Exploring the Influence of Maternal Self-Discrepancy on Psychological Well-Being: A Study on Middle-Aged Mothers

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Abstract : Background: Maternal psychological well-being has been investigated from various aspects, such as social support, employment status. However, a perspective from self-discrepancy theory has not been employed. Moreover, most were focused on young mothers. Less is understanding the middle-aged mother's psychological well-being. Objective: To examine the influence of maternal self-discrepancy between actual and ideal self on maternal role achievement, state anxiety, trait anxiety, and subjective well-being among Japanese middle-aged mothers across their employment status. Method: A pilot study was conducted with 20 mother participants (aged 40-55, 9 regular-employed, 8 non-regular-employed, and 3 homemaker mothers) to assess the viability of survey questionnaires (Maternal Role Achievement Scale, State-Trait Anxiety Inventory, Subjective Well-being Scale, and a self-report). Participants were randomly selected voluntarily from the college students' mothers. Participants accessed the survey via a designated URL. The self-report questionnaire prompted participants to list up to 3 ideal selves they aspired to be and rate the extent to which their actual selves deviated from their ideal selves on a 7-point scale (1= not at all; 4 = medium; 7 = extremely). The findings confirmed the validity of the survey questionnaires, indicating their appropriateness for use in subsequent research. Self-discrepancy scores were calculated by subtracting participants' degree ratings from a 7-point scale, summing them up, and then dividing the total by 3. Setting: We ensured participants were randomly selected from the research firm to mitigate bias. The self-report questionnaire was adapted from a validated instrument and underwent rigorous modification and testing in the pilot study. The final sample consisted of 241 participants, 97 regular-employed, 87 non-regular employed, and 57 homemaker mothers. Result: The reliability coefficient for the discrepancy score is α=.75. The findings indicate that regular-employed mothers tend to exhibit lower self-discrepancy scores compared to non-regular employed and homemaker mothers. This discrepancy negatively impacts maternal role, state anxiety, and subjective well-being while positively affecting trait anxiety. Trait anxiety arises when one feels they did not meet their ideal self, as evidenced by higher levels in homemaker mothers, who experience lower state anxiety. Conversely, regular-employed mothers exhibit higher state anxiety but lower trait anxiety, suggesting satisfaction in their professional pursuits despite balancing work and family responsibilities. Full-time maternal roles contribute to lower state anxiety but higher trait anxiety among homemaker mothers due to a lack of personal identity achievement. Non-regular employed mothers show similarities to homemaker mothers. In self-reports, regular-employed mothers highlight support and devotion to their children's development, while non-regular-employed mothers seek life fulfillment through part-time work alongside child-rearing duties. Homemaker mothers emphasize qualities like sociability, and communication skills, potentially influencing their self-discrepancy scores. Furthermore, the hierarchical multiple regression analysis revealed that the discrepancy scores significantly predict subjective well-being. Conclusion: There may be the need for broader generalizability beyond our sample of Japanese mothers; however, the findings offer valuable insights into the impact of maternal self-discrepancy on psychological well-being among middle-aged mothers across different employment statuses. Understanding these dynamics becomes crucial as contemporary women increasingly pursue higher education and depart from traditional motherhood norms.

Keywords : maternal employment, maternal role, self-discrepancy, state-trait anxiety, subjective well-being

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