A Structure of Childbearing Motivation

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Introduction

Historically, childlessness is not a new phenomenon but its demographic context and nature has changed (Rowland 2007). Currently, childlessness is related not only to being infertile or single, but more and more often it results from various external obstacles (e.g., financial, work-related) or is associated with a shift in people's attitudes and life priorities (Hagestad and Call 2007; Heaton et al. 1999). Consequently, the classic distinction between "involuntary" (related to biological limitations) and "voluntary" childlessness became obsolete. Instead, it has been suggested to distinguish between "child-less" and "child-free" individuals (Basten 2009; Tanturri and Mencarini 2008) or between childlessness that is congruent or incongruent with individual attitudes (Connidis and McMullin 1993; Koropeckyj-Cox 2002). The attitudes towards childbearing and motivation for parenthood are focal in these typologies.

Unfortunately, while many studies examine obstacles that prevent young couples from having offspring, childbearing motivation is much less investigated. This study contributes to filling this gap in our knowledge.

We situate our research in the theoretical framework, developed by Warren Miller (1994, 1995, 2011a, 2011b). According to this model, childbearing desire – that precedes reproductive intention and consequent behavior – is shaped by motivational traits or motives (Trait-Desire-Intention-Behavior model). The motivational traits are individual dispositions to react favorably or unfavorably to various aspects of parenthood.

The Childbearing Questionnaire, designed by Warren Miller (1995) allows for measuring the strength of childbearing motivation and for investigating its dimensions. It provides detailed information on what aspects of having children are evaluated positively or negatively by an individual. Which aspects are mostly desired or feared of. In this study we use the Polish version of the Childbearing Questionnaire to identify key positive and negative motives for having offspring. We examine what motives are crucial for wanting to have a child (a desire) and for a precise plan to become a parent in the near future (an intention).

Childbearing Questionnaire – measuring childbearing motives

The Childbearing Questionnaire of Warren Miller (1995) comprises of two sections. First the respondents are asked to rate how desirable various, possibly positive consequences of childbearing are to them. This section allows for measuring a strength of positive childbearing motives (PCM), an overall disposition to react favorably to different aspects of childbearing. In the second part, the respondents are asked to rate undesirability of another set of possibly negative consequences of childbearing. The second section allows for capturing people's fears and worries related to parenthood and hence to measure an overall strength of negative childbearing motives (NCM).

In the Polish adaptation, the original questionnaire was translated and also expanded. Items were added to both sections based on the qualitative research conducted in Poland (Mynarska 2009). In total, there are 35 items to measure positive motives and 29 in the negative section. With multiple questions we are able to explore a structure of childbearing motives. In the American version, five positive and four negative subscales were derived based on the principal component analysis (Miller 1995).

Pilot study

The pilot study to test the questionnaire in the Polish context took place in December 2012. The preliminary version of the questionnaire was administered to over 200 childless respondents (150 women and 53 men), aged 20-40. The reliability of the questionnaire was excellent. The internal consistency of PCM and NCM scales, evaluated with Cronbach's alpha coefficient, was 0.957 and 0.933 respectively. Moreover, several analyses were performed to document the validity of the questionnaire. *Inter alia*, the relation between childbearing motives, desires and intentions – as postulated in the theoretical model – was verified, using Structural Equation Modeling technique. The graph below depicts relations between the latent constructs (standardized regression weights). The measures to describe goodness of fit are presented beneath.
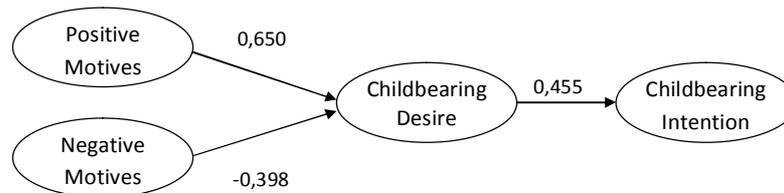
Fitting procedure: ML
Goodness of fit:
χ^2 (2275) = 4918.91 p < 0.0005 χ^2 / df = 2.16
CFI = 0.700
RMSEA = 0.076

In overall, the structural model has shown a satisfactory model fit, proving the validity of the questionnaire. While RMSEA lower than 0.05 would be desirable, the result of 0.076 is very promising given a very small sample size (203 respondents only). Moreover, detailed analyses of questionnaire items indicated which questions could have been problematic to the respondents, impairing the validity of the questionnaire. Consequently, some minor changes to the wording of items were introduced.

Data collection and plan of analyses

The final version of the Polish version of the Childbearing Questionnaire was administered to the purposive sample of over 900 childless individuals, aged 25-44. The respondents were diversified in respect to educational level and place of residence (different regions of Poland, big cities and small municipalities). The data collection was completed in October 2013.

First, we will use this data to depict various components of childbearing motives. Similarly to the original study of Warren Miller (1995), principal component analysis will be performed to identify dimensions of positive and negative motives. Next, we will examine which of these dimensions are crucial for wanting to have a child (a desire) and for a precise plan to become a parent in the near future (an intention). Regression methods will be used to investigate which positive or negative motives are the strongest predictors of childbearing desires and intentions.

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