

Nurture-Preparedness Assessment for the Childless Adults in China

Wenyan Miao^{1,a,*}, and Zhenrui Chen²

¹*Faculty of Science and Technology, Beijing Normal University Hongkong Baptist University
United International College, Zhuhai, Guangdong, 519000, China*

²*Acabridge Academy, Shanghai, 200052, China
a. 1529944920@qq.com*

**corresponding author*

Abstract: Since the role of caregivers at all stages of their offspring's development has a significant impact on the formation of sound personalities, assessment tests of the ability of caregivers to provide emotional support to their offspring can help reduce the probability of problems for adolescents during their formative years. This study aims to initially develop a scale for Nurture-Preparedness Assessment for the Childless Adults in China. Combined with the classical psychological theories of Freud, Erikson and Maslow, and under the basis of the parents expectation and the Bond of Kinship, primarily constructed the positive and negative six aspects of the scale, a total of 31 items. After discrimination analysis, the final 26 scale items. Meanwhile, the reliability and validity of the scales were assessed by analyzing the internal consistency and validity factors. It should be noted that this experiment is a preliminary exploration, so the results are controversial and need to be further explored.

Keywords: Nurture-Preparedness, childless adults, discrimination, validity, reliability

1. Introduction

The prevalence of mental disorders in China will remain high until 2022. A study on the prevalence of mental disorders in 31 provinces in China in 2021 showed a relatively high percentage of 28,140 patients with mental disorders who were successfully treated, only 0.5% [1]. Based on the impact of mental disorders on adolescents, adolescents are more susceptible to psychopathic tendencies during their development. A survey on the prevalence of psychiatric disorders among Chinese adolescents showed that 14.8% of adolescents were at high risk of developing various psychiatric disorders, such as depression. Among them, the probability of developing various psychiatric disorders among adolescents aged 18 to 24 is more than 24%. According to Erikson's theory of personality development, the fulfillment of desires by caregivers at various stages of development plays an important role in the formation of a sound personality [2]. Therefore, an assessment test of the caregiver's ability to provide spiritual support is recommended. A "Nurture-Preparedness" test was developed in 2021 to primarily assess an individual's caregiving ability (or "childcare" ability). It was found through testing and evaluation that the validity of this study was relatively low due to, among other things, demand characteristics and the fact that it did not include the detection of new psychological aspects, among other issues, thus failing to meet the goal of assessing parental or caregiver competence.

Therefore, this paper develops the Nurture-Preparedness Assessment for the Childless Adults in China on the basis of psychological theories, kinship ties, etc., with the aim of improving the assessment of parental caregiving abilities and thus improving the problems encountered by adolescents during their development.

2. Psychological Theories

2.1. Erikson-Eight Stages of Personality Development

Erikson divided life into eight stages of personality development by age, and educational failure at any age can create obstacles to a person's lifelong development [3]. In addition, according to Erikson, at each stage of psychosocial development, the personality traits that emerge from the resolution of core issues include both positive and negative qualities [4]. If the positive qualities are maintained at each stage of personality development, a sound personality is gradually formed. On the contrary, psychosocial crises and emotional disorders will occur, thus forming an unsound personality. The eight stages are: Trust versus mistrust (occurs from birth to around 18 months, focusing on developing a sense of trust and security in the world), Autonomy versus shame and doubt (occurs from around 18 months to 3 years of age, focusing on developing a sense of independence and self-control), Initiative versus guilt (occurs from around 3 to 5 years of age, focusing on developing a sense of purpose and taking initiative in tasks), Industry versus inferiority (occurs from around 5 to 12 years of age, focusing on developing competence and skills in school and other activities), Identity versus role confusion (occurs during adolescence, from around 12 to 18 years of age, focusing on developing a sense of self-identity and exploring different roles in life), Intimacy versus isolation (occurs during adulthood, from around 19 to 40 years of age, focusing on developing intimate relationships and forming strong connections with others), Generativity versus stagnation (occurs during middle adulthood, from around 40 to 65 years of age, focusing on contributing to society and leaving a positive impact on the next generation), and Ego integrity versus despair (occurs during late adulthood, from around 65 years of age and onwards, focusing on reflecting on life and feeling a sense of satisfaction and fulfillment, or experiencing regret and despair).

2.2. Projection Effect

The theory of the projection effect, originally derived from Freud's theory of psychological defense mechanisms, is a cognitive disorder that refers to the tendency to project one's own subjective desires onto others and to assume that others conform to one's own expectations or have the same desires as oneself. The phenomenon in which people perceive and form impressions of others, thinking that they also possess characteristics similar to their own, and at the same time projecting and imposing their own feelings and will on others. Projection makes people tend to recognize or perceive others according to their own characteristics, thus misjudging their feelings and intentions [4]. The projection effect is usually manifested in two ways: one is emotional projection, which means that one acquiesces to the fact that other people's good and bad feelings are the same as one's own, and then tries to influence others according to one's own way of thinking. The second is a lack of objectivity in perception [4].

2.3. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Maslow's hierarchy of needs belongs to the motivational theory of psychology, where he classified human needs into different levels based on the urgency of the need and displayed them in the shape of a pyramid structure. From the bottom of the hierarchy upwards are: physiological needs, safety needs, belongingness and love needs, esteem needs, cognitive needs, aesthetic needs, self-

actualization, and transcendence needs. These eight need stages can be categorized as deficiency needs and growth needs. The first four levels are often referred to as deficiency needs, while the last four are growth needs. Maslow believed that lower-level needs must be satisfied before higher-level needs can emerge. And people need motivation to fulfill certain needs, and some needs are prioritized over others [5-6].

3. Design

3.1. Scale Factors

Aiming to test the ability of adopters to cultivate wholesome personalities in their offspring, this paper designs and develops a more targeted test of “Nurture-Preparedness”. The new parenting readiness test will be divided into two aspects: expectations (of offspring) and the bond of kinship. It is believed that the expectations of caregivers directly influence the way they treat their offspring. The so-called “bond of kinship” refers to the presence or absence of a bond of trust and the ability of the caregiver to provide a sense of security to the offspring. Each time period involves two opposite positive and negative indices. Expectations are categorized into normal and abnormal expectations.

“Normal expectations”, as a positive indicator, include self-actualization expectations and belonging expectations. Based on Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs theory, parents have self-actualization and belonging expectations for their children in the parent-child companion education relationship. That is, parents expect their children to enjoy certain things or abilities and to target them as specialties. As well, parents expect their children to feel trusted and relaxed when they are with them. These needs are based on the parent’s own needs and are projected onto the parent-child relationship. In contrast, “abnormal expectations” fall into the negative dimension, which includes projective expectations and excessive expectations. Projective expectations are derived from the projection theory proposed by Freud, which states that caregivers always impose their subjective wishes or judgments on their offspring without their knowledge [5]. As a result, parents believe that their children or offspring will be geniuses in the areas in which they specialize. Transitional expectations can be interpreted as parents’ belief that their children or offspring must attain a higher status in society than their parents.

The sessions of the bond of kinship consist of a positive emotional feedback index (positive index) and an emotional indifference index (negative index). The positive affective feedback index refers to the fact that the parent will give some material or verbal rewards to the offspring. And the emotional indifference index means that the parent will show kindness to the offspring only when they are obedient.

3.2. Participants and Procedure

There were 224 respondents, including 216 valid results. The participant method was opportunity. Participants were single and over 18 years old, with couples and married but childless individuals, aiming to assess their parenting ability in the future..

The questionnaire, which included 31 questions, was published online, and the data was also collected online. The questions were randomized, and the participants were blind to the dimensions of the questions. Participants were asked to answer whether they agreed with the judgment in each question on a 5-point scale: 1 (disagree) to 5 (agree). In the statistical analysis, the reverse questions were recoded and summed. The higher the score, the higher the future parenting ability. Then, the authors applied SPSS 19.0, Mplus, and the WPS office to do data analysis.

4. Results

4.1. Demographic Results

There were 216 valid questionnaires, of which the gender ratio varied greatly, with 37 (17.13%) males and 179 (82.87%) females. In terms of age ratio, more than ninety percent (93.90%) of the subjects were between the ages of 18-22, amounting to 203. 6 (2.77%) of the subjects were between the ages of 22-26. The number of subjects over 26 years old was 7 (3.24%). In terms of marital status, more than 80% of the subjects were single, amounting to 177 (81.94%). In addition, 36 (16.67%) were unmarried couples, and 3 (1.39%) were married without children.

4.2. Item Discrimination Index

The correlation coefficient between the total score of each item and the scale was used as the item discrimination index. The results are shown in Table 1.

As can be seen from Table 1, the scale has good item discrimination. Most of the items are very significant, $p < 0.001$. However, the coefficients of Q22, Q25, Q26, Q29, and Q30 are smaller than 30, so delete these questions here. Later reliability and validity measurements were obtained from the 26-question scale.

Table 1: Results of discrimination.

F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6
Item α	Item α	Item α	Item α	Item α	Item α
Q1 .44	Q2 .36	Q4 .51	Q7 .49	Q19 .40	Q21 .50
Q3 .39	Q5 .48	Q6 .51	Q8 .48	Q20 .40	Q24 .48
Q9 .41	Q10 .35	Q11 .48	Q13 .54	Q22 .29	Q27 .43
Q14 .40	Q18 .44	Q12 .53	Q17 .59	Q23 .36	Q28 .49
		Q15 .56		Q25 .22	Q31 .38
		Q16 .56		Q26 .20	
				Q29 .28	
				Q30 .27	

4.3. Reliability and Validity

The internal consistency coefficient was used in this scale reliability assessment. Finally, the internal consistency coefficient (α) of the total volume table is obtained as 87. The results demonstrate the good reliability of the nurture-preparedness assessment scale.

In this study, confirmatory factor analysis was used to assess the conceptional validity of the scale. The results are shown in Table 2. From Table 2, the conceptional validity of the scale is not very ideal. Among them, X^2/df and SRMR meet the specified requirements, and CFI and TLI RMSEA are very little different from the ideal indicators.

Table 2: Results of CFA.

Index	χ^2	df	χ^2/df	CFI	TLI	SRMR	RMSEA
ALL	1176.98	284	4.14	.86	.84	.073	.085

5. Discussion

After a period of regular model collection and data analysis, a preliminary development of the assessment scale was made. After discrimination analysis, internal consistency analysis, and confirmatory factor analysis, the following conclusions can be drawn.

The original scale consisted of 31 items, and after discriminant analysis, the correlation indices α of Q22, Q25, Q26, Q29, and Q30 with the total score were less than 0.30, which indicated that the degree of discrimination was poor. Therefore, the whole scale finally became 26 items. Then, the α coefficients were greater than 0.30 for all the other question items and all of them reached a significant level of 0.001. In addition, the internal consistency coefficient reached 0.87 with a significance level of 0.001, indicating that the scale has good reliability. However, the results of the exploratory factor analysis were not satisfactory. Although two indicators, X2/df and SRMR, reached the standard, the rest of the indicators did not reach the desirable indicators. Although the study is only a preliminary exploration, the reliability of the scale is guaranteed and the validity gap is not too large.

To be more specific, there were some positive aspects while building the scale and applying classical theory. With the randomized order of the questions for participants to respond, the demand characteristics were relatively reduced. People are likely to give the social-desirable answers due to they are usually willing to act well and be more sociable. The discrimination of positive and negative dimensions of the questions in this assessment was concretely manifested on the positive or negative correlation of the scores and the ratings given by the respondents, and the randomized order aided to make the respondents blind to the dimensions of the questions. This means that participants would be unsure with whether the more they agreed with the judgment in the question, the higher score they would have. Hence, the validity of the assessment would be increased.

Basing on the personality development theory of Erikson, it can be found that the positive interventions in each stage play a significant part in the formation of a wholesome, or saying, social-desirable personality [4]. And on account of the current circumstance in China, which is a country developing rapidly, where the psychosocial crisis occurs are usually families that are not poor at the provision on resources. This illustrates that the key issue is in the mental factors.

After comprehending the concept in the personality development theory, it was led to the theory of hierarchy of needs developed by Maslow which demonstrated that the belongingness and love needs are prior to the self-actualization and transcendence needs [7]. With the supports of these involving theories, the content of the questionnaire was relatively valid and reliable.

6. Conclusion

This study combines classical psychological theories, such as Maslow's hierarchy of needs and the projection effect, and identifies 26 scale items on the basis of parental expectations and affectionate bonds, which are used to establish and improve the Nurture-Preparedness Assessment for the Childless Adults in China (Appendix). Due to the period of time was relatively short, a verification research was absent. With only 216 participants collected by opportunity, the validity of the results was likely to be reduced. At the same time, the rate between male and female was one of the factors that may influence our results. After that, ours sample may lack representativeness and our research also lack standardize. Last but not least, without the verification research, we lose an operation for a test for the reliability of the assessment. A further research would be demanded later. The verification research could be a well designed new assessment divided into 2 parts separately for the offsprings and the caregivers to answer.

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Appendix

Future Parents Parenting Competency Assessment

1. I hope that my child will have certain pursuits in life.
2. I will try to make my child feel that I love him/her.
3. My child should have a specialty or skill that also serves as a hobby.
4. I will enable my child's life to develop according to my plan.
5. I hope that my child will know how to love because of my presence.
6. My children should be competent in the same areas in which I am competent.
7. I hope to turn my back on a troubled child in order to strengthen his/her will.
8. I expect to create many problems for them so that they can learn to be independent under the difficult conditions I have created.
9. My child(ren) should find a profession that he/she loves and specializes in and adopt it as his/her career.
10. I want my children to feel a sense of trust and relaxation when they are with me.
11. My child deserves absolute obedience from me because I raised him/her.
12. I have already thought about what my children will do in the future.
13. My child must be much better than his/her peers.
14. I desire that my child will spontaneously strive to realize his/her own values in life.
15. My children will develop a worldview, values, and life outlook that are completely consistent with mine.
16. I expect my children to realize the dreams that I have not been able to achieve.
17. My children must achieve a better social status than I did.
18. I will try to convince my child that I will never abandon him/her.
19. During the early childhood stage of my child, I am able and willing to spend a lot of time with and care for him/her.
20. I will observe my child closely for interpersonal problems and show affectionate concern for him/her.
21. When I lose control of my emotions due to my child, I think that it is not my fault and that my child deserves to bear the burden of my negative emotions.
22. When my child makes a mistake or behaves inappropriately, I am willing to explain things patiently, even if my child doesn't understand right away.
23. If there is any negative comment about my child, it must be the result of a mistake my child has made.
24. If my child makes a mistake that I cannot forgive, I will no longer respect him/her.
25. My love and care for my child are based on his/her obedience to me (being obedient, well-behaved, and understanding).

26. I think it is not necessary for me to respond to any childish questions that my children ask me when they are younger.

Self-activation expectation (P)

Affiliation expectation (P)

Projective expectation (N)

Excessive expectation (N)

Positive emotional feedback (P)

The extent of emotional indifference and negative emotional feedback (N)