




## Identifying the components of the maternal role: a qualitative study

Zeinab. Saketi<sup>1</sup>, Hadi. Farhadi<sup>1\*</sup>, Seyed Hamid. Atashpour<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Department of Psychology, Isfahan (Korasgan) Branch, Islamic Azad University, Isfahan, Iran

\* Corresponding author email address: farhadihadi@yahoo.com

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### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** Being a mother is one of the biggest challenges in women's lives that can affect their mental health. Awareness of the role of motherhood and acceptance of this role by women can help the health of mother and child. Therefore, it seems necessary to identify the components of accepting the mother's role. The aim was to identify the components of accepting the role of a mother for married women without children.

**Methods and Materials:** This study was conducted with a qualitative method and a library data collection approach. The statistical population of the research was 75 books, articles, and theses related to the topic of motherhood and the role of the mother in the years 2000 to 2022, from which 31 articles were selected in a purposive manner and the data were analyzed using the thematic analysis method.

**Findings:** The findings were classified into 25 organizing categories and 5 main categories, including individual, family, social, cultural and economic components.

**Conclusion:** The results of the present study showed that identifying the components of accepting the role of the mother can be the basis for adopting educational and support measures for women.

**Keywords:** Maternal Role Acceptance, Thematic Analysis, Qualitative Study

### 1. Introduction

The essential role of women in the family has always been emphasized in all cultures and societies. A woman plays various roles throughout her life, but the two basic roles of wife and mother are listed as her most important (Hadadi et al., 2011). In today's societies, the prominent presence of women in social and occupational roles and their more attention to individual interests has caused a wide change in women's roles. Despite these changes, they still consider the role of a mother as one of the main roles of a woman during her life (Márk-Ribiczey, Miklósi, & Szabó, 2016), as if the fate of a woman is tied to

the role of a mother. It should be noted that mother and motherhood are two different concepts. From a biological point of view, a mother is a woman who can reproduce and have a child. However, motherhood is a social and cultural concept and refers to all the characteristics that society expects from the concept of mother. The role of mother for women culturally defines a set of behaviors assigned based on gender, and along with this concept, expectations are formed and obligations and duties are defined. Considering that the mother's role is the main intermediary in creating a human being, it is the most important personality shaper and a determining factor in developing his body and soul (Daly et al., 2022; Madigan et al., 2018). The special impact of the

mother's role in people's lives has made transitioning to the mother's role and accepting it one of the main challenges in women's lives since, both physically and emotionally, she should be prepared to enter a new role (Darvill, Skirton, & Farrand, 2010). If the mother adapts well to her role, she will have a sense of competence and self-confidence and perform well in establishing a relationship with the child. In fact, by accepting the role of a mother, a mother can take good care of herself and her child (Meleis et al., 2000). It has been found that mothers' problems in this role can increase behavioral problems in children in the future (Madigan et al., 2018). Although the birth of a child is usually a beautiful and joyful event, it can be a source of stress, worry, conflict and failure for women because they have to accept the responsibility of the new role (Rallis et al., 2014). It is a role that perhaps women do not know much about and consider an inevitable result of adulthood. On the contrary to commonly thought, motherhood is not always accompanied by pleasant feelings. However, it may be associated with the experience of regret, failure and conflict (Shrestha et al., 2019) and even affect the woman's mental health (Cooklin et al., 2016). Based on this, the role of the mother has always been considered, and by reviewing the research, it can be said that researchers have examined this role from two perspectives. The first group of studies that qualitatively focused on women's experiences of motherhood and reported a wide range of positive and negative experiences (Javadifar et al., 2016; Pritchard, 2013). The second category of studies that have investigated the influential factors of this role (Kordi et al., 2016; Pritchard, 2013). Despite extensive studies in the field of the mother's role, no research was found that comprehensively focused on identifying and extracting the components of this role. Based on this, the current research seeks to discover and identify the components of the mother's role in a qualitative study using the library method.

## 2. Methods and Materials

### 2.1. Study Design and Materials

This research is considered as an exploratory study with qualitative method. Based on the research design, the qualitative method in this research was thematic analysis by Braun & Clarke (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2022). According to the statistical population, all the scientific texts in the field of the maternal role included 75 articles; 31 articles were selected by purposive sampling method. The tool used in the research was the thematic analysis results registration form.

This form was used to perform thematic analysis related to extracting the components of the mother's role based on meaningful items, open codes, sub-categories, main categories, main themes, and basic themes of the texts. The content validity of this form is consistent with Braun & Clarke's (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2022) theme analysis.

### 2.2. Procedure

In order to extract the components of acceptance of the mother's role, Braun and Clarke's (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2022) method was used, which is one of the methods of qualitative content analysis and systematic and hierarchical review of texts to extract codes. This method is one of the important qualitative methods in data analysis. Based on this method, 75 items were found in the research from 2000 to 2022 by searching keywords related to the mother's role. After the initial study and review, 31 items were found suitable based on the desired content and thematic analysis was started. In the first stage, the texts were carefully studied and examined in order to get familiar with the data and were read several times. Through studying and taking notes, important phrases were obtained. In the second stage, primary codes were extracted and data were organized with a meaningful and systematic method. Every part of the data related to the research problem or was significant in the subject area was coded. Open coding was used here, meaning there was no predetermined code, but the codes were developed and modified during the coding process. In this step, 120 codes were identified and extracted. In the third stage, themes were identified. This stage is the search for themes that include one or a group of extracted concepts. Starting with the fourth step, the themes identified in the third step were checked to ensure that the created sub-themes covered the concepts well and that the main themes included their sub-themes. In this step, we reached five main themes by aggregating sub-themes in a broader meaning. In the fifth stage, the themes were finalized; what does the theme say? If there is a sub-theme, how does it relate to the main theme and what kind of connection is there between the themes? Also, the integrity, comprehensiveness and usefulness of the themes were examined. Finally, during the sixth stage, the network of themes was created and the final report was prepared based on the analysis of the theme and presentation of the findings.

### 3. Findings and Results

The results were organized among 420 thematic sentences from the text of articles. Finally, they reached 120 primary concepts in the form of 25 organizing categories and 5 main categories: Individual components (psychological capital, quality of life, psychological flexibility, perfectionism, personality traits, biological-psychological-individual changes, primary maladaptive schemas, responsibility, beliefs, individual attitude and desire, positive emotions, understanding of maternal identity and

feelings of guilt and regret); Family components (mother's role in the family, mother-child relationships, gender conflicts, and quality of married life); Social components (social support, social causes, and information and communication technology); Cultural components (values and norms, customs, and developmental causes); Economic components (employment, economic issues and problems, and health care and counseling services). Table 1 shows the analysis of themes in the form of basic concepts, organizing categories, and main categories.

**Table 1**

*The results of thematic analysis (Core category: The components of acceptance of the mother role of married women without children)*

Main category	Sub-categories	Initial concepts
Individual components	Psychological capital	Optimism
		Hope
		Self-efficacy and competence
		self worth
	Quality of Life	Self-confidence and self-esteem
		Stress and anxiety
		Depression
		Life satisfaction
		lifestyle
	Psychological flexibility	attachment
		Prioritizing individual values
		Commit to action
		Mindfulness
		Acceptance - solving the problem
	Perfectionism	Psychological demarcation
		High anxiety sensitivity
		Rumination
		Self-evaluation
		Self-criticism
	Personality traits	Experiential avoidance
		Agreeableness
		Neuroticism
		Extraversion-introversion
	Biological-psychological-behavioral changes	Openness to experience
		Physical changes caused by pregnancy
Physical changes due to childbirth		
Psychological changes caused by pregnancy		
Psychological changes due to childbirth		
Early incompatible schemas	Behavioral changes due to childbirth	
	Fear of abandonment and loss	
	Defect and shame	
	dependency	
	damage	
Being responsible	Emotional deprivation	
	Avoid danger	
	Educational doubts	
	Act consciously and maturely	
Beliefs - a person's attitude and inclination	Drawing the future and having a platform and program	
	Self-concept	
		Happiness

				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The role of religious beliefs</li> <li>Women's attitude towards the ideal mother</li> <li>Deep desire to become a mother</li> </ul>
	Positive emotions			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>feeling happy</li> <li>A sense of worth</li> <li>Feeling satisfied</li> <li>The pleasant feeling of motherhood despite deprivation</li> </ul>
	Understanding maternal identity			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Receiving the role of mother as a pleasant gift</li> <li>Accepting the role of women</li> <li>Learning maternal behaviors</li> <li>Physical experiences of motherhood</li> <li>Emotional experiences of motherhood</li> </ul>
	Guilt and regret			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Accepting the role of mother permanently</li> <li>Loss of previous life</li> <li>Reducing the controllability of affairs</li> <li>Reducing the degree of individual choice</li> <li>Loss of opportunities</li> </ul>
Family components	Mother's role in the family			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Difficult childbirth and physical changes</li> <li>child rearing</li> <li>Child health</li> <li>Child's mental health</li> <li>Continuity of generation</li> <li>family formation</li> </ul>
	Mother-child relationships			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Meeting the needs of the child</li> <li>Emotional interactions with the child</li> <li>child care</li> <li>Genotype and phenotype</li> </ul>
	Gender conflicts			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The formation of the child's inner world</li> <li>male superiority</li> <li>Giving importance to the role of the father compared to the mother</li> <li>Overresponsibility of the mother's role</li> <li>Misplaced expectations from the mother</li> </ul>
	Quality of married life			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The mother's role as a victim in the family</li> <li>emotional support</li> <li>Emotional Divorce</li> <li>Incompatibility and coherence in relationships</li> <li>Unfavorable emotional atmosphere</li> </ul>
Social components	social support			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of differentiation of couples</li> <li>Belong</li> <li>Stress exchange pattern</li> <li>High social interactions</li> <li>Government support and encouragement</li> </ul>
	Social causes			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Social vulnerability</li> <li>Social insecurities</li> <li>Unbridled society</li> <li>Dissemination of unfortunate social news</li> <li>Uneducated society</li> <li>Widespread frustration in society</li> </ul>
	Information Technology	and	Communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sharing the role of mother</li> <li>Decreased fertility and childbearing</li> <li>Changing identities and roles in the family</li> <li>Health literacy</li> <li>Individualism</li> </ul>
Cultural components	Values and norms			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Influence on gender role attitudes</li> <li>Mother's high position</li> <li>Paradise is under the feet of mothers</li> <li>The role of mothers' prayers and curses</li> <li>Breeder of Ashraf creations</li> </ul>
	Customs			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sesame supply by families</li> <li>Celebrating gender, whipping and birthday</li> </ul>

		Baby naming ceremony based on the recitation of Quranic verses
	Developmental causes	Maternal instinct Divine wisdom The rule of Sharia and Prophet's way of life Motherhood is the reason for the existence of women A woman's ability to become a mother
Economic components	employment	Job insecurity Career Success Conflict of employment status with mother role Career failure
	Economic issues and problems	Fragility of economic parameters Economic distress Ideal mental distance from shaky economy Lack of financial goals due to unstable economy Sick economy
	Health, treatment and counseling services	Lack of free pre-pregnancy counseling during pregnancy Absence of free health services for pregnant and postpartum women Abortion due to lack of access to health facilities Not holding training sessions to improve mental and physical health for having children Failure to address and treat physical problems that prevent pregnancy

#### 4. Discussion and Conclusion

The current research sought to discover, identify and explain the components of the mother's role. The results of this research were implicitly in line with some previous studies (Banerjee et al., 2021; Daly et al., 2022; Madigan et al., 2018; van Vugt & Versteegh, 2020). During their studies, these researchers showed that increasing responsibility, changing identity, time management skills, receiving support and the importance of the role of mother are some of the issues that should be considered in the transition to the role of mother. Women about to have children should receive appropriate psychological, emotional and family support. Also, these researchers found that how a person communicates with his mother during childhood has a special effect on accepting the role of the mother. The bad memory of the relationship with the mother was an important factor in the delay in accepting the maternal role or the relationship with the baby. On the other hand, according to these findings, the determining characteristics of the mother's role included maintenance, nurturing, care and management of household affairs and their consequences, awareness of newborn conditions, the balanced performance of multiple roles, maternal role pressure, and role conflict. Therefore, the investigations showed that these studies have investigated the factors affecting the mother's role in a scattered and separate way, and since the need for an integrated look at the above cases was felt, this research sought to extract the components of

the mother's role in the form of a qualitative study. In the explanation of the present findings, it can be said that due to the special impact of the mother's role in people's lives, transitioning to this role is one of the main challenges of women's lives, and they should be physically and mentally prepared to accept this role. (Darvill, Skirton, & Farrand, 2010). On the other hand, since becoming a mother causes a change in the way women are viewed by themselves and others, it is a source of anxiety and worry for women. In transitioning to the role of mother, women experience a period of change and instability (Cooklin et al., 2016) and having children leaves important social effects on their life cycle, including jobs, marital relationships, education, etc. Many individual, family, social, economic and cultural factors should be considered in this process. In the current research, a comprehensive view was adopted to discover the components of the mother's role, and it was tried to analyze the studies of the mother's role from all aspects and discover and extract the components of this role.

One of the categories extracted from the mother's role studies was individual components. Studying and examining the role of women's characteristics in playing the role of mother has been the focus of researchers (Benza & Liamputtong, 2017; Erfina et al., 2019; Kordi et al., 2016; Shrestha et al., 2019; van Vugt & Versteegh, 2020). For example, studies show that the more positive a person has towards motherhood and the role of a mother, the more the

desire to become a mother and the number of children increases (Kordi et al., 2016).

The next main category was family components. Factors such as family conflict and the lifestyle of the person's relationship with the mother were among the family factors that were investigated in the research. Banerjee et al. (2021) emphasize that women who want children should receive adequate psychological, emotional, and family support (Banerjee et al., 2021). Entering the role of mother causes changes in the family system, role expectations, and new responsibilities (Shrestha et al., 2019). Therefore, the role of the family will be especially important in accepting the role of the mother, and women especially need the support and companionship of the family during pregnancy, childbirth, and after. Also, studies showed that couples' conflicts are important factors that can be effective in women not accepting the role of mother (Modiri & Ghazi Tabatabaie, 2019).

Social components were another main category extracted. Societies and these supports have always emphasized that social support in childbearing is important for women to accept the role. Faramarzi and Pasha (2015) showed that social support for women can reduce the stress and worry of motherhood. Studies showed that fear of the future, social responsibility and social concerns are among the factors that affect the acceptance of the role of the mother. Hopelessness and unpredictability of the future make women hesitant to have children (Faramarzi & Pasha, 2015). Also, with the expansion of social media and the presence of women in this field, this space has been mentioned as one of the new social factors that influence the role of motherhood. Ghorbani, Golmakani, and Shakeri (2016) found a positive relationship between having children and using social media, and many mothers receive the necessary training and support by using this space (Ghorbani, Golmakani, & Shakeri, 2016). Also Matley (2020) examined the expression of feelings about motherhood in social media and stated that mothers use this space to express their negative feelings, such as regret about motherhood, which is considered taboo in societies (Matley, 2020). In fact, along with social support and social causes, social media plays an undeniable role in creating maternal identity and accepting the role of mother.

The next category was cultural components. In almost all cultures, the role of the mother is considered sacred and the mother's position has always been respected. Every culture has particular customs for mothers and motherhood (Rahnama et al., 2022). Culture's attention to maternal role is effective in women's view of identity and acceptance of

maternal role. On the other hand, cultural values and beliefs about the role of the mother significantly impact how women, families and society view this role. In fact, culture can guide girls to accept the role of mother from childhood to adulthood.

Finally, economical components of job and income level, place of residence, financial status, and various costs, especially the cost of health and medical services have been mentioned as factors influencing the acceptance of the role of mother (Goebel et al., 2020). Perhaps the role of the economy in having children has undergone extensive changes over the years in such a way that in the past, children were seen as a profitable capital and a source of increasing the family's income. However, today, this view has completely changed, and families consider themselves obliged to cover expenses such as health, education, recreation, etc., until the child becomes independent. In fact, not only are children no longer a source of income as in the past, but they also increase the family's cost. In such a way, the family's economic status has become one of the main concerns of families for having children.

Overall, the findings showed that the acceptance of the mother's role is affected by individual, family, social, cultural and economic factors. Therefore, it can be said that the main factors affecting the acceptance of the mother role in married women are the factors related to individual, family, social, cultural and economic factors, confirmed in the current qualitative research according to previous studies.

## 5. Limitations

Like any other research, the current research was faced with limitations, such as: although the components were determined based on the qualitative method of thematic analysis, it was based on the subject's mentality of the researcher and his professors, and other researchers may approach the problem differently. The collected information is specific to the time of the research and may not correspond to future needs. Based on this, conducting other studies according to the mentioned limitations is suggested. It is also suggested that studies be conducted in other cities and on other groups of women, including single-child women, to re-accept this role.

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## Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

## Ethics principles

In this research, ethical standards including obtaining informed consent, ensuring privacy and confidentiality were observed. (Ethics Code: IR.IAU.KHUISF.REC.1401.117)

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