study. In selecting the sample attention was paid to ensuring that a similar number of children were selected from and that the ratio of males to females was similar for each grade. For the confirmatory factor analysis, a separate group of 398 students, of similar characteristics to the sample group was selected.

## Procedure

In order to develop a questionnaire for children's images of God, this study began with a qualitative study and a survey of other studies in the field. 463 students were selected from the population using convenience sampling and asked to write a composition about the question "What comes to mind when you hear the word 'God?'" Taking into account previous work in the field carried out by Graebner (1964), Tamminen (1994), Heler (1998), Hay and Nye (1998), Coles (1990), Yıldız (2007), and Öcal (2004), these compositions were examined and subjected to semantic content analysis.

The categories used in the content analysis were selected with reference to the categories used in other studies in the field. The compositions were analyzed using both category analysis and frequency analysis. The sentence was selected as the unit of analysis, and findings were listed in tables along with frequency and percentage.

In order to select the categories used in the collection of data a category pool was established with reference to other studies in the field. Categories relating to images of God were developed by the researcher. These categories were then given to experts for review. They were then finalized, and the compositions written by children on their images of God were examined. The compositions were read by both the researcher and by another researcher, to whom the categories were explained, and two tallies were kept of the results. The frequencies of the two tallies thus arrived at were placed in the consistency formula.

$$\text{Consistency Percentage} = \frac{\text{number of agreements:454}}{\text{number of agreements+number of non agreements:454+9}} = 0.98$$

The result of 0.98 indicated that the categories were consistent.

The sentence was selected as the unit of analysis and it was determined whether or not the pre-determined sub-categories, were present. Both manifest and latent content was taken into account. In other words a single word, a phrase, or even an entire sentence corresponding to one of the sub-

categories was counted. Quantitative content analysis was used in order to ensure reliability and validity in the evaluation. In line with this, the frequency of images of God was calculated as expressed in the children's own words. The frequencies and percentages thus obtained were listed in a table and examined.

The theoretical framework developed for this study drew from both the findings of the qualitative study and also from a survey of different theoretical models used in other studies in the field.

The results of the content analysis established how children perceived God, and these results were itemized and recorded. These expressions were organized under categories and compared and contrasted with other studies in the field. The procedures for questionnaire development were taken into account and these expressions were recorded as image sentences as follows:

- "When I think of Allah a sense of love comes over me. I love Allah. If we do good things and pray Allah will love us more." (age 11)
- "He is the one who guides us toward the right path." (age 10)
- "Allah burns bad people and people who don't believe in Him in the fires of Hell." (age 10)
- "Sometimes when I am home alone I hear noises and I get scared. I say bismillah, and I know that Allah protects me." (age 11)
- "I think He is the one who created us and gave us reason. He gives me happiness." (age 11)
- "When I hear Allah's name I feel happy and safe." (age 11)
- "Allah helps people who need help. He gives more to good people." (age 11)
- "When I hear the word, 'Allah' a sense of joy comes over me. That's why Allah created us, because He cares about us." (age 11)
- "We should fear Allah, because Allah can do everything. And if we read some suras He will protect us but only from some things." (age 11)
- "When I hear the word 'Allah' what comes to mind is that I should fear Him, and that He is great." (age 11)
- "I think that Allah loves me a lot." (age 9)
- "Allah doesn't have eyes but He can see." (age 10)
- "Allah is the one who loves us, who created us, and who guides us. I love Allah. Allah is good. He loves us and is further away than even outer space." (age 9)

- "I know that He loves us." (age 10)
- "We used to think that Allah was in a [telephone] pole and we would pour water on it. I think of Allah as a person. He isn't a bad person, He's a good person. He has a kind heart." (age 9)
- "You can't cross Allah because He will turn you to stone." (age 10)
- "If I feel sad I pray to Allah." (age 10)
- "We pay our debt to Allah by worshipping Him." (age 10)
- "When I hear the word 'Allah' I think of someone who protects, forgives, saves, and loves everyone. And He loves everyone equally and doesn't discriminate." (age 11)
- "Allah was never born and He didn't have a childhood. He created everything. And there is only one of Him." (age 10)
- "I have never seen Allah but I fear Him." (age 11)
- "All of our Muslim brothers must fear Almighty Allah. For example I am really, and I mean really, afraid of my Allah. In order to go to His Heaven we have to be good." (age 11)
- "Allah protects us. He helps us. And He makes our prayers come true." (age 9)
- "When I pray to Allah it is like I'm right beside Him." (age 9)
- "Allah is an invisible person. He loves people more who go to mosque and to the tombs [of important Muslims]." (age 9)

These expressions were examined under different categories and were changed into overlapping, measurable statements with similar meanings and placed into the questionnaire. In writing the particular items of the questionnaire this study benefited from questionnaires previously developed and utilized by Lawrence (1997), Benson and Spilka (1973), and Miaello (2005). A five-point Likert scale was used. These sub-scales were: Dependable God, Awe Inspirin God, Approving God, and Undemanding God. The second sub-scale of Awe Inspirin God, in contrast to the other scales, was reverse-coded.

The questionnaire items were reviewed in comparison to other research in the field. The questionnaire form, composed of 58 expressions relating to images of Allah, was prepared and reviewed by nine theology experts, three teachers, two psychological counselors, and two measurement and evaluation experts, after which inappropriate items were removed and other items were altered. The resulting 50-item questionnaire was then finalized (See. Yıldız, 2012).

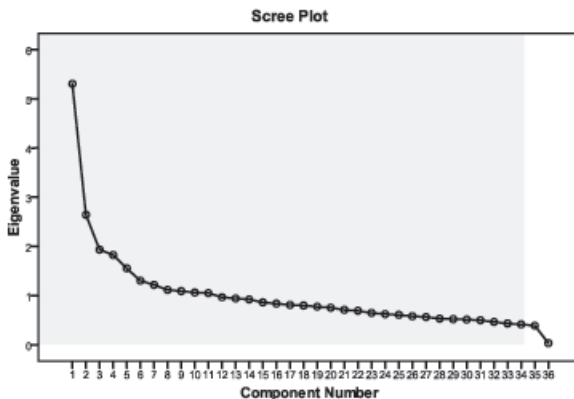
## Results

### Exploratory Factor Analyses

The preliminary 50-item questionnaire was given to the 600-person group of students from grades four to seven at the primary school selected for this study. An exploratory factor analysis was then carried out with attention to the theoretical structure of the questionnaire.

The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test is used to measure the adequacy of a sample. The KMO value obtained for the results of this study was 0.79, a value satisfactory for continuing on to the factor analysis. Bartlett's Test of Sphericity is used to determine whether or not the prerequisite of factor analysis, the assumption of "normality," is met. A significance of 0.00 was obtained in this test. This value shows that the data set meets the standards of significance and the assumption of normality. This value also shows that the data set is of sufficient size to carry out factor analysis.

The total variance of the four sub-scales in the factor analysis was 32.523%. When the impact of each sub-scale on the total variance was examined it was determined that the questionnaire displayed a four sub-scales structure and that the variance in the sub-scales was measurable.



*Graph 1: Eigenvalue and Components Graph of the God Image Questionnaire for Children*

Another criteria used in deciding on the number of sub-scales is the scree plot. Looking at the graph, one sees that after the fourth sub-scale the graph straightens out. Thus an eigen value defined on the basis of four sub-scales shows a maximum variance up to four sub-scales, after which point the variance is minimal. This was helpful in establishing the four sub-scales structure of the questionnaire in this study.



Factor weighting and findings related to their sub-scales are displayed in Table 1 in the appendix. After laying out the factor analysis and the number of factors of the items that form the different sub-scales of the questionnaire, there was no item in the Rotated Component Matrix with a factor weight value below 0.30. The first factor in this study has eight items, the second factor has eight, the third and fourth factors have six. Items with a factor weighting value of 0.30 and above belong to the appropriate sub-scale. Items that had a difference of less than 0.15 between their factor weighting values in two different sub-scales were determined to be overlapping. When examining these overlapping items it was decided that placing them in two different sub-scales was not appropriate, and they were removed from the questionnaire. A 28-item and four-sub-scale version of the God image questionnaire was then finalized and its validity was determined.

### Confirmatory Factor Analysis

During the process of carrying out the confirmatory factor analysis, as part of the confirmation of the scale, a covariance matrix and maximum likelihood methodology were used. The relationship between the latent variables (subscales and factors) and the observed variables (items), as well as the error variance are displayed in Figure 2.

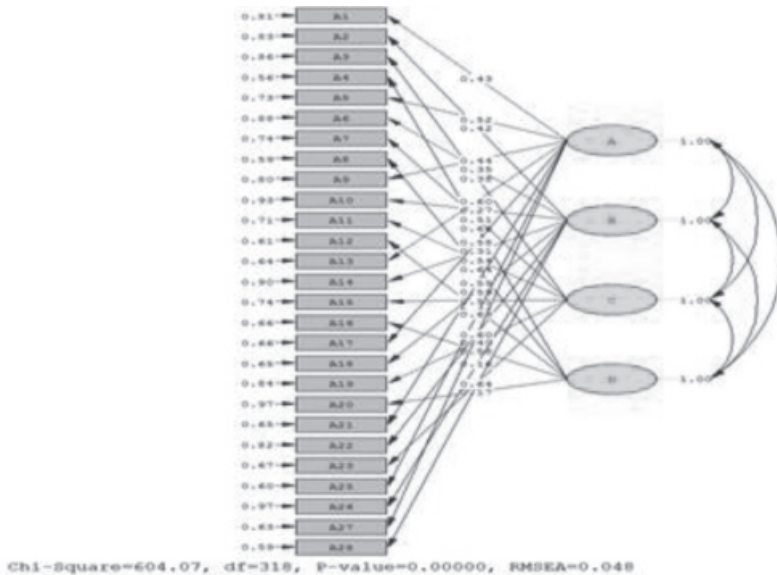


Figure 2. The Relationship and Error Variance Between the Observed Variables According to The Results of The Preliminary Confirmatory Factor Analysis of The Children’s Image of God Scale

*Table 1.* Lambda, T and Explanatory Variance Values in the Measurement Model

Factor	Items	Standardized parameter value	T value	R <sup>2</sup>
A	Item1	0.35	7.59	0.19
	Item5	0.45	10.61	0.27
	Item 9	0.41	8.84	0.20
	Item13	0.43	12.51	0.36
	Item17	0.52	12.01	0.34
	Item 21	0.58	12.24	0.35
	Item25	0.49	13.33	0.40
	Item 27	0.54	12.64	0.37
B	Item 2	0.48	7.59	0.17
	Item 6	0.47	6.21	0.12
	Item 10	0.42	4.80	0.07
	Item 14	0.42	5.60	0.09
	Item 18	0.68	11.14	0.35
	Item 22	0.50	7.66	0.18
	Item 26	0.22	2.89	0.02
	Item28	0.64	12.24	0.41
C	Item 3	0.36	7.20	0.14
	Item 7	0.52	10.03	0.26
	Item 11	0.49	10.71	0.29
	Item 15	0.49	10.04	0.26
	Item 19	0.48	7.65	0.16
D	Item 23	0.50	11.61	0.33
	Item 4	0.79	12.49	0.44
	Item 8	0.77	11.95	0.41
	Item 12	0.78	11.73	0.39
	Item 16	0.56	10.72	0.34
	Item 20	0.19	2.86	0.027

According to Table 1, the relationships between the latent variables and the observed variables varied as follows: Subscale A, 0.35-0.58; Subscale B, 0.22-0.68; Subscale C, 0.36-0.52; Subscale D, 0.19-0.79. The T values of the items explaining the latent variables varied from 2.86 to 13.33. Examining the regression coefficients of the items, Item 4 of Subscale D had the highest explanatory variance ( $R^2=0.44$ ), while Items 26 and 20 had the lowest ( $R^2=0.027$ ).

The fit index obtained from the preliminary confirmatory factor analysis of the scale is displayed in Table 2, along with the border values used by other researchers utilized to confirm it.

Table 2. Fit Index and Reference Values of The God Image Questionnaire for Children

Indices	Range	Scale Values	Range	Reference
$\chi^2$	$p > .05$	653	$p > .05$	
$\chi^2/sd$	0- $\infty$ (High-Low)	1.89	<2.5 perfect fit	
RMSEA	0-0.1 (High-Low)	0.048	<.05 perfect fit	Kline (1998), Sümer (2000), Tabachinck and Fidel (2007), Hair, etc..(2006)
GFI	0-1 (Low-High)	0.89	>.85 medium fit	
AGFI	0-1(Low-High)	0.88	>.85 medium fit	
CFI	0-1(Low-High)	0.86	>.90 medium fit	
NNFI	0-1(Low-High)	0.85	>.90 medium fit	

The fit index obtained from the preliminary confirmatory factor analysis of the scale is displayed in Table 2, along with the border values used by other researchers utilized to confirm it.

### Reliability

In order to determine the reliability of the questionnaire the total test correlation of the items was calculated and the Cronbach alpha ( $\alpha$ ) value of the items forming the questionnaire was found to be 0.73. The questionnaire was tested again on a 20-person group on two separate occasions and findings relating to the test re-test reliability of the questionnaire were obtained again. The Wilcoxon signed-rank test, used to compare the averages of the values obtained during the two different samplings, was performed with a resulting z-value of 3.305 and a p-value of greater than 0.05. These results show that there was no important difference in the total points obtained in the two different samplings and that the questionnaire could reliably be used as a measure over time. As part of the 398 participant reliability study of the confirmatory factor analysis, the internal consistency coefficient for responses obtained for Item 28 was 0.78.

### Discussion

The goal of this two-staged study was to better understand how children conceive of God. In the first stage children were asked “What comes to mind when you hear the word ‘God?’” Their answers to this question were

organized according to frequency and classified into three separate groups according to the nature of the response. The results of the content analysis established how children conceive of God and these results were written in item form. These items were grouped into different categories and were compared and contrasted with those of other studies in the field. The procedures for questionnaire development were taken into account and these expressions were recorded as image sentences. In the second stage of this study a questionnaire was developed by surveying the literature in the field in connection to the responses obtained from the children in this study. The questionnaire items were then reviewed on the basis of other research in the field and sent to experts for comment.

After obtaining the comments of experts in the field the questionnaire was reduced from 58 items to 50 and was prepared for implementation. Then, in a preliminary test, this questionnaire was given to a group of 600 people selected for this study. 578 of these questionnaires were then analyzed. An exploratory factor analysis was conducted with attention to the theoretical structure of the questionnaire. On the basis of this the validity of the 28-item and four sub-sub-scale God image questionnaire was determined. These sub-sub-scales were: Dependable God, Awe Inspirin God, Approving God, and Undemanding God. A five-point Likert scale was used in allocating point values to responses. The second sub-scale of a Awe Inspiring God, in contrast to the other sub-scales, was reverse-coded.

In order to determine the reliability of the questionnaire the total test correlation of the items was calculated and the Cronbach alpha ( $\alpha$ ) value of the items forming the questionnaire was found to be 0.73. The questionnaire was tested again on a 20-person group on two separate occasions and findings relating to the test re-test reliability of the questionnaire were obtained again.

## Notes

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Table 3: Çocuklar İçin Tanrı İmgesi Ölçeği'nin Faktör ve Madde Analizi Sonuçları

Madde No	Maddeler	Faktör Yük Değeri				Madde Toplam Korelasyonu
		Güven veren	Korku ve kaygı veren	Destekleyen	Özgür bırakan	
1	Allah'ın bize çok yakın olduğunu düşünürüm	.754				.278
5	Allah'ın beni her zaman duyduğunu düşünürüm.	.713				.134
9	Allah'ın herkese karşı merhametli olduğunu düşünürüm	.679				.321
13	Karşıma çıkan zorluklar ne kadar büyük olursa olsun, Allah bana yardım eder.	.621				.351
17	Allah'ı düşündüğüm zaman kendimi huzurlu hissedirim.	.614				.332
21	Allah'ın beni sevdiğine eminim.	.599				.153
25	Dua ettiğim zaman kendimi güvende hissedirim.	.599				.358
27	Allah'tan zorluklarla baş edebilme konusunda yardım isterim.	.565				.411
2	Allah'ın beni sevdiği konusunda bazen endişelenirim.		.733			.439
6	Allah'ın beni sadece çok iyi şeyler yaptığım zaman sevdiğini düşünürüm.		.712			.315
10	Allah'ın gerçekten var olup olmadığını düşünürüm.		.647			.272
14	Allah'tan istediğim şeylerin çok azının gerçekleşeceğini biliyorum.		.594			.325
18	Allah'ın sadece bazı insanları sevdiğini düşünürüm.		.482			.364
22	Bazen işlediğim günahları Allah'ın affetmeyeceğini düşünürüm.		.482			.315
26	Cehenneme gitmekle ilgili korkulu rüyalar görürüm.		.319			.405
28	Dua etsem bile, Allah'tan yardım almam.		.303			.427
3	Uykuya dalarken Allah'ı düşünürüm.			.600		.375
7	Allah'a olan inancımın hayatımda etkisi olduğunu düşünürüm.			.589		.164

11	Allah bana doğruları yapmam için rehberlik eder.			.558		.350
15	Allah'ın benim için güvenilir bir dost olduğunu düşünürüm.			.553		.354
19	Her istediğimde Allah'a sığınırım.			.536		.316
23	Allah'ı çok şefkat eden bir varlık olarak hayal ederim.			.461		.162
4	Kötü bir şey yapsam da, Allah'ın beni sevmeye devam edeceğini düşünürüm.				.592	.380
8	Allah hakkındaki fikirlerim yanlış olsa bile, Allah beni sever.				.578	.167
12	Allah kendisine inanmayanları bile sever.				.568	.392
16	Mükemmel olmadığını biliyorum, ancak Allah beni her şekilde sever.				.552	.172
20	Allah'ın insanları özgür bıraktığını düşünürüm.				.506	.288
24	Allah'ın benim hayatıma karışacağını sanmıyorum				.446	.160