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Investigating the relationship between attitudes toward fertility and childbearing and the value of children with attitudes toward fertility control in married women aged 15-45 in Isfahan

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Abstract:

BACKGROUND: The family is one of the important social institutions and the function of childbearing is one of the important functions of the family. The decision to have children depends on the individual's attitude about the consequences of having another child and their perceived norms. Therefore, this study was conducted to determine the relationship between attitudes toward fertility and childbearing and the value of children with attitudes toward fertility control in married women aged 15 to 45 years in Isfahan.

MATERIALS AND METHODS: This study was a cross-sectional correlational study that was performed on 500 married women with at least one child in health centers affiliated to Isfahan University of Medical Sciences. Data collection tools in this study were standard questionnaires. The data were analyzed by SPSS software version 22.

RESULTS: The mean score of attitude toward fertility control was 40.43 ± 9.03 . The area of security in old age and the area of procrastination had the highest mean values of children and attitudes toward fertility and childbearing, respectively. Analysis of data by Spearman test showed that there is a significant relationship between all dimensions of child value and attitudes toward fertility and childbearing with attitudes toward fertility control ($P < 0.05$).

CONCLUSION: A positive attitude toward the child increases the likelihood of having children and believing in the negative impact of the child on freedom reduces the likelihood of having a desire for fertility. Changing attitudes of societies toward childbearing and less desire to have children should not be sought only in material, economic, or social reasons but also cultural factors should be considered in this area.

Keywords:

Attitude, childbearing, children, fertility, reproductive behavior, value of children

Introduction

The family is one of the important social institutions and the function of childbearing is one of the important functions of the family. Fertility is the most important factor in changing the structure

of the population.^[1] Total fertility rate is the average number of children a woman gives birth to during her lifetime; this rate is 1.8 in Iran and 2.1 in the world.^[2] The value of children has wide social, psychological, and economic dimensions.^[3] The decision to have children depends on the individual's

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attitude about the consequences of having another child and their perceived norms.^[4,5] Couples make decisions based on the costs and benefits of their children and considering their special circumstances.^[4] The value of children is important for clarifying the goals and expectations of parents about their children, intergenerational relationships and differences, and a set of factors that reflect the position of the child in the family and society.^[6] The value of children clearly illustrates intercultural differences in individual decisions about reproductive behavior.^[7-9] The concept of children's value varies according to the type of society and has a wide variety of consequences and directly determines the motivation of parents to have a certain number of children and determine and regulate the time of having children.^[3] Another of the most important factors that play a role in childbearing is the attitude towards childbearing.^[10] Demographers call women's ability to conceive fertility or the possibility of having children, and attitudes are expressed in the mental readiness of individuals, which is formed on the basis of an organized experience and distorts the individual's response to distorted situations. Intention Toward Fertility And Childbearing is one of the main determinants of fertility behavior. Today, reducing the tendency to have children is one of the challenges of societies, and Iran is no exception.^[11] A positive attitude toward the child and childbearing leads to early childbearing and more childbearing.^[3,6-9] But a positive attitude toward childbearing does not increase fertility in all cases because some couples have a positive attitude toward childbearing but do not want to have more children.^[12-14] According to these studies, the specific effect of attitudes toward fertility and childbearing (ATFC) and the value of children with fertility have not been determined. On the other hand, the attitude toward fertility control means the degree of importance that a person has toward this phenomenon, that is, the degree of tendency toward having children.^[15] For this reason, paying attention to all these points can affect the final fertility rate of individuals. This study examined the relationship between fertility attitude and childbearing and the value of children with attitudes toward fertility control, reproductive behavior, and fertility rate.

Materials and Methods

Study design and setting

This study was a cross-sectional correlational study that was performed in health centers affiliated to Isfahan University of Medical Sciences in 2021.

Study participants and sampling

Sampling in this study was done by non-probability sampling and available (easy) type. The sample size was 500 people.

Inclusion criteria were as follows: having informed consent to participate in the study, Iranian nationality, being a Muslim, being married, having a biological child without the use of assisted reproductive techniques, not having cancers and chronic diseases, and not having mental illnesses.

Exclusion criteria were incomplete completion of questionnaires and unwillingness to continue cooperation.

Data collection tool and technique

In this study, the questionnaires used were as follows: demographic/fertility characteristics, ATFC and the value of children, reproductive behavior, and attitudes toward fertility control.

To measure the attitude toward fertility and childbearing, the study questionnaire of Kordzanganeh *et al.*^[9] was used. This questionnaire was scored based on a 5-point Likert scale (with strongly agree to strongly disagree). This questionnaire consists of 21 questions and 4 components (the importance of the child for the future, the child as a barrier in the present, and social identity). The reliability of the questionnaire in the study of Kordzanganeh *et al.*^[9] was confirmed by Cronbach's alpha coefficient equal to 1.5.

Questionnaire on attitudes toward children of Fazeli *et al.* (2014) was used to assess attitudes toward children. In this questionnaire, the value of children is classified into four dimensions: emotional, utilitarian-normative, family, and security in old age. This questionnaire has 41 items. Scoring in the Likert scale is from 1 to 5 (from strongly disagree to strongly agree).^[6] The reliability of the questionnaire in the study of Fazeli *et al.*^[7] was confirmed by Cronbach's $r = 0.85$.

Attitudes toward fertility control and reproductive behavior were assessed using a study questionnaire by RastegarKhaled *et al.* This questionnaire has 17 items: 2 questions are related to reproductive behavior and 15 questions are related to attitudes toward fertility control. The questions are scored on a Likert scale from 1 to 5 (from strongly disagree to strongly agree). The reliability of this questionnaire in the research of Rastegar Khalid *et al.*^[15] was 72%.

At first, the researcher, after approving the plan in the research vice chancellor of Isfahan University of Medical Sciences, by referring to Isfahan health centers on consecutive days, selected the study units that met the inclusion criteria through easy sampling. For sampling, the researcher introduced herself and then explained the research objectives and working method to the participants. Participants then completed

a written consent form. Then, demographic/fertility questionnaire, attitude toward fertility and childbearing questionnaire, and children’s value questionnaire were completed by the research units. Finally, the collected information was coded and entered into SPSS software version 22 and analyzed by descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) and analytical tests (Spearman and regression).

Ethical consideration

This study was performed after approval by the Student Research Committee of the School of Nursing and Midwifery and the Ethics Committee of the Vice Chancellor for Research, Isfahan University of Medical Sciences (IR. MUI. RESEARCH. REC. 1399.458). Conscious consent was obtained from all participants. Also, due to the fact that this study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, all health protocols (use of masks, gloves, and disinfectants) were observed.

Results

The results of this study showed that the mean score of attitude toward fertility control was 40.43 ± 9.03 . Also, the area of security in old age with an average of 67.56 ± 14.3 and the area of procrastination with an average of 25.3 ± 4.9 , respectively, had the highest mean values of children and ATFC [Table 1].

In addition, the data analysis with Spearman test showed that there is a significant relationship between all dimensions of child value and ATFC with attitudes toward fertility control ($P < 0.05$) [Table 2].

The results of data analysis by Spearman and regression tests showed that there was no significant correlation between attitudes toward fertility control and demographic variables of female age, spouse age, female occupation, female education, spouse occupation, spouse education, financial status, and housing status ($P > 0/05$).

Discussion

According to the results of this study, the highest mean score related to child value dimensions was related to the field of security in old age. In this regard, the results of the study of Fazeli *et al.*^[7] also showed that the highest mean score was related to the field of security in old age. But in Mayer *et al.*’s^[16] study, the highest mean score was related to the emotional domain. Probably in Iran, due to the lack of attention to middle-aged people and the lack of support organizations, this traditional view of the child is of the greatest value to families, which makes the security of old age a major concern. On the other hand, in developed and developing countries, economic-utilitarian value fades because little economic

Table 1: Investigation of mean and standard deviation of main variables in research units

| Variable | Mean±standard deviation |
|---|-------------------------|
| Attitudes towards fertility control | 40.43±9.03 |
| Child value | |
| Family | 40.82±11.6 |
| Utilitarian-normative | 60.23±12.4 |
| Emotional | 65.44±14.4 |
| Security of aging | 67.56±14.3 |
| Attitudes toward fertility and childbearing | |
| Postponement to the future | 25.3±4.9 |
| Obstacle now | 13.8±3.9 |
| Being important for the future | 18.8±3.4 |
| Social identity | 14.5±3.5 |

Table 2: Investigating the relationship between child value and attitudes toward fertility and childbearing with attitudes toward fertility control in research units

| Variable | Attitudes toward fertility control | |
|---|------------------------------------|-------|
| | r | P |
| Child value | | |
| Family | 0.43 | 0.001 |
| Utilitarian-normative | 0.52 | 0.001 |
| Emotional | 0.32 | 0.001 |
| Security of aging | 0.16 | 0.001 |
| Attitudes toward fertility and childbearing | | |
| Postponement to the future | 0.41 | 0.001 |
| Obstacle now | 0.52 | 0.001 |
| Being important for the future | 0.63 | 0.001 |
| Social identity | 0.27 | 0.001 |

benefits are provided to parents through children, and the emotional value of the child can be one of the primary reasons for having children.

It has also been stated that with the expansion of production methods and non-family social institutions, the economic benefit of children and the reliance of parents on their children in the days of old age and hardship has decreased. In addition, studies have shown that the most important value of the child for the couple to want the next child is attitude values and the least important value of the child for the couple is economic values.^[17] By studying the value of children in Palestine and Turkey, Klaus *et al.* (2007) showed that Palestinians place more importance on their children in creating parental comfort and gaining social respect. In both countries, children are important for meeting emotional needs and gaining pleasure. In Palestine, the value of children is defined independently of specific living conditions and the fertility is high.^[18] According to the findings of Klein and Eckhard (2007), among women with higher education, understanding the intangible value of their children is more important and the psychological value of parenting creates the decision to start a family. On the other hand, favorable

economic aspects such as security in old age are less important.^[6]

The results of this study also showed that the highest mean scores of attitude towards fertility and childbearing were related to the field of procrastination. In this regard, the results of the study by Kordzanganeh *et al.*^[9] also showed that the field of procrastination had the highest average among the dimensions of ATFC. Based on this, it can be said that people are more inclined to postpone their pregnancy and childbearing to the future, which in turn increases the reproductive age. In fact, it can be said that women and couples in general, by recognizing the realities of life, including living expenses and children, try to regulate their childbearing behavior, and by postponing their childbearing to the future, they have tried to do so.

In addition, the results of this study showed that there is a significant relationship between all dimensions of child value and ATFC with attitudes toward fertility control. In this regard, the results of Rastegar Khaled *et al.*'s^[15] study showed that there is a relationship between child value and attitudes toward fertility control. Due to the economic and social conditions as well as the culture of the society, couples who understand the value of children and have a positive view of fertility and childbearing have a higher tendency for fertility and literally control fertility and fertility behaviors. Also, people can take effective steps to increase fertility by considering their children valuable.

Limitation and recommendation

This study was performed in paired conditions of COVID-19. Since COVID-19 disease can affect the reproductive behavior of individuals, this study is recommended in conditions other than the COVID-19 pandemic.

Conclusion

A positive attitude toward the child increases the likelihood of having children and belief in the negative effect of the child on freedom reduces the likelihood of fertility. In other words, changing the attitude of societies toward childbearing and less desire to have children should not only be sought in material, economic, or social causes but also cultural factors should be considered in this area.

Declaration of patient consent

The authors certify that they have obtained all appropriate patient consent forms. In the form the patient(s) has/have given his/her/their consent for his/her/their images and other clinical information to be reported in the journal. The patients understand that their names

and initials will not be published and due efforts will be made to conceal their identity, but anonymity cannot be guaranteed.

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Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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