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Adapting the Guilt about Parenting Scale (GAPS) to Iranian Culture (Validity and Reliability Study)

Reyhaneh Rokni[1], Azadeh Taheri[2]

1. undergraduate student, Department of Counseling, Faculty of Education and Psychology, Alzahra University, Tehran, Iran.
2. Assistant professor, Department of Counseling, Faculty of Education and Psychology, Alzahra University, Tehran, Iran.

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Corresponding Author:
Azadeh Taheri

Email:
sa.taheri@alzahra.ac.ir

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Abstract

Parental guilt represents a distressing moral emotion arising from the perception that one's behavior or choices have negatively impacted their child's development or well-being. In the contemporary socio-cultural landscape of Iran, working mothers are increasingly navigating the complexities of the intensive mothering ideology. This imposes idealized, self-sacrificing standards while they concurrently fulfill modern professional demands. This structural and emotional tension, often referred to as "double pressure," often manifests as significant parental guilt, highlighting a critical need for localized assessment tools. Thus, this study was undertaken to adapt and rigorously ascertain the psychometric properties of the Persian version of the Guilt about Parenting Scale (GAPS) specifically for Iranian working mothers. Utilizing a descriptive-correlational design, 218 working mothers in Tehran with children aged 2 to 12 years were selected through convenience sampling, all fulfilling the criterion of working at least 20 hours per week. The validation process involved a standard forward-backward translation protocol, followed by the appraisal of face and content validity by a panel of ten experts, yielding satisfactory Content Validity Index (CVI) and Content Validity Ratio (CVR) values. To explore construct validity, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was performed using AMOS-24, which confirmed a robust single-factor structure with factor loadings ranging within 0.56-0.81, all significant at the 0.001 level. The structural model fit indices were within highly acceptable ranges: CMIN/DF = 2.37, RMSEA = 0.073, GFI = 0.93, CFI = 0.95, and IFI = 0.95. Internal consistency was exceptionally strong, evidenced by a Cronbach's alpha of 0.90 and a Composite Reliability (CR) of 0.80, with an Average Variance Extracted (AVE) of 0.50. Concurrent validity was established through a significant positive correlation with work-family conflict (r = 0.68) and a significant negative correlation with mindful parenting (r = -0.31). These findings collectively suggest that the Persian GAPS is a reliable and valid instrument within the Iranian context. Through providing a precise metric, this tool enables clinicians to identify mothers at risk of burnout and design interventions that promote a sustainable balance between professional and family life.

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Extended Abstract

Introduction

Parental guilt is defined as a painful emotional experience arising from the belief that one's actions (or inactions) have adversely affected their child. This emotion is deeply intertwined with the "Motherhood Myth," which imposes idealized and often unattainable standards on mothers. In Iranian society, in spite of the rapid growth of women's employment, the domestic division of labor remains largely traditional. Thus, working mothers often confront intense conflict between professional responsibilities and the expectation to be the primary caregiver, resulting in persistent feelings of inadequacy and guilt. Although there are various scales for specific types of guilt, a general, culturally adapted tool for measuring parental guilt in the Iranian population is not currently unavailable. Thus, this study sought to adapt and validate the Guilt about Parenting Scale (GAPS) to provide an efficient clinical and research tool for this demographic.

Method

The statistical population consisted of all working mothers in Tehran with children between 2 and 12 years old. A sample of 218 mothers was selected using convenience sampling, ensuring they worked at least 20 hours per week. The participants had a mean age of 37 years and an average of 1.9 children. The translation process involved a forward-backward method, followed by a pilot study on 10 mothers to ensure face validity. Content validity was appraised by 10 experts using the Content Validity Ratio (CVR) and Content Validity Index (CVI). To ascertain construct and concurrent validity, three instruments were employed: 1) The 10-item GAPS (7-point Likert scale); 2) The 18-item Work–Family Conflict Scale (WFCS) to assess convergent validity; 3) The 28-item Mindful Parenting Questionnaire (MIPQ) to appraise divergent/concurrent validity. Data analysis was performed using SPSS-26 and AMOS-24, focusing on Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and internal consistency metrics.

Results

Initial data screening confirmed the normality of the distribution as well as the absence of multivariate outliers (Mahalanobis distance < 4). Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) revealed that all 10 items of the GAPS loaded significantly onto the latent construct of parental guilt, with loadings exceeding 0.56. The structural model fit indices (CMIN/DF = 2.37; RMSEA = 0.073; GFI = 0.93; CFI = 0.95; IFI = 0.95) fulfilled the criteria for an acceptable model. Reliability analysis exhibited a Cronbach's alpha of 0.90, indicating excellent internal consistency. The Composite Reliability (CR) was 0.80, and the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) reached the threshold of 0.50, further supporting convergent validity. Considering concurrent validity, GAPS scores presented the strongest positive correlation with the "time-based family interference with work" subscale (r = 0.58) and the total WFCS score (r = 0.68). Conversely, it indicated a significant negative correlation with mindful parenting (r = -0.31) and its sub-dimensions, such as "being in the moment with the child" (r = -0.29).

Discussion

The findings indicate that the Persian version of the GAPS is a psychometrically robust instrument. The positive association between work-family conflict and guilt highlights the psychological burden on Iranian mothers who perceive their employment as a hindrance to

their traditional caregiving roles. This "double-edged sword" of professional growth versus maternal responsibility results in anxiety and a fear of causing developmental harm to children .

Meanwhile, the negative relationship with mindful parenting suggests that mothers who practice non-judgmental awareness and self-compassion are better equipped to regulate their emotions as well as experience less paralyzing guilt. This study provides a foundation for clinical interventions, such as compassion-focused therapy or mindfulness-based stress reduction, tailored for working parents. While the study is limited by its focus on mothers and its use of convenience sampling in an urban setting (Tehran), it fills a significant gap in Iranian psychological assessment literature. Future research should include fathers and more diverse geographic populations to boost the generalizability of the findings. Practically, the GAPS can be employed in workplace wellness programs to identify at-risk employees and develop support systems that promote a healthier balance between professional life and family duties.

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Ethical Approval: This study was reviewed and approved by the Department of Counseling, Faculty of Education and Psychology, Alzahra University. All procedures of this research were conducted in accordance with ethical principles.