ISSN: 2717-3216 *Volume 11, Issue 2 (2024)* https://www.ijfpjournal.ir/

Journal of Family Psychology

Research Paper

10.22034/ijfp.2025.2042893.1360

The Mediating Role of Psychological Well-being in the Relationship Between Pathological Worry and Childbearing Motivation in Married Women

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Article Info.

Received: 6 October 2024

Revised: 1 December 2024

Accepted: 30 December 2024

Keywords:

Childbearing motivation, Pathological Worry, Psychological well-being

Abstract

Abstract

The present study was conducted to investigate the mediating role of psychological well-being in the relationship between pathological worry and childbearing motivation. The research method was descriptive and path analysis. The statistical population consisted of all married women aged 18 to 45 in Hamedan in 2023 when at least three years had passed since the beginning of their marital life. The sample was considered to be 550 individuals to improve the external validity of the research. They were selected from the statistical population through a purposeful sampling method. Despite the loss of some of the participants, 400 married women participated in this study. Moreover, Miller's Childbearing Questionnaire (1995), Penn State Worry Questionnaire (1990), and Riff's Scales of Psychological Well-being (1989) were used. Then, after collecting the questionnaires, the data was analyzed using path analysis using SPSS software (version 26) and Lisrel software (version 8.8). The findings showed that the model had a good fit. According to the results, pathological worry had a direct and negative relationship with positive childbearing motivation, and psychological well-being had a direct and positive relationship with positive childbearing motivation ($P < 0.01$). Furthermore, pathological worry had an indirect effect on childbearing motivation with the mediating role of psychological well-being ($P < 0.01$). Therefore, it can be concluded that psychological well-being can moderate the effects of the relationship between pathological worry and childbearing motivation. Moreover, by reducing pathological worry and increasing psychological well-being, a positive effect can be created on women's childbearing motivation.

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Introduction

Having a child in families is an important event worldwide. Attitudes towards childbearing are influenced by different factors (Alijanzadeh et al., 2023; Fiskin & Sari, 2021; Vatanparast et al., 2021). In recent years, couples have been planning for fewer children and tend to have their first child at an older age (li et al., 2022). Iran is a developing country that has experienced a sharp decline in childbearing (Abbasi Shavazi et al., 2009).

Research studies have shown that worry can seriously affect childbearing motivation (Boivin et al., 2018). Worry is a common phenomenon in people who want to anticipate and be prepared for future events. Pathological worry not only is limited to dangerous events but also includes small daily events. This type of worry is considered uncontrollable and is strongly associated with catastrophizing (Borkovec et al., 1983; Ruscio & Borkovec, 2004).

On the other hand, well-being plays an important role in determining reproductive intentions (Matsuo & Matthijs, 2016). The decision-making process of individuals arises from the pursuit of happiness, of which children are likely to be an important component. Thus, childbearing is higher in societies where couples receive a higher level of psychological well-being from the experience of childbearing (Aassve et al., 2015). The results of research studies have shown that worry has a negative relationship with psychological well-being (Iani et al., 2019). Given the importance of childbearing in the current situation and the sharp decline in the childbearing rate in Iran, it is very important to examine the factors affecting the motivation to have children from a psychological and pathological perspective.

A review of the literature shows that childbearing motivations are influenced by several factors. However, there is little information on the direct and indirect effects of pathological worry and psychological well-being on childbearing motivations; therefore, due to the lack of a comprehensive study that can examine the effects of these psychological and pathological factors on childbearing motivation, this study aimed to answer the question of whether childbearing motivations could be explained based on pathological worry with the mediating role of psychological well-being?

Method

This study is a descriptive research and path analysis type. The statistical population included all married women aged 18 to 45 in Hamadan in 2023; they had been living together for at least three years. Being aware of the possibility of a loss in participants and increasing external validity, the researchers considered the sample size of 550 individuals, who were selected through purposive sampling method. The final sample included 400 married women in Hamadan. The sample size was based on the Kline (2015) criteria, which suggested a minimum sample size of 200 people. Since this study examined multiple direct and indirect relationships and to increase external validity, a larger sample size was examined. The inclusion criteria were 1) being a woman, 2) being married, 3) having lived together for at least 3 years, and 4) having a minimum of high school educational level. Moreover, the exclusion criteria were 1) incompleteness of the questionnaires and 2) unwillingness to cooperate with the researcher. After obtaining permission from the Ethics Committee of the University of Kurdistan, cultural, social, and educational centers were referred to access the samples. Thus, women were asked to participate in the study if they met the conditions. Miller's Childbearing Questionnaire (1995), Penn State Worry Questionnaire (1990), and Riff's Scales of Psychological Well-being (1989) were used to collect data. After collecting the

questionnaires, data were analyzed using path analysis using SPSS software (version 26) and Lisrel software (version 8.8).

Findings

A total of 400 married women with a mean age of 34.84 and a standard deviation of 5.87 (aged 20 to 45) participated in this study.

Table 1. Correlation matrix of the research variables

Variables	1	2	3	4
Positive childbearing motivation	1			
Negative childbearing motivation	-.59**	1		
Pathological worry	-.39**	.32**	1	
Psychological well-being	.62**	.51**	-.29**	1

*P<0.05, **P<0.001

The results of Table 1 show that there were a negative and significant relationship between positive childbearing motivation and pathological worry (P < 0.01; r = -0.39) at the 99% level, and a positive and significant relationship with psychological well-being (P < 0.01; r = 0.62) at the 99% level.

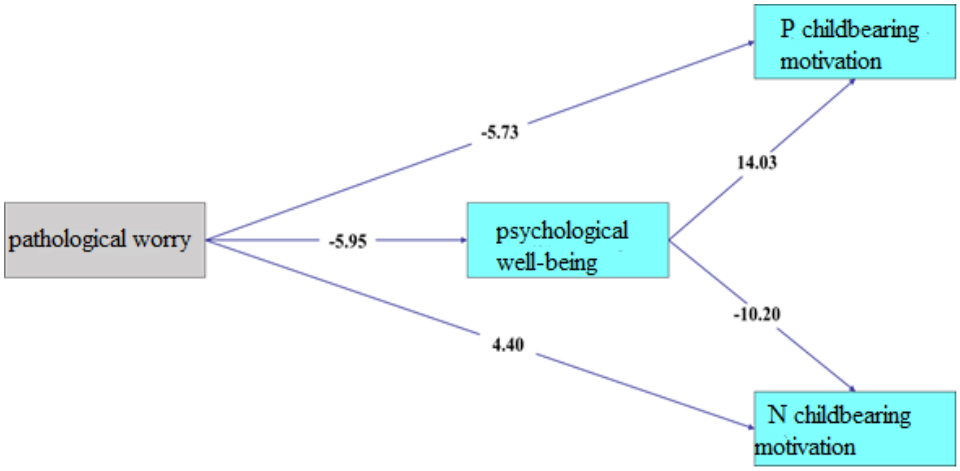

Figure 1. Research model (T-Value mode)

Based on the fitness indices of the research model, the comparative fit index (CFI) was 0.92, the normalized fit index (NFI) was 0.92, the goodness of fit index (GFI) was 0.86, the chi-square ratio per degree of freedom was 2.55, and the root mean square error index (RMSEA) was 0.070. According to the results obtained, it can be stated that the research model was confirmed in terms of significance and fit indices.

Table 2. Direct effects

Variables			**Standard coefficients**	**T-value**	**Standard error**	**Significance**
Pathological worry	➔	Positive childbearing motivation	-.23	-5.73	.118	P< .05
Pathological worry	➔	Negative childbearing motivation	.19	4.40	.075	P< .05
Pathological worry	➔	Psychological well-being	-.29	-5.95	.035	P< .05
Psychological well-being	➔	Positive childbearing motivation	.55	14.03	.023	P< .05
Psychological well-being	➔	Negative childbearing motivation	-.45	-10.20	.026	P< .05

According to Table 2, the direct effect of pathological worry variables on positive and negative childbearing motivation was significant at the 99% confidence level. To examine the indirect effect of pathological worry on positive and negative childbearing motivation with the mediation of psychological well-being, the Sobel test was used, and to determine the intensity of the indirect effect through the mediator, a statistic called VAF was used, the results of which are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. The results of the analysis of indirect effects

Research hypothesis		T-sobel	Standard path coefficient	VAF	Result
Pathological worry ➔ Psychological well-being	Positive childbearing motivation	9.822	.160	.411	Significant
	Negative childbearing motivation	8.410	.131	.397	Significant

According to the structural model of the research, in the case of significant coefficients, it is observed that the indirect t-statistic (Sobel t-statistic) between the above variables was outside the range (1.96 and -1.96); therefore, the indirect effect of pathological worry on the motivation of childbearing was accepted. Therefore, in addition to the direct effect, pathological worry affected the motivation of childbearing indirectly through psychological well-being.

According to the obtained value for the VAF statistic, it is observed that 41.1 percent of the effect of pathological worry on the positive motivation of childbearing and 39.7 percent of the effect of pathological worry on the negative motivation of childbearing could be explained through psychological well-being.

Discussion

The present study investigated the mediating role of psychological well-being in the relationship between pathological worry and childbearing motivation. The results showed that pathological worry had a direct effect on childbearing motivation, which is consistent with the results of similar studies such as Mynarska and Rytel, (2020) and Yahyanejad et al. (2022). However, studies that directly examined this hypothesis have not been conducted, and therefore there is little information in this regard. Those who worry about the negative aspects of childcare, such as time, energy, and financial costs, are the least likely to want to have children (Mynarska & Rytel, 2020).

The findings emphasized that psychological well-being had a direct effect on childbearing motivation, which is consistent with the findings of studies by Balbo and Arpino (2016), Le Moglie et al. (2015), Vignoli et al. (2020), and Radó (2020). Having or not having children is associated with differences in the psychological well-being of women of reproductive age (Kuipers et al., 2021).

The results also showed that pathological worry had an indirect effect on childbearing motivation through psychological well-being. The data obtained indicated confirmation of this hypothesis, but similar studies have not been conducted on this subject area.

It should be noted that in these cross-sectional studies, it is not possible to examine the causal relationship between the variables in detail. Considering that only self-report questionnaires were used to collect data, it is possible that some participants avoided providing a true answer. Moreover, the high number of questions in the questionnaires led to a long time to fill in. Thus, there was a possibility that the accuracy of the respondents may have decreased. It is suggested that longitudinal studies be conducted to better clarify the relationship between the variables. Moreover, shorter questionnaires should be used to reduce the implementation time.

Conflict of Interest

This article is derived from a master's thesis in Clinical Psychology at the University of Kurdistan; there is no conflict of interest.

Acknowledgements

The researchers consider it necessary to appreciate all participants for participating in the research study.

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