

Desire for Children: Development and Validation of a Scale with a Brazilian Sample

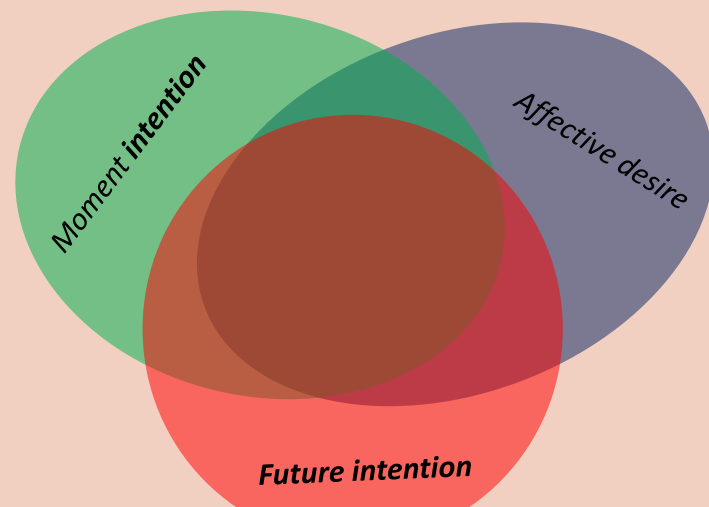
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Historically the desire to have children has received little attention in the field of psychological evaluation. Also for this reason instruments to measure this specific construct are scarce.

Most of the studies that investigate this phenomenon use qualitative methods, or one single question about the will to have children. However, like happens with many other measurable phenomena in psychology, a wide sample of behaviors is needed to assess the desire to have children.

Evolutionary Psychology (see T Barkow, Tooby, & Cosmides, 1992; Buss, 1995) suggests that the desire to have children is part of the psychological mechanisms that aim to favor genetic explicability. Although the functions of psychological mechanisms do not always correspond with motivations consciously attributed to behaviors, issues related to these functions can usually be assessed.

In this research, we conceive the desire to have children as a psychological construct relative to the subjective evaluation about the feeling of wanting to have children, to the intention of having children at the moment, and to the intention of having children in the future. Therefore we conceptualized the desire to have children as three interrelated dimensions that could represent an affective component concerning the desire intensity, and two components concerning the current and future intention to have children.



Based on this conceptualization, we hypothesized (1) that the desire to have children would be higher in the vital cycle stage in which people are in full biological conditions of having children; (2) that when the levels of desire were higher people would want to have more children; and (3) people with higher levels of desire would be less careful avoiding pregnancy.

Aim

The aim of this study was to develop and to search for validity evidences of a measure of the desire to have children.

Method

Participants

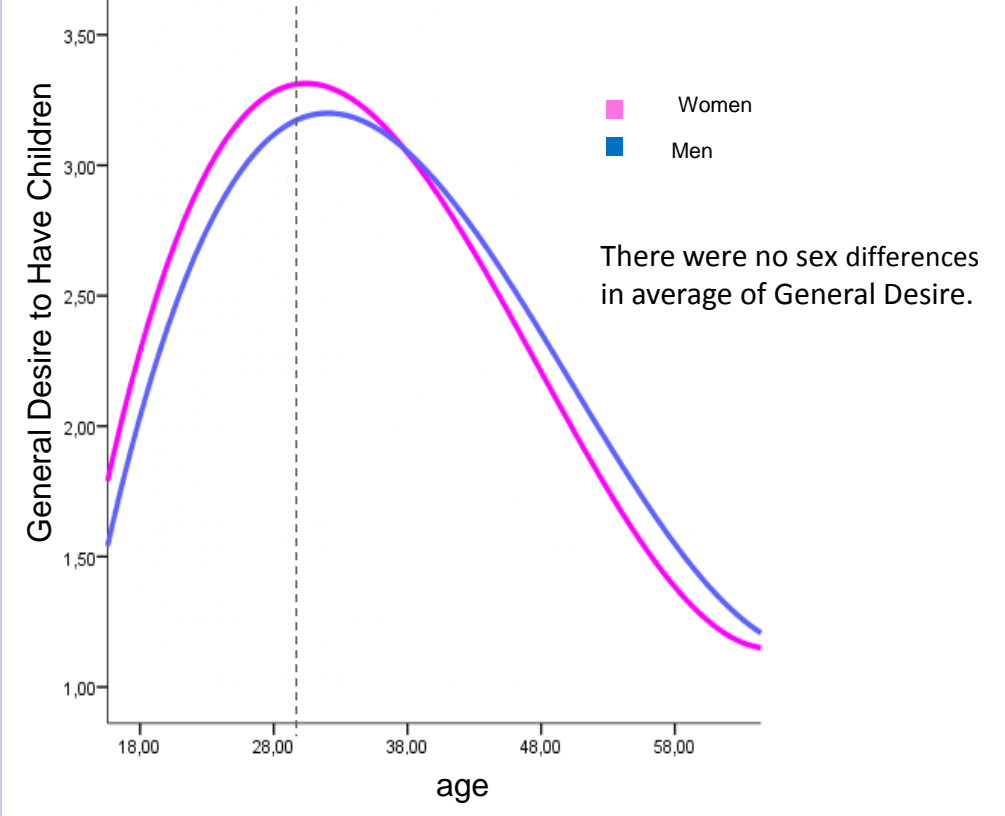
The participants were 419 individuals of all regions of Brazil, 64% of them were woman. In average the participants were 27.1 years old ($SD=7.84$). Most of the participants were undergraduate students (50.4%), the others had higher degree than undergraduate.

When asked about desire to have children in the future, 85.9% of the participants answered that they desired to have children. And the average of desired children was 1.71 ($SD=1.07$).

Regarding sexual life, most participants (62.5%) did not use condom in the last sexual intercourse. Furthermore, within those that declared using the pill ($n=263$), 68.8% affirmed that they had not forgotten to take the pill any day of their cycles.

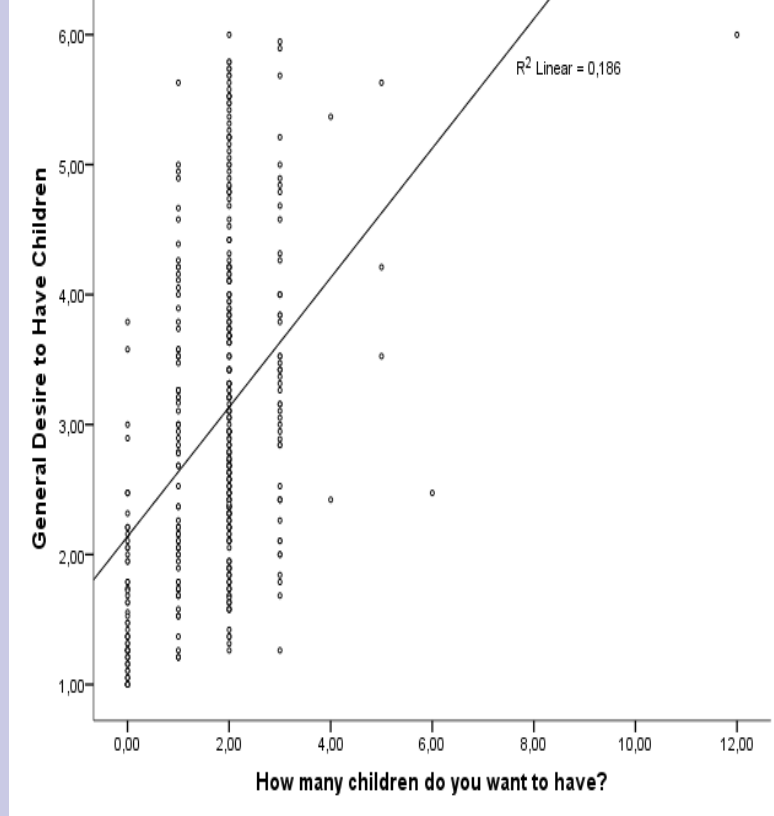
Results

A Principal Axis Factoring analysis [$KMO=.95$, Batlett's test: $p<.001$, rotation method: oblimin] was conducted and the three factors extracted explained 58.7% of the variance of the 19 items of the scale. Eleven items that showed low factor loadings in all factors, and those that decreased the reliability, were excluded of final version of the scale. Table 1 shows the items, factor loadings, alpha coefficient and other psychometric properties of final version of the scale. The factors were moderately correlated. The correlation between Intensity of Desire and Future Intention was .68; between Intensity of Desire and Moment Intention was .68; between Moment Intention and Future Intention was .45. Additionally to the scores of the three factors, a single score including all the items was computed and it was called General Desire. Individuals who said they wanted to have children scored higher in all dimensions ($p<.001$).



Both for women and for men the General Desire score followed a trend that was compatible with their reproductive age, as it can be seen in Figure 1.

Figure 1. General Desire X Age.



An expected correlation between the General Desire and the number of children participants want to have in their lives was found, as can be seen in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Correlation between General Desire and number of children.

A stronger correlation of the General Desire with Liking, as well as with Wanting to take care of younger children was also expected and confirmed. This can be seen in Figure 3.

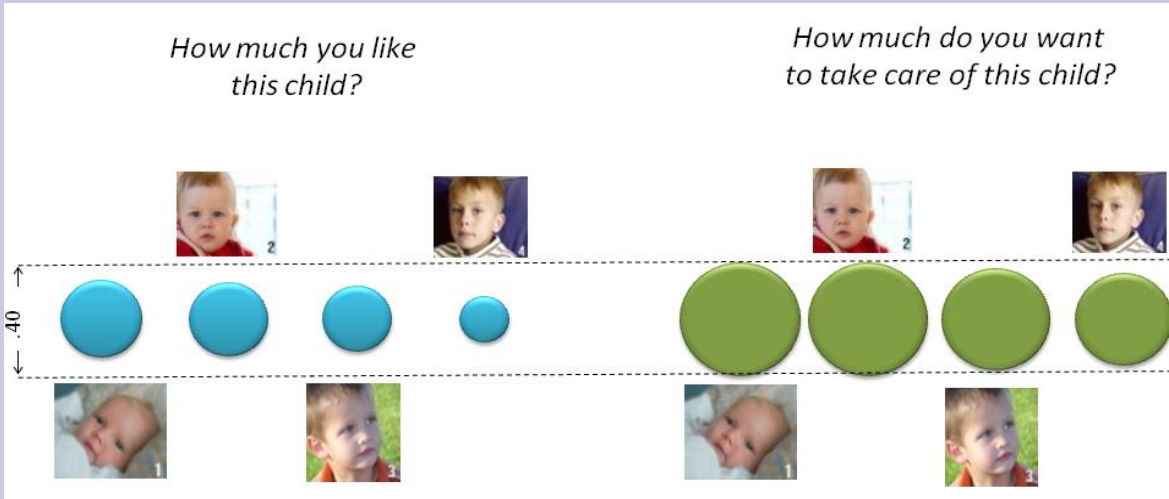


Figure 3. Correlation between General Desire, Liking and Wanting to take care of children.

The instrument was capable of discriminating the group of participants who forgot to take the pill in the past month from those who didn't forget. It also discriminated those who used or did not use condoms in the last sexual intercourse. Both results confirm the hypothesis that individuals who have higher levels of Desire to have children tend to be less careful in relation to contraception. This can be seen in Figures 4 and 5.

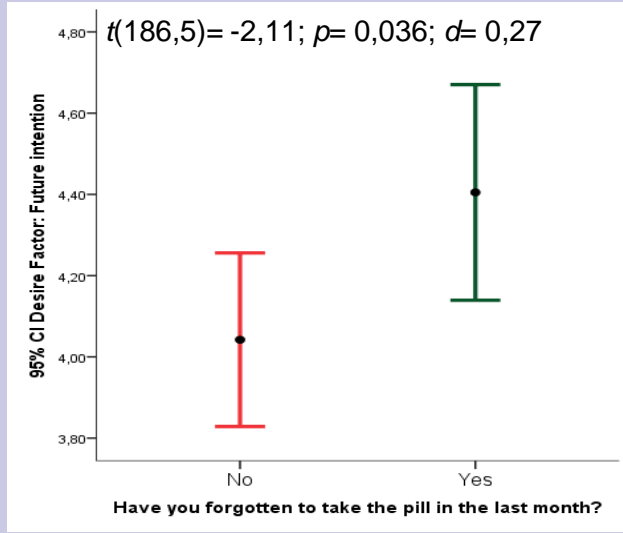


Figure 4. Disere and Pill.

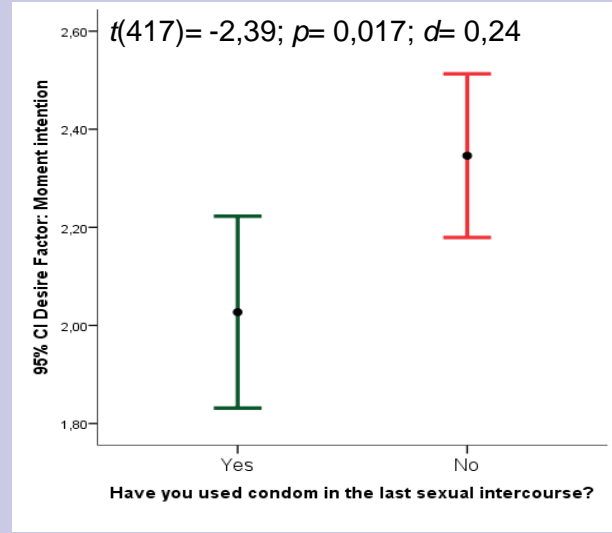


Figure 5. Disere and Condom.

Table 1
Factor Loadings and Communalities of Desire to Have Children Items for Principal Axis Factor Analysis with Oblimin Rotation

	Factors			h ²
	Intensity of desire	Future intention	Moment intention	
Meu desejo de ter um bebê aumentou nos últimos tempos.	.904	-.071	-.019	.713
My desire to have a baby increased in recent times*				
Tenho pensado em ter filho(s) ultimamente.	.868	-.164	.155	.773
I have thought about having children*				
Hoje em dia penso mais em ter filho(s) do que pensava antigamente.	.753	.093	-.086	.581
Nowadays I think more about having children than I thought beforetime*				
Eu converso com outras pessoas sobre a ideia de ter um bebê.	.662	.049	.067	.552
I talk to other people about the idea of having a baby*				
A ideia de ter filho(s) é um tema recorrente em meus pensamentos.	.593	.138	.096	.581
The idea of having children is a current subject in my thoughts*				
Quando vejo bebês ou crianças pequenas, isso me desperta vontade de ter um também.	.511	.275	-.017	.511
When I see babies or little kids, this arouses my willingness to have a baby too*				
Sinto que algo em mim pede para eu ter filho(s).	.475	.209	.147	.548
I feel that something in myself demands that I have children*				
Quero muito ter filho(s).	.070	.791	.027	.729
I really want to have children*				
Pretendo ter filho(s) algum dia.	.045	.786	-.148	.576
I intend to have children someday*				
Ficaria feliz em ter filho(s).	-.018	.634	.139	.483
I would be happy to have children*				
Se eu estivesse com alguém que não quer ter filho(s), pensaria em trocar de parceiro.	-.031	.593	.078	.372
If I were with someone who does not want to have children, I would think of changing partner*				
Acredito que ter uma criança vai me tornar uma pessoa mais realizada.	.130	.582	.109	.545
I believe that having a child will make me a more fulfilled person*				
Acho que seria bom caso eu viesse a ter um bebê por agora.	.010	-.020	.867	.748
I think that it would be nice if I come to have a baby by now*				
Sinto que estou no momento certo para ter uma criança.	-.029	.001	.836	.666
I feel that I am in the right moment to have a child*				
Se eu pudesse, teria um filho neste momento da minha vida.	.026	.007	.806	.684
If I could, I would have a child at this point in my life*				
Se minha(meu) companheira(o) quisesse muito ter filho(s) agora, eu aceitaria.	-.017	-.020	.737	.513
If my partner really wanted to have children now, I would accept it*				
Se tivesse filho(s) agora, ficaria contente.	.036	.068	.730	.623
If I had children now, I would be content*				
Sinto que estou preparado(a) para ter filho(s).	.030	.003	.692	.511
I feel I am prepared to have children*				
Se tivesse condições financeiras suficientes, teria filho(s) agora mesmo.	.127	.111	.507	.443
If I had enough financial condition, I would have children right now*				
Initial Eigenvalues	9.19	2.07	1.07	
% of the Variance Explained	46.3	8.80	3.58	
Mean	3.01	4.02	2.22	
Standard-Deviation	1.52	1.44	1.33	
Alpha Coefficient	.91	.85	.90	

Note. * These items were translated only for this presentation.

Instruments

The instrument was an online survey with sociodemographic questions, sexual life questions and the 30 items created to evaluate desire to have children. Four pictures of children at different ages were also presented to the participants who had to inform how much they liked and wanted to take care of each child.

Procedures

From interviews with psychologist researchers, a list of items was compiled to represent the construct named desire to have children. This list was reviewed by two researchers to assure content validity and comprehensibility of the items. The items were then grouped according to the three dimensions established theoretically. To obtain empirical evidences of validity, the participants were recruited through invitations by emails and links in social network websites.

Conclusion

The scale showed satisfactory evidences of validity and reliability to evaluate the desire to have children. Also it could discriminate people who claimed to want to have children from those who said they did not want, people who used or not condom, and people who forgot or not to take the pill.

Based on these results it is possible to think about research and also practical applications for the evaluation of the desire to have children. For instance, as a guide for psychologists who evaluate candidates to programs of permanent birth control.

References

- Barkow, J. H., Cosmides, L., & Tooby, J. (1992). *The adapted mind: Evolutionary psychology and the generation of culture*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Buss, D. M. (1995). Evolutionary Psychology: A new paradigm for psychological science. *Psychological Inquiry*, 6(1), 1-30.



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Support

