The Supportive Supervisory Scale: Psychometric Properties in Chinese Health Care Aides Samples

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Research

Keywords: Supportive Supervisory Scale, Chinese Version, Psychometric Properties, Health Care Aides

DOI: https://doi.org/10.21203/rs.3.rs-53490/v1

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Abstract

Objective To sinicize the Supportive Supervisory Scale (SSS) and analyze the psychometric properties of the Chinese version of SSS (SSS-C).

Methods The SSS (the original English version) was firstly sinicized and adjusted, then its psychometric properties were examined in 300 health care aides from four long-term care (LTC) facilities. SPSS 22.0 was used to process the data and calculate the reliability and validity.

Results The 15-item SSS-C had satisfactory internal consistency (Cronbach's α coefficient=0.852), split half reliability (Spearman-Brown coefficient=0.834) and test-retest reliability (Pearson correlation coefficient=0.784). Three factors were extracted, four items were deleted because their communality was less than 0.4 and the remaining 11 items could explain 55.654% of the total variance. The discriminant validity of the SSS-C varied significantly between sites.

Conclusions The Chinese version of SSS can be used to effectively measure the supervisory support of the nurses within the LTC settings.

Introduction

With the aging of global population, the needs for long-term care (LTC) have increased significantly. However, most of long-term care facilities (LTCFs) have been faced with the staffing challenges, resulting in poor capacity to provide competent and high-quality long-term care to the elderly [1-3]. Health care aides (HCAs, equivalent to nursing assistants) provided 80%~90% of the direct care to LTCF residents [4]. Thus, it can be seen that the stability and quality of HCAs affect the nursing care of LTCFs to a considerable extent. In LTCFs, HCAs are often supervised by registered nurses, and evidence is accumulating that these supervisory relationships prominently affect HCA turnover, job satisfaction, and the quality of the care provided [3,5,6]. In addition, supportive supervisory practices have been proven to be associated with patient outcomes, for example, less adverse events and complications [7]. Therefore, it is urgent to measure and improve the supervisory support of HCA supervisors in the LTCFs.

Supportive Supervisory Scale (SSS) has been originally developed in English for this purpose and has been proven to be a reliable, valid, and useful tool to assess the supervisory support of supervisors in LTCFs, which may influence the retention of HCAs and quality of resident care [8]. To date, such instruments to evaluate the supervisory support of the supervisors within LTCFs are still lacking in China. Given the above needs, the authors obtained the authorization from the author of the original SSS scale, Prof. McGilton, and sinicized and adapted it, and then examined the psychometric properties of the Chinese version of SSS for use in China.

Methods

This study was approved by the Ethics Committee of Soochow University (No. SUDA 20200515H03). All participants were given both verbal and written information about the study; those who agreed to participate in this study signed an informed consent.

Instrument and Sinicization

The SSS has 15 items and includes two parts. The first part is labeled “Respect Uniqueness” and the second part “Being Reliable” [9]. Answer options are “never”, “seldom”, “occasionally”, “often”, “always”, which successively represent the score of “1, 2, 3, 4, 5”.

The SSS was translated from English into Chinese using Brislin's translation model [10]. The steps for sinicization of SSS are shown in Fig. 1. Firstly, two bilingual researchers separately translated the original SSS into Chinese. The discrepancies between these two translations were reviewed and discussed comprehensively, and formed a single version, which was then translated back into English by another bilingual researcher. The retroversion was repeatedly compared with the original SSS scale and the Chinese expressions were adjusted accordingly. During this procedure, the translation validity index (TVI) was used to assess the translation equivalence of versions. It used a 4-point Likert scale (1=uncorrected, 2=needs major modification on equivalent item, 3=equivalent but needs minor modification, and 4=equivalent). In this study, three language experts were recruited to compare the SSS in English and Chinese. The items were revised until a TVI score of 4 was achieved. The revised version of SSS was pilot tested with a convenience sample of 30 HCAs in a LTCF in Suzhou to evaluate whether the Chinese version of SSS was easy to understand. Language expression was adjusted if HCAs felt it was difficult to understand. After the pilot test, the Chinese version of SSS (SSS-C) was finalized for the test of its psychometric properties.

Fig.1 Sinicization steps of SSS

Sample and Setting

The study was conducted in 4 LTCFs in Suzhou, China. Health care aides meeting the following criteria were enrolled in the study: (i) working in the LTCFs for more than 3 months; (ii) able to give written consent. A total of 300 participants completed the scale. 41.4% of the HCAs were less
than 50 years old and 54% were 51-60 years old; 85.3% were female; 100% of the respondents were employed full-time. The mean number of years that the respondents have worked in the LTCF was less than 5 years (n=241, 80.3%).

**Procedures**

After giving written consent, HCAs were asked to fill out the survey questionnaire independently in the nursing station or staff lounge. The researchers remained in the room and were available to answer questions when necessary. Neither compensation nor remuneration was offered to the participants.

**Statistical analyses**

Analyses were performed by IBM SPSS Statistics 21. Participant characteristics and major variables were summarized by descriptive statistics (Table 1). Reliability was tested by internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha), split-half reliability (Spearman-Brown coefficient) and test-retest reliability (Pearson correlation coefficient) (reliability coefficient ≥ 0.7 was acceptable) [11]. Construct validity was examined by exploratory factor analysis (EFA) (principal component analysis with varimax rotation). Scree plot, Kaiser criterion (eigenvalue ≥ 1.0), and clinical interpretability were considered in determination of factor solution (When the factor loading ≥ 0.40, the item can be considered in the factor) [12]. Discriminative validity was assessed by examining if supervisory support varied between the different facilities by one-way analysis of variance. Multiple comparisons, using Bonferroni’s procedure, were completed to compare every pair of facilities. The significant level was 0.05[13].

**Results**

No data were missing; therefore, no corrections were made. Scores of the SSS-C ranged from 25 to 75, and the mean score was 59.56 (SD=7.29) for the supervisors.

**Reliability**

The 15-item SSS-C had satisfactory internal consistency (Cronbach's α coefficient= 0.852), split half reliability (Spearman-Brown coefficient= 0.834) and test-retest reliability (Pearson correlation coefficient=0.784) (see Table 2). Corrected item–total correlation and Cronbach’s α coefficient if item deleted for SSS-C are demonstrated in Table 3. The item-to-item correlations were positive, in the 0.083-0.541 range (Table 4).

**Construct validity**

Construct validity was examined by EFA, and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy for this analysis was satisfactory (=0.887), indicating that the sample size for the EFA was adequate. The result of the Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant (χ² = 1125.922, P<0.001), demonstrating a sufficient correlation to perform factor analysis. Using the Kaiser criterion, three factors were initially identified, and total variance explained was 48.128%. However, since the communality of item1 (My supervisor recognizes my ability to deliver quality care), 4 (My supervisor tries to understand my point of view when I speak to them), 5 (My supervisor tries to meet my needs in such ways as informing me of what is expected of me when working with my residents) and 7 (My supervisor keeps me informed of any major changes in the work environment or organization) was less than 0.4, they should be deleted in theory [14]. After deletion of these four items and a second exploratory factor analysis, we still extracted three factors, which accounted for 55.654% of the scale's total variances (KMO= 0.843, χ² = 806.668, P<0.001) (Table 5).

Mean item scores of the 15-item SSS ranged from 3.79 to 4.26 (SD=0.715 to 1.033; Table 3). The four items under Factor I represented “the supervisors’ need to build connections with staff that involved respecting them as individuals” [9], therefore, this factor was labeled “building connections with staff”. Factor II including three items represented “the supervisors were available to staff to listen and respond to their concerns, and that they kept staff informed of what was new on the unit” [9], therefore, this factor was labeled “being dependable”. Factor III was labeled “being empathic” because the items loaded on this factor represented “the supervisors try to understand their point of view, recognize and accommodate expressed needs, recognize their abilities, and help them develop” [9]. Coefficient alpha reliabilities on the items comprising the three factors were: Factor I=0.723, Factor II=0.588 and Factor III =0.663. The coefficient alpha for the 11-item SSS was 0.816.

**Discriminant Validity**

The discriminant validity of the SSS-C varied significantly between sites. For example, within Facility D, scores of the SSS were significantly higher than those for Facility C (F = 4.791, p < 0.005; see Table 6).

**Discussion**
This was the first study to sinicize and validate a Chinese version of the SSS. The psychometrics results supported the utility of the SSS-C. It can be used as a reliable and valid instrument to determine the supervisory support of the team leader within LTC settings. The EFA procedures carried out on the 15-item SSS-C in the present study were performed on an adequate sample of HCAs [15], and accepted criteria were used to determine the best factor solution. Four items have been deleted due to their poor communality. For the 11 items, loadings on the three-factor rotated solution were strong.

The results of the three-factor rotated solution were compatible with the three dimensions upon which the original SSS was initially based [9], however, they were discrepant with the original SSS which only has two dimensions. The three factors (building connections with staff, being dependable, and being empathic) were consistent with the theoretical underpinning of the SSS. At the core of effective supervision is a supervisor’s ability to develop and maintain positive working relationships with each HCA (what the dimension “building connections with staff” represents) [8], which can enhance the connection, cooperation and team work among the nurse supervisors and HCAs, and may significantly influence the HCA turnover and patient outcomes [16,17]. Supportive supervision was defined as the extent to which the leader demonstrated empathy and reliability (also referred to as dependability) with staff [8]. The other two dimensions “being dependable” and “being empathic” were consistent with the above concepts. When HCAs can depend on their supervisors to achieve, relate to and enjoy their work, it will be easier for them to be committed to their work and become devoted caregivers [18]. Supportive supervision was defined as the extent to which the leader demonstrated empathy and reliability (also referred to as dependability) with staff [8]. The other two dimensions “being dependable” and “being empathic” were consistent with the above concepts. When HCAs can depend on their supervisors to achieve, relate to and enjoy their work, it will be easier for them to be committed to their work and become devoted caregivers [18]. Nurse supervisors in the LTCFs can help the staff counteract the negative effects of work-related pressure, perform their best over the long-term using Mindfulness, Hope and Compassion [19]. Therefore, “being dependable” and “being empathic” were also very important qualities of the supervisors in the LTCFs.

The discriminant validity of the SSS-C was also examined relative to construct validity, which showed that the SSS-C was able to differentiate supportive behaviors of supervisors between different LTCFs. No concurrent measure was conducted because there were no appropriate instruments.

The study has a few limitations. First, this study used a convenience sample of HCAs from the LTCFs in Suzhou. Another limitation is that no concurrent measure was conducted to analyze the construct validity.

**Conclusions**

The reliability and validity of the Chinese version of the SSS were acceptable. A strong three-factor solution was obtained, which was consistent with the three dimensions upon which the original SSS was initially based. At the core of supportive supervision is the supervisor's ability to develop and maintain relationships with the HCAs. Through their dependability and empathy, these relationships can prosper. The SSS-C can be used as a reliable and valid tool to measure the level of supportive supervision in the LTCFs, which may influence retention of HCAs and quality of resident care.

**Declarations**

**Ethics approval and consent to participate**

This study acquired ethical approval from the Medical Ethics Committee of Soochow University (No. SUDA 20200515H03). All participants signed the informed consent form.

**Consent for publication**

All participants have read the final manuscript and agreed to publish the data included in this manuscript.

**Availability of data and materials**

The authors have full control of all primary data and agree to allow the journal to review the data if requested.

**Funding**

This study was funded by the Humanity and Social Science Youth Foundation of Ministry of Education of China (Project No. 18YJCZH164) and National Natural Science Foundation of China (Grant No. 81801098).

**Competing interests:** The authors have no conflicts of interest to disclose.

**Author Contributions**

Tian L, Lin L, and Li HX translated the scale and performed the cultural adaption. Li HX, Dong B, Xie CY, and Wang H performed the survey. Tian L and Lin L wrote the first draft of the manuscript. Tian L revised the final manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.
Acknowledgements

We would like to express our heartfelt gratitude to the data collectors and study participants. This study would not have been possible without their contributions.

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Tables

Table 1 Participant characteristics (N=300)
| Socio-demographic characteristics | Number (%) | Socio-demographic characteristics | Number (%) |
|----------------------------------|------------|----------------------------------|------------|
| Age                              |            | Original occupation              |            |
| ≤ 30                             | 3 (1)      | Relevant occupation              | 104 (34.7) |
| 31-40                            | 8 (2.7)    | Unrelated occupation             | 196 (65.3) |
| 41-50                            | 113 (33.7) | How the participant obtained this job | |
| 51-60                            | 162 (54.0) | Help from relatives or friends   | 159 (53)   |
| ≥ 61                             | 14 (4.7)   | Help from domestic companies     | 44 (14.7)  |
| Gender                           |            | Recommended by employment center or relevant departments | 20 (6.7)   |
| Male                             | 44 (14.7)  | Official recruitment             | 111 (37.0) |
| Female                           | 256 (85.3) | Others                           | 18 (6.0)   |
| Marital status                   |            | The reasons for doing this job   |            |
| Married (Including remarriage)    | 281 (93.7) | No better work                   | 46 (15.3)  |
| Not married (single, divorced, and widowed) | 19 (6.3) | Stable income                    | 107 (35.7) |
| Education                        |            | Want to work in the city         | 23 (7.7)   |
| Primary school                   | 111 (37.0) | Happy to serve the elderly       | 148 (49.3) |
| Junior high school               | 149 (49.7) | Learning knowledge and skills    | 85 (28.3)  |
| Senior high school and technical secondary school | 36 (12.0) | Gain respect and praise          | 21 (7.0)   |
| ≥ Junior college                 | 4 (1.3)    | Others                           | 7 (2.3)    |
| Residence                        |            | Professional attitude            |            |
| Urban                            | 30 (10.0)  | Respectable                      | 192 (64.0) |
| Town                             | 82 (27.3)  | No difference from other jobs    | 90 (30.0)  |
| Rural                            | 188 (62.7) | Low social status                | 18 (6.0)   |
| Nature of the LTCF               |            | Change profession when possible  |            |
| Public                           | 149 (49.7) | Yes                              | 50 (16.7)  |
| Private                          | 146 (48.7) | No                               | 170 (56.7) |
| Others                           | 5 (1.7)    | Uncertain                        | 80 (26.7)  |
| Average monthly income           |            | Type of certificate              |            |
| < 3000 RMB                       | 2 (0.7)    | No certificate                   | 62 (20.7)  |
| 3000-3999 RMB                    | 87 (29.0)  | Junior                           | 201 (67.0) |
| 4000-5000 RMB                    | 164 (54.7) | Intermediate                     | 32 (10.7)  |
| > 5000 RMB                       | 47 (15.7)  | Advanced                         | 5 (1.7)    |
| Daily working hours              |            | Receive formal training          |            |
| < 8 h                            | 1 (0.3)    | Yes                              | 282 (94.0) |
| 8-9 h                            | 17 (5.7)   | No                               | 18 (6.0)   |
| 10-12 h                          | 202 (67.3) | Number of elderlies cared for    |            |
| > 12 h                           | 80 (26.7)  | 1                                | 6 (2.0)    |
| Years of working in this occupation |        |                                   |            |
| < 1 Year                         | 52 (17.3)  | 5-8                              | 222 (74.0) |
| 1-3 Years                        | 103 (34.3) | 8-10                             | 46 (15.3)  |
* LTCF: long-term care facility

Table 2 The results of Reliability Analysis

| Reliability          | Total (15 items) | Total (11 items) | Factor I | Factor II | Factor III |
|----------------------|------------------|------------------|----------|-----------|------------|
| Cronbach’s α        | 0.852            | 0.816            | 0.723    | 0.588     | 0.663      |
| Split-half reliability | 0.834            | 0.775            | 0.759    | 0.579     | 0.672      |
| Test-retest reliability | 0.784            | 0.740            | 0.714    | 0.660     | 0.651      |

Table 3 Corrected item–total correlation and Cronbach’s α coefficient if item deleted for SSS-C

| Item | Mean | Standard deviation | Corrected Item–total correlation | Cronbach’s α if item deleted |
|------|------|--------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1    | 4.03 | 0.715              | 0.518                            | 0.842                        |
| 2    | 3.82 | 0.873              | 0.473                            | 0.844                        |
| 3    | 3.79 | 1.033              | 0.394                            | 0.850                        |
| 4    | 4.14 | 0.786              | 0.488                            | 0.843                        |
| 5    | 3.98 | 0.782              | 0.435                            | 0.845                        |
| 6    | 3.84 | 0.913              | 0.529                            | 0.840                        |
| 7    | 3.92 | 0.818              | 0.408                            | 0.847                        |
| 8    | 3.87 | 0.947              | 0.454                            | 0.845                        |
| 9    | 4.10 | 0.729              | 0.490                            | 0.843                        |
| 10   | 3.86 | 0.977              | 0.463                            | 0.845                        |
| 11   | 4.15 | 0.723              | 0.525                            | 0.841                        |
| 12   | 4.06 | 0.736              | 0.493                            | 0.843                        |
| 13   | 4.26 | 0.821              | 0.432                            | 0.846                        |
| 14   | 3.85 | 0.992              | 0.631                            | 0.834                        |
| 15   | 3.87 | 0.852              | 0.587                            | 0.837                        |

Table 4 Item-to-Item Correlations for 15-Item SSS-C
### Table 5
Results of exploratory factor analysis

| Item | 1     | 2     | 3     | 4     | 5     | 6     | 7     | 8     | 9     | 10    | 11    | 12    | 13    |
|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| 1    | 1.000 |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |
| 2    | 0.357 | 1.000 |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |
| 3    | 0.230 | 0.267 | 1.000 |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |
| 4    | 0.314 | 0.330 | 0.267 | 1.000 |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |
| 5    | 0.228 | 0.334 | 0.174 | 0.276 | 1.000 |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |
| 6    | 0.310 | 0.325 | 0.337 | 0.312 | 0.245 | 1.000 |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |
| 7    | 0.250 | 0.196 | 0.186 | 0.257 | 0.207 | 0.296 | 1.000 |       |       |       |       |       |       |
| 8    | 0.253 | 0.183 | 0.130 | 0.223 | 0.209 | 0.308 | 0.254 | 1.000 |       |       |       |       |       |
| 9    | 0.232 | 0.238 | 0.174 | 0.232 | 0.290 | 0.336 | 0.288 | 0.353 | 1.000 |       |       |       |       |
| 10   | 0.293 | 0.136 | 0.263 | 0.287 | 0.277 | 0.305 | 0.242 | 0.346 | 0.287 | 0.447 |       | 1.000 |       |
| 11   | 0.315 | 0.392 | 0.203 | 0.280 | 0.277 | 0.276 | 0.190 | 0.239 | 0.365 | 0.271 | 1.000 |       |       |
| 12   | 0.372 | 0.231 | 0.140 | 0.291 | 0.240 | 0.235 | 0.231 | 0.276 | 0.269 | 0.287 | 0.447 | 1.000 |       |
| 13   | 0.272 | 0.298 | 0.083 | 0.268 | 0.267 | 0.200 | 0.121 | 0.190 | 0.241 | 0.345 | 0.321 | 1.000 |       |
| 14   | 0.384 | 0.286 | 0.342 | 0.345 | 0.277 | 0.361 | 0.278 | 0.371 | 0.275 | 0.334 | 0.349 | 0.389 | 0.541 |
| 15   | 0.363 | 0.312 | 0.377 | 0.257 | 0.253 | 0.378 | 0.331 | 0.348 | 0.392 | 0.276 | 0.330 | 0.306 | 0.267 |

| Items | Factor I | Factor II | Factor III |
|-------|----------|-----------|------------|
| 13. My supervisor respects me as a person. | 0.659 | 0.810 | 1.000 |
| 11. My supervisor encourages me even in difficult situations. | 0.515 | 0.650 | 1.000 |
| 12. My supervisor makes a point of expressing appreciation when I do a good job. | 0.515 | 0.608 | 1.000 |
| 14. My supervisor makes time to listen to me. | 0.560 | 0.578 | 1.000 |
| 8. I can rely on my supervisor to be open to any remarks I may make to him/her. | 0.595 | 0.751 | 1.000 |
| 10. My supervisor strikes a balance between clients/ families’ concerns and mine. | 0.540 | 0.705 | 1.000 |
| 9. My supervisor keeps me informed of any decisions that were made in regards to my residents. | 0.434 | 0.570 | 1.000 |
| 3. My supervisor knows me well enough to know when I have concerns about resident care. | 0.713 | 0.837 | 1.000 |
| 6. I can rely on my supervisor when I ask for help, for example, if things are not going well between myself and my co-workers or between myself and residents and/or their families | 0.509 | 0.585 | 1.000 |
| 2. My supervisor tries to meet my needs. | 0.559 | 0.538 | 1.000 |
| 15. My supervisor recognizes my strengths and areas for development. | 0.524 | 0.528 | 1.000 |

*Note:* Factor I: Building connections with staff; Factor II: Being dependable; Factor III: Being empathic.

**Table 6** Divergent Construct Validity Across the Long-Term Care Facilities
| Facility | Number of supervisors | Supportive supervisory scores (Mean±SD) |
|----------|-----------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| A        | 80                    | 58.71±5.61                              |
| B        | 24                    | 60.42±5.54                              |
| C        | 65                    | 57.22±8.19                              |
| D        | 131                   | 61.08±7.69                              |
| Total    | 300                   | 59.56±7.29                              |

ANOVA \( F=4.791 \)  
\( P\text{value} = 0.003 \)

**Figures**

**Figure 1**

Sinicization steps of SSS