

# Maternal self-efficacy in south africa

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Developing a new measure is a difficult process and must be done by trained professionals who have adequate experience and knowledge in the particular field. A very important step to follow before developing a measure is for the researchers to gain an in-depth understanding of the concept that's being explored as well as its relevance and meaning in the target population.

For this specific study, the focus is on the maternal self-efficacy of African mothers with preschool children but before looking at this concept one must first understand the core concept of self-efficacy.

### **Self-efficacy**

The theorist Albert Bandura focused on studying human behaviour and its determinants. He noticed that certain personality factors, like self-efficacy, have a major influence on people's behaviour, motivation and affect. Self-efficacy can be explained as a person's belief in their own ability to perform a specific task and achieve desired outcomes. Literature indicates that people's efficacy beliefs impact their outlook on life, their choices, hope, goals, determination, resilience and vulnerability to depression. Self-efficacy plays an important role in the motivational, cognitive, and affective processes of a person.

It has been indicated that individuals with high levels of self-efficacy have a healthy mental status and experience feelings of personal empowerment which provide them with the necessary confidence to perform tasks. In contrast to the above-mentioned individuals with low self-efficacy tend to have poor determination, they tend to take their failure more personal and generally suffer from depression and anxiety which might lead to them

questioning their own ability to perform specific tasks. Self-efficacy play an important role in various aspects of a person's life, but this study will focus on mother's levels of self-efficacy in their parenting role, better known as maternal self-efficacy.

### **Maternal self-efficacy**

Maternal self-efficacy is defined by several sources as a mother's belief in being a competent mother who can constructively contribute towards their child's development and behaviour. Various factors such as mothers' self-confidence and feelings of competency influence maternal self-efficacy.

Literature indicates that maternal self-efficacy is very important because it is directly linked with parenting quality; it protects mothers against postpartum depression and anxiety and has positive influences on the child's temperament. Maternal self-efficacy also functions as a buffer against the negative effects of adversity for those who live in disadvantaged circumstances. Further studies showed that mothers who possess maternal self-efficacy tend to devote more time to educating themselves on parenthood.

Mothers with high levels of maternal self-efficacy tend to display compassion, warmth and openness which serve as protective factors against the development of behaviour problems in children. These mothers are usually more committed to their parenting role and feel a sense of competent which help them experience personal fulfilment rather than anxiety when they engage in challenging parenting activities. Maternal self-efficacy in mothers also leads to benefits for the child such as increased levels of confidence, better school performance and decreased levels of

anxiety and depression. In contrast, low levels of maternal self-efficacy are characterised by a parenting style in which the parents are very unsympathetic, coercive and abusive. This, as a result, leads to behavioural and emotional problems in children. These parents experience their parenting duties as a heavy burden which can leave them feeling immobilized at times.

Sanders and Woolley (2005) indicated that maternal self-efficacy can be measured at different levels namely a specific level, intermediate level or a global level. Coleman and Karraker (2003) further explained these three approaches in more detail. The first approach is referred to as the task-specific approach which measures the perceptions mothers have regarding their competence in performing specific parenting tasks, for example, taking care of a sick child. Second is the domain-specific approach where the focus is placed on specific parenting domains, for example, measuring mother's levels of maternal self-efficacy with the use of different task-specific items. The last approach is referred to as the domain-general approach which measures maternal self-efficacy based on global capability expectations and not according to specific parenting duties.

Individuals' feelings of efficacy can be influenced by various factors including education, culture, profession, political affairs, socioeconomic status and poverty. Therefore it is important to also consider individuals contextual factors when measuring individuals maternal self-efficacy. Literature indicates that in both collectivistic and individualistic cultures maternal self-

efficacy plays an important role and that the development thereof is culture-specific.

### **The influence of culture on parenting**

Parenting can be explained as the specific activities parents execute to care for and support their children. This concept is recognised worldwide but literature has indicated that culture plays a very influential role in parenting and therefore it might be best to view parenting from within individual's specific cultural context. Visser and Moleko (2012) explain that culture is context specific, it is the way different societies construct their realities, make sense of the world they live in and assign meaning.

Mentioned above in the definition of culture reference were made to worldviews which influences a person's way of living. Previous literature has pointed out a few differences between African and Western worldviews. African cultures are more collectivistic which means that their focus is beyond the individual and extended families are the norm. These individuals believe in the concept of holism which can be explained as a belief that everything is linked to each other for example plants, animals, humans and gods. Children of this culture are taught that the community's needs are prioritised above individual needs. Miles (2013) mentions that in the African culture parenting is viewed as a collective duty, where even members of the community play an active role in raising other people's children. This is very different from the Western cultural perspective where children grow up in nuclear families and are taught to be independent. Assuming cultural homogeneity when developing and using measures might lead to bias. This motivates why previous studies and reviews on maternal self-efficacy

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measures are considered to determine if existing measures are appropriate to use for the chosen purpose and population.

### **Maternal self-efficacy measures**

Previous reviews on maternal self-efficacy measures have been done and indicated that most measures were developed for a more western population. These measures were also used in research studies for a variety of different purposes. In studies like that of Kolopaking, Bardosono and Fahmida (2011), Mirghafourvand, et al, (2016) and Zheng et al., (2018) attempts were made to adapt maternal self-efficacy measures for non-western populations like Indonesia, Iran and China. Despite these previously adapted measures, no literature indicated that this has been done for the South-African context. There is a great lack of research on maternal self-efficacy of African mothers and what it means to them.

Measures reflect the context within which they were developed which explains why some measures might be inappropriate to use in different contexts. Using a measurement that is inappropriate and not standardised for a specific context can have serious consequences which include things like bias, inaccurate results and causing harm.

The information above shows that traditions, beliefs and parenting styles vary across cultures and therefore the indicators used to measure what it means to be a good mother might differ from one culture to another.

Considering the above statement and the importance of maternal self-efficacy for both mothers and their children it motivates the reason for

developing a new maternal self-efficacy measure that is standardised for the South African context.