

Nonattachment Scale



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Synonyms and Acronyms

NAS

Description

The Nonattachment Scale is a 30-item self-report unidimensional rating scale used in mindfulness research to assess nonattachment, defined as a flexible and balanced way of relating to one's experiences without clinging to or suppressing them.

Nonattachment Scale (NAS)

The NAS is grounded in Buddhist philosophy, where nonattachment has been a central construct for over 2500 years. According to Buddhist theory, psychological suffering does not originate from external circumstances but from rigid and inflexible mental attachments—distorted cognitions that exaggerate desirable qualities of cherished objects or experiences while screening

out disagreeable ones. These attachments lead to suffering when they inevitably fail to align with an ever-changing reality, as nothing in life remains stable, certain, or permanent. Nonattachment, conceptualized as the solution to attachment-related suffering, represents a flexible and balanced way of relating to experiences without clinging to positive experiences or suppressing negative ones.

The NAS was developed by Sahdra et al. (2010) through a rigorous, culturally informed process. The authors first consulted with 18 Buddhist experts from three major traditions (Theravadan, Zen, and Indo-Tibetan) to develop conceptualizations of nonattachment that transcended tradition-specific interpretations. These experts characterized nonattachment as manifesting through psychological flexibility, nonreactivity, noncontingent well-being, openness to undesirable facts of life, and genuine engagement with present experiences—traits fundamentally distinct from detachment, aloofness, or indifference. While sharing conceptual similarities with Western attachment theory's secure attachment style, particularly in reducing clinginess and avoidance, nonattachment emphasizes freedom from mental fixation on outcomes. Based on these conceptualizations, an initial pool of 135 items was generated reflecting how nonattachment might manifest in everyday life. Nine Buddhist experts with extensive training (averaging 18 years of monastic/teacher-led training and meditation experience) then rated each

item on a 5-point Likert scale for fit with their understanding of nonattachment. Seventy-five items received consistently high ratings across traditions and were retained for psychometric analysis.

The 75 items were administered to 331 US college students and subjected to exploratory factor analysis (EFA), which identified 32 items loading above 0.40 on a single factor. A second EFA with a nationally representative American sample ($N = 511$) further refined the scale to 30 items accounting for 35.24% of variance with excellent internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.94$). Confirmatory factor analysis on an independent validation sample confirmed the unidimensional structure with excellent model fit indices. The final 30-item NAS demonstrated strong test-retest reliability, known-groups validity (distinguishing meditators from non-meditators), and both convergent and discriminant validity with theoretically relevant constructs.

The 30-item NAS has accumulated substantial evidence supporting its psychometric quality across multiple independent studies (Devine et al. 2025). Subsequent research has confirmed the scale's excellent internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from 0.87 to 0.94 across diverse samples. Evidence for convergent validity has been replicated in multiple studies, with the NAS demonstrating expected positive associations with mindfulness, self-compassion, acceptance, and autonomous motivation, while showing negative correlations with anxious attachment and materialism. Beyond establishing construct validity, research has linked nonattachment measured by the NAS to numerous indicators of psychological well-being and adaptive functioning. Higher nonattachment scores have been associated with greater subjective and eudaimonic well-being, a personality profile characteristic of well-being (higher extraversion, lower neuroticism), and reduced psychological distress including depression, anxiety, stress, and difficulties in emotion regulation—findings that have been independently replicated by multiple research teams. The scale has also demonstrated interpersonal benefits, with nonattachment positively correlating with perspective-taking,

empathy, generosity, and in adolescent samples, peer-rated kindness and helpfulness. These cumulative findings across independent samples and research groups provide robust evidence for both the psychometric integrity of the NAS and the theoretical proposition that nonattachment represents an adaptive psychological characteristic associated with optimal functioning.

The NAS has been translated and validated in both Chinese and Spanish to facilitate cross-cultural research. Chao and Chen (2013) validated the Chinese version in a sample of 313 military soldiers in Taiwan, reporting excellent internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.92$) and demonstrating that nonattachment was related to but distinguishable from the Chinese construct of Zhong-Yong thinking. The Chinese NAS showed positive correlations with subjective well-being and self-determination, and negative correlations with state-trait anxiety and perceived stress. Feliu-Soler et al. (2016) validated the Spanish version in 625 Spanish adults, with exploratory factor analysis confirming a one-factor solution accounting for 42% of variance and excellent internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.95$). The Spanish NAS demonstrated construct validity through expected correlations with mindfulness, decentering, resilience, emotion regulation difficulties, and psychopathology, and known-groups validity by discriminating between meditators, non-meditators, and individuals with bipolar disorder. Both translations maintain the psychometric integrity of the original English version, enabling nonattachment research across diverse cultural contexts.

Two short forms of the NAS have been developed to minimize participant burden: the 8-item NAS-SF (Chio et al. 2018) and the 7-item NAS-7 (Elphinstone et al. 2020). The NAS-SF was developed using Item Response Theory, selecting items based on their contribution to test information across trait levels, yielding strong psychometric properties with marginal reliability of 0.91 and correlation with the full NAS of 0.94. The NAS-7 was developed through stringent conceptual review and iterative confirmatory factor analysis, demonstrating excellent model fit ($CFI = 0.97\text{--}0.99$, $RMSEA = 0.030\text{--}0.060$) and

strong reliability ($\alpha = 0.84$) across American and Australian samples. Both short forms correlate highly with each other ($r = 0.82$) and the original NAS ($r = 0.90$ – 0.93), showing comparable associations with theoretically relevant constructs including life satisfaction, depression, and materialism. Notably, the NAS-7 is the only non-attachment measure validated longitudinally, with Ciarrochi et al. (2020) demonstrating measurement invariance over time and predictive validity for mental health improvements in adolescents. The NAS-7 has also been cross-culturally validated in Spanish-speaking samples (Feliu-Soler et al. 2016), making it particularly suitable for settings with time constraints or diverse populations.

The NAS demonstrates several notable strengths that have contributed to its widespread adoption in mindfulness and contemplative science research. First, its development was grounded in rigorous consultation with experts from three major Buddhist traditions, ensuring conceptual validity and cross-tradition applicability. The scale has demonstrated excellent psychometric properties across multiple independent studies, including strong internal consistency, robust test-retest reliability, and comprehensive evidence for convergent, discriminant, known-groups, and incremental validity. The NAS has proven utility across diverse populations and contexts, having been translated into multiple languages (Spanish and Chinese) with maintained psychometric integrity, and is available in validated short forms (NAS-SF and NAS-7) that reduce participant burden while preserving measurement quality. In addition, the scale has demonstrated meaningful associations with important outcomes including psychological well-being, reduced distress, and prosocial behaviors, providing cumulative evidence for the adaptive nature of nonattachment. The NAS-7's validation in longitudinal research with demonstrated measurement invariance over time further strengthens its utility for tracking developmental changes in nonattachment.

Despite its strengths, the NAS has some noteworthy limitations. The original scale development identified that some items assess multiple

concepts or contain compound elements (e.g., “calm and/or happy”), which can lead to inconsistent interpretations across respondents—a concern that motivated the more stringent item selection criteria used in developing the NAS-7. The presence of both positively and negatively worded items has been associated with method effects, as evidenced by the Spanish validation study where modeling correlated error terms for negatively worded items was considered to address factor structure concerns. The scale has been primarily validated in Western samples (United States, Australia) and has limited cross-cultural validation beyond Spanish and Chinese translations, potentially limiting its generalizability to other cultural contexts. In addition, while Rasch measurement theory analysis by Feng et al. (2016) suggested a revised 26-item version with superior discriminatory power, this alternative has not been widely adopted, and the field lacks consensus on whether the original 30-item, the revised 26-item, or the short forms represent optimal measurement approaches. Finally, more research is needed to establish the scale's performance in diverse clinical populations and hard-to-reach groups, as most validation has occurred in college student and general community samples.

Cross-References

- [Clinging in Early Buddhist Thought](#)
- [Impermanence Awareness and Acceptance Scale](#)
- [Impermanence in Early Buddhism](#)
- [Not Self in Early Buddhism](#)

Competing Interest Declaration The author(s) has no competing interests to declare that are relevant to the content of this article.

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