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Short-term fertility intentions among married women in depok city: a cross-sectional study based on the theory of planned behavior

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ABSTRACT

The decline in fertility in urban areas of Indonesia highlights the importance of understanding psychosocial determinants of reproductive decision-making. This study examined short-term fertility intention among married women in Depok City using the Theory of Planned Behavior framework. A quantitative cross-sectional design was employed involving 155 married women aged 19–35 years with no children or one child who completed a structured questionnaire. Data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The results indicated that attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control (PBC) were positively associatedwith effects on fertility intention (R^2 = 0.285). Among the TPB constructs, PBC showed the largest standardized coefficient (β=0.346, 95% CI: 0.205-0.487), followed by subjective norm (β=0.279, 95% CI: 0.126-0.432) and attitude (β=0.185, 95% CI: 0.060- 0.310). These findings suggest that fertility intentions in this urban context are shaped not only by personal evaluations but also by perceived control and social influences. In this context, fertility decision-making reflects considerations of readiness and perceived ability to manage reproductive, economic, and life demands. The study highlights the relevance of psychosocial factors in fertility intentions and may provide insights for reproductive health programs and family guidance and counseling practices in context urban setting. Findings should be interpreted within the context of the study's purposive sample and cross-sectional design.

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Introduction

The decline in fertility rates has become an important issue in demographic change and reproductive health. Over the past several decades, Indonesia has experienced a steady decline in fertility levels. Population census data indicate that Indonesia's Total Fertility Rate (TFR) decreased from 5.61 in 1971 to 2.18 in 2020 (BPS, 2023b). More recent data suggest that fertility has converged toward replacement level fertility, 2.1 births per woman,with a TFR of 2.12 in 2025 (Kemendukbangga/BKKBN, 2025). The TFR of 2.12 marks a significant turning point in Indonesia's demographic transition. Although technically still slightly above the 2.1 threshold, this very narrow margin could be at risk if fertility continues to decline below replacement level. This phenomenon indicates that Indonesia is no longer simply trying to control population growth, but is beginning to face the challenge of maintaining population stability. This trend reflects not only the long-term influence of family planning programs but also broader social and economic changes. As a result, decisions about childbearing are increasingly shaped by individual circumstances and contextual considerations.

The decline in fertility is more pronounced in urban areas. Data from LFSP 2020 show that many urban regions have TFR levels close to or below replacement level (BPS, 2023a). Depok City, which recorded a TFR of 1.99, represents one such urban context. In cities such as Depok, factors such as rising living costs, dual-income arrangements, and commuting demands may influence decisions about having children. These conditions may affect how couples consider the timing and number of children, as well as their readiness for parenthood.

In this study, fertility intention refers to the intention to have an additional child within the next three years. Fertility intention is often used as a proximal indicator of fertility behavior. It refers to plans regarding whether to have children, when to have them, and how many children to have. Previous studies suggest that fertility intentions are associated with subsequent behavior, although intentions may not always be realized due to various constraints (Aragón-Morales & Ruiz-Jiménez, 2025; Dommermuth et al., 2015). Recent research also indicates that fertility intentions may involve a degree of uncertainty, particularly regarding their realization and timing (Badolato et al., 2025). The use of a three-year time frame provides a concrete and actionable horizon for assessing fertility intentions and is expected to capture near-term reproductive plans more accurately than an unspecified time frame, as this period is particularly appropriate for investigating the realization of short-term goals (Spéder & Bálint, 2024). In urban contexts, factors such as economic readiness, employment stability, and work–family balance are often considered in shaping these intentions.

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) provides a framework for understanding how intentions are formed. According to TPB, intention is influenced by attitudes toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control (Ajzen, 1991). In the context of fertility, attitudes refer to evaluations of having children, subjective norms relate to perceived expectations from others, and perceived behavioral control reflects perceived ability and available resources to carry out the behavior (Ajzen & Klobas, 2013; Ghasemi et al., 2023). Empirical studies have shown that these three components are associated with fertility intention in different settings (Li et al., 2019). Although other perspectives, such as Social Cognitive Theory and Theory of Conjunctural Action, also explain fertility behavior through factors such as self-efficacy, social structures, and cultural context (Johnson-Hanks et al., 2011; Snead et al., 2014), the TPB was selected in this study because it provides a more specific framework for examining the formation of fertility intentions as a planned and deliberative process. Despite criticism that the TPB overemphasizes rational decision-making and overlooks ambivalence or unplanned pregnancy, the TPB remains relevant because the study focuses on specific intentions over a three-year period As Lazzari (2025) tates, fertility intentions are dynamic commitments and are strongly influenced by an individual's conscious evaluation of their current life situation over a specific period, including the alignment of childbearing desires with other life domains such as career and economic circumstances (Tydén et al., 2016). Thus, the TPB provides an analytical tool for predicting fertility intentions positioned as part of a structured life plan.

Empirical studies in different contexts have found that TPB variables are associated with fertility intentions (Dommermuth et al., 2011; Fantaye et al., 2025; Yu & Liang, 2022). In Indonesia, research on the determinants of fertility has flourished, exploring factors such as the risk of unintended pregnancy among women seeking to limit births (Supriyatna et al., 2018), the influence of household structure and housing ownership (Salamah et al., 2023), the role of women's autonomy in negotiating personal aspirations with reproductive decisions (Muthia & Setyonaluri, 2025), and how fertility preferences are influenced by the presence of relatives as substitute caregivers (Snopkowski & Nelson, 2021). While this literature provides extensive insights, this study focuses on individual decision-making mechanisms through the TPB lens, particularly in areas experiencing extreme demographic transition, particularly in Depok City, where fertility has reached below-replacement level. This study aims to examine fertility intentions among married women in an urban context using the TPB framework. Specifically, this study analyzes attitudes as having a positive influence on fertility intentions (H1), subjective norms as having a positive influence on fertility intentions (H2), and perceived behavioral control as having a positive influence on fertility intentions (H3) among married women in Depok City. The findings are expected to contribute to a better understanding of fertility decision-making in urban contexts and may provide insights for family planning, reproductive health programs, and family guidance and counseling practices regarding family fertility planning.

Method

This study employed a quantitative approach with a cross-sectional design, aiming to examine the associations between attitude toward having children, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control

(PBC) on the fertility intentions of married women. Depok City, West Java, was selected as the research location due to its urban characteristics and a Total Fertility Rate (TFR) below the replacement level (1.99), with a specific focus on Beji and Cinere sub-districts, which exhibit the lowest population growth rates in the region. These sub-districts were purposively selected as critical case environments representing the urban fertility transition. The cross-sectional design was utilized to capture the relationships between the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) constructs and fertility intentions at a single point in time during the data collection period from June to August 2025.

Research Subjects

The target population for this study consisted of married women residing in Depok City. The sample was determined using a non-probability purposive sampling technique to ensure that participants met specific characteristics relevant to the research objectives. This approach was considered the most appropriate and feasible for identifying respondents who met the study's inclusion criteria: legally married women, aged 19–35 years, and currently having no children or only one child. These inclusion criteria were established to focus on women at the pivotal stage of the transition to first or second parenthood, an important stage in the context of urban fertility decline.

A total of 155 respondents participated in the study. Of the 162 eligible candidates approached, 155 completed the interviews, while 7 candidates could not be interviewed due to temporary absence from home or scheduling conflicts during follow-up visits. No eligible participants explicitly declined participation. The sample size was determined based on the minimum sample size requirements for PLS-SEM, which suggest that approximately 155 observations are required to detect a path coefficient between 0.11 and 0.20 at a 5% significance level (Hair et al., 2022). This sample size was considered adequate for estimating the hypothesized relationships within the PLS-SEM framework.

Research Instruments

The research instrument was a structured questionnaire adapted from Ghasemi et al. (2023). Prior to the main study, a pilot test (n=33) was conducted, demonstrating high internal consistency for Attitude (α=0.804), Subjective Norm (α=0.899), and Perceived Behavioral Control (α=0.819). All variables were measured using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The TPB antecedent constructs were operationalized as reflective constructs and measured using multiple indicators. Attitude toward having children was measured through indicators of perceived benefits and concerns regarding childbearing; Subjective norms were assessed based on the perceived expectations from husbands, parents, siblings, and close friends; perceived behavioral control (PBC) was evaluated through perceived control over economic conditions, health status, and daily activities, with reverse scoring applied to negatively phrased items. These negatively worded items were retained following the instrument structure developed by Ghasemi et al. (2023) and were theoretically intended to represent evaluative aspects of the same latent attitude construct rather than distinct dimensions. To assess potential method bias, the reverse-scored items were evaluated through outer loadings and construct reliability during the measurement model assessment. All reverse-scored indicators demonstrated statistically significant outer loadings above 0.70 and aligned consistently with the positively worded items, supporting convergent validity and the unidimensional reflective construct specification.

Fertility intention was assessed through a single-item construct focusing on the intention to have children within a specific three-year window. This approach aligns with the Theory of Planned Behavior's core principle that human behavior is best predicted in specific contexts (Ajzen, 1991). By defining a clear planning horizon, the measure allows a more specific assessment of short-term (three-year) fertility intention rather than a broad or unspecified fertility preference. In SEM research, single-item constructs may be considered acceptable when measuring concrete and narrowly defined constructs (Hayduk & Littvay, 2012). Nevertheless, the authors acknowledge that using a single item to measure fertility intentions may not fully capture its complexity. The measure primarily captures short-term timing-related fertility intention rather than broader dimensions such as desired number of children, spacing preferences, or certainty of intention.

Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected through face-to-face interviews to ensure data quality and minimize non-response bias. To accurately identify eligible families in the absence of a formal registry, the researchers collaborated with local sub-district officials, neighborhood leaders, and community health volunteers. Field visits were conducted alongside these local guides to facilitate access and establish trust. Each respondent was provided with an informed consent form at the beginning of the interview, detailing the study's objectives, the voluntary nature of participation, and the confidentiality of their data. Participants were informed of their

right to withdraw from the interview at any time without any consequences. During fieldwork, several identified candidates could not be interviewed due to temporary absences from home or scheduling conflicts (non-contact). To address this, the field team scheduled follow-up visits during weekends and non-working hours until the calculated target of 155 completed interviews was achieved.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis was conducted using PLS-SEM with SmartPLS version 3. Although fertility intention was modeled as a single-item endogenous construct, PLS-SEM was retained because the exogenous TPB variables were conceptualized as latent constructs measured by multiple indicators. This approach enables estimation of structural relationships while accounting for measurement error in the predictor constructs and does not require strict multivariate normality assumptions. As fertility intention was operationalized as a single-item construct, internal consistency reliability indices such as composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE) were not substantively interpreted for this variable. The resulting CR and AVE values of 1.000 for the fertility intention construct are acknowledged as mathematical artifacts inherent to single-item operationalization in SEM software and should not be interpreted as evidence of perfect reliability or validity (Hair et al., 2017). Despite the use of a single-item endogenous construct, PLS-SEM remains appropriate for simultaneously modeling latent multidimensional predictors within the TPB framework.

All constructs in this study were specified as reflective measurement models, consistent with the conceptualization of the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) framework. Items with negative phrasing were reverse-scored prior to analysis to maintain interpretive consistency while remaining specified as reflective indicators. The analysis including evaluation of the measurement model assessement through indicator reliability, convergent validity (AVE), discriminant validity via the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio, and evaluation of the structural model assessment, including collinearity (VIF), path coefficients, R^2, effect sizes (f^2), and predictive relevance (Q^2) (Hair et al., 2017). Additionally, the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) was reported to assess model fit (Kline, 2016) Statistical significance was assessed using bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples.

Ethical Considerations

This study received ethical approval from the Research Ethics Committee for Studies Involving Human Subjects, IPB University, under approval letter No. 1755/IT3.KEPMSM-IPB/SK/2025. All participants provided written or verbal informed consent prior to data collection, confirming their voluntary participation. Data confidentiality was strictly maintained in accordance with established research ethics principles.

Results and Discussions

Demographic Characteristics of The Respondents

A total of 155 married women of reproductive age (19–35 years) participated in this study. The majority of respondents were 25–29 years old (52.9%), with a mean age of 28.13 years. The average age at first marriage was 23.79 years, and most respondents married between 20–24 years of age (45.8%). Regarding marriage duration, 39.4% had been married for 1–5 years, and 38.1% for 6–10 years, indicating that most families were in the early to mid-stages of family formation. In terms of education, the majority had completed senior high school (56.1%), while 24.5% held a bachelor's degree. Most respondents had one child (78.7%), and for ideal family size, the majority preferred two children (71.0%). These demographics reflect characteristics commonly found among urban families in the early stages of family development.

Descriptive Analysis

The descriptive analysis aims to provide an initial overview of respondents' perceptions across all research constructs, including Attitude (AT), Subjective Norm (SN), Perceived Behavioral Control (PBC), and Fertility Intention Married Woman (FIMW). All items were measured using a five-point Likert scale, and indicators marked with (*) were reverse-scored; thus, higher mean values on these items indicate lower perceived constraints or concerns. The results indicate a generally positive orientation toward childbearing among respondents, although certain perceived limitations remain present.

Regarding Attitude (AT), children are viewed through highly positive perceptions. The conviction that "children are a blessing" emerged as the strongest perception, followed by the belief that children enhance personal happiness and provide hope. Although the high mean score (4.2–4.4) and low standard deviation (0.5–0.6) indicate a ceiling effect on this variable, it reflects the strong homogeneity of cultural values in society, especially in Depok city, regarding the importance of children. The researchers acknowledge that the low variance in the attitude variable may statistically limit its power as a predictor. However, from a

substantive perspective, these findings suggest that pro-natalist values remain very dominant. For the reverse-scored items, the relatively high mean scores indicate that potential drawbacks such as reduced personal comfort or the loss of hobbies are not perceived as significant deterrents. This suggests that for these women, the emotional and psychological rewards of parenthood effectively outweigh the perceived personal costs.

The influence of Subjective Norms (SN) reflects a moderate but distinct social hierarchy in decision-making. Spousal dynamics play the most critical role, with the husband's expectations exerting a far stronger influence than the expectations of parents or relatives. This pattern may indicate the stronger salience of spousal expectations compared with extended family expectations in fertility decision-making among respondents in this urban area, where the quality of the marital relationship and partner support has become the most salient social influence in fertility planning, surpassing traditional extended family pressures.

In terms of Perceived Behavioral Control (PBC), the data highlights that an individual's sense of agency is most challenged by external resource availability. Economic readiness (Mean = 3.0) appeared to be the most salient constraint, followed by health considerations. Interestingly, work and educational commitments were perceived as relatively manageable. This indicates that while urban women feel capable of managing multiple role expectations, economic readiness remains the main perceived constraint shaping fertility intentions.

Finally, these perceptions culminate in a moderately high level of Fertility Intention Married Woman (FIMW). Approximately 65.2% of respondents expressed a positive intention to have a child within the next three years. This finding suggests that fertility intentions may reflect the interaction between positive attitudes toward children and perceived economic readiness. In the context of human development, these findings suggest that while the desire for family formation remains robust, the realization of these intentions is closely tied to the couple's perceived stability in an urban environment.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of TPB Indicators and Fertility Intention

Indicators	Mean	SD	1 (%)	2 (%)	3 (%)	4 (%)	5 (%)
Attitude (AT)							
Children are a blessing	4.4	0.6	0.0	1.9	0.0	56.8	41.3
Children increase happiness	4.3	0.6	0.0	1.3	0.6	61.9	36.1
Children provide hope and joy	4.2	0.5	0.0	0.6	0.6	74.2	24.5
Children enhance spousal closeness	4.2	0.6	0.0	2.6	3.2	65.8	28.4
Children reduced comfort*	3.9	0.7	0.6	8.4	1.3	84.5	5.2
Children reduce old-age loneliness	3.8	0.8	0.0	11.6	5.2	72.3	11.0
Children losing hobbies*	3.7	0.7	0.6	12.3	5.8	78.7	2.6
Children increased expenses*	3.6	1.0	2.6	17.4	7.1	65.8	7.1
Subjective Norm (SN)							
Husband expects me to have/add children	3.7	1.0	0.6	19.4	9.7	54.2	16.1
Friends expect me to have/add children	3.5	0.9	0.6	18.1	16.1	61.3	3.9
Relatives expect me to have/add children	3.4	0.9	0.6	21.9	14.2	59.4	3.9
Parents expect me to have/add children	3.3	0.9	0.0	29.0	20.0	45.8	5.2
Perceived Behavioral Control (PBC)							
Work/education limits childbearing capacity*	3.5	0.9	1.3	19.4	4.5	73.5	1.3
Health limits childbearing capacity*	3.1	1.0	3.2	40.6	4.5	51.0	0.6
Economy limits childbearing capacity*	3.0	1.1	4.5	38.7	7.1	47.7	1.9
Fertility Intention Married Woman (FIMW)							
Intention to have a child within 3 years	3.5	1.2	3.9	23.9	7.1	47.1	18.1

Note: SD = Standard Deviation; 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree. Indicators marked with (*) have been reverse-scored.

Measurement Model Assessment

The measurement model was evaluated through instrument purification, validity, and reliability tests. During the purification process, several indicators were excluded to ensure measurement quality. The final model for Attitude (AT), Subjective Norms (SN), and Perceived Behavioral Control (PBC) retained indicators with acceptable outer loadings.

Table 2. Measurement Model Assessment Results

Construct	Indicator	Outer Loading	Composite Reliability (CR)	AVE	R^2	Q^2
Attitude (AT)	3 items	0.781-0.826	0.845	0.645		
Subjective Norm (SN)	4 items	0.746-0.812	0.854	0.594		
Perceived Behavioral Control (PBC)	3 items	0.705-0.781	0.780	0.543		
Fertility Intention Married Women (FIMW)	1 items	1.000	1.000	1.000	0.285	0.246

Source: Primary Data, 2025

The outcome variable, Fertility Intention Married Woman (FIMW), was measured using a single indicator, focusing on the intention to have a child within a specific three-year window. This temporal focus was intended to provide a more specific assessment of short-term fertility intention. As presented in Table 1, all constructs met the established thresholds for Average Variance Extracted (AVE > 0.50) and Composite Reliability (CR > 0.70), confirming strong convergent validity and internal consistency. Furthermore, discriminant validity was established using the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio, with all values below the 0.85 threshold, indicating that Attitude, Subjective Norms, and Perceived Behavioral Control are empirically distinct dimensions

Table 3. Discriminant Validity Assessment Using HTMT Ratio

Construct	AT	SN	PBC	IFI
Attitude (AT)	-			
Subjective Norm (SN)	0.146	-		
Perceived Behavioral Control (PBC)	0.159	0.274	-	
Fertility Intention Married Woman (FIMW)	0.271	0.387	0.532	-

Source: Primary Data, 2025

Structural Model and Hypothesis Testing

Before evaluating the structural relationships, the model was assessed for potential collinearity issues and model fit. The results indicated that all inner Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values were below 3.0 (ranging from 1.054 to 1.121), suggesting that multicollinearity was not a concern in the model. To assess the approximate model fit, the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) was calculated. The model yielded an SRMR value of 0.099, which is within the acceptable limit of < 0.10 as proposed by Kline (2016). The structural model was evaluated using a bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 resamples. Figure 1 provides the structural model, illustrating the path coefficients and outer loadings from the PLS algorithm.

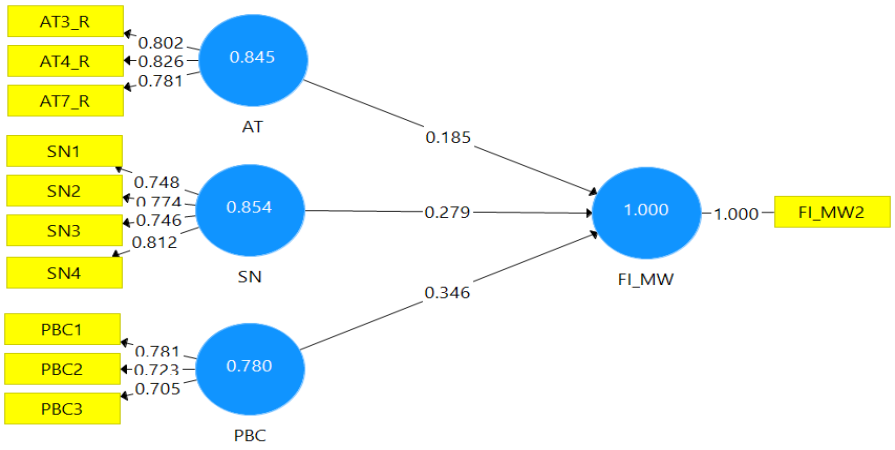

Figure 1. PLS-SEM Structural Model Results
Source: Primary Data, 2025

The hypothesis testing results are summarized in Table 4. All three hypothesized relationships were statistically significant (p < 0.05), supporting H1, H2, and H3.

Table 4. Structural Model and Hypothesis Testing Results

	Variable	β	STDEV	t-statistic	p-value	95% CI	Results
H1	Attitude → Fertility Intention	0.185	0.064	2.855	0.004	[0.060, 0.310]	Accepted
H2	Subjective Norm → Fertility Intention	0.279	0.078	3.557	0.000	[0.126, 0.432]	Accepted
H3	Perceived Behavioral Control → Fertility Intention	0.346	0.072	4.799	0.000	[0.205, 0.487]	Accepted

Source: Primary Data, 2025

The model explains 28.5% of the variance in the intention to have a child within the next three years. Although the explanatory power was modest (R2=0.285), the findings indicate that the TPB constructs contribute meaningfully to understanding fertility intentions within this urban sample. Analysis of the effect size (f2) indicated that Perceived Behavioral Control (PBC) demonstrated the largest practical contribution, showing a medium effect size (f2 =0.161). Meanwhile, Subjective Norms (f2 =0.104) and Attitude (f2 =0.048) exhibited relatively small practical effects (Cohen, 1988). These findings suggest that perceived capability in managing economic and practical demands may play a relatively more prominent role in shaping short-term fertility intentions compared with personal attitudes or perceived social expectation. The Q2 value of 0.246 for the endogenous construct further confirms the model's predictive relevance.

Discussion

This study examines the relevance of the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) in predicting fertility intentions among married women aged 19–35 in Depok City. The findings indicate that attitudes toward having children, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control significantly influence fertility intentions. These results reinforce the applicability of TPB in explaining reproductive decision-making in the urban Indonesian context (Ajzen, 1991; Fishbein & Ajzen, 2011).

Further analysis reveals that among the TPB constructs, perceived behavioral control (PBC) demonstrated the largest standardized coefficient and effect size in this model, although the differences between predictors were not formally compared statistically. Within the TPB framework, PBC reflects individuals' perceptions of their ability and readiness to perform a behavior. The prominence of PBC in this study suggests that fertility intentions are shaped more by perceived readiness and feasibility than by personal desire alone. This interpretation is supported by descriptive patterns, where economic readiness appeared to be the most salient perceived constraint compared to other factors such as health or work-related limitations. This indicates that decisions about having children are closely tied to perceptions of financial stability and resource availability. This interpretation is also consistent with broader demographic trends in Southeast Asia, where economic considerations in urban settings increasingly shape fertility decision-making despite persistently positive family and childbearing norms (Jean Yeung & Abalos, 2025). These results are consistent with previous studies highlighting the importance of economic conditions, including income and employment, in shaping fertility intentions (Guo et al., 2023; Hayford & Agadjanian, 2017). Thus, the findings suggest a tendency toward more pragmatic considerations, where individuals evaluate not only whether they want to have children, but also whether they are able to do so under current conditions. This pattern is also confirmed in studies of young urban women, where reproductive intentions are strongly influenced by family readiness (Adhitiah et al., 2025).

Subjective norms emerge as the second showed the largest relative contribution, indicating that social expectations and interpersonal influences remain important in shaping fertility intentions. This finding aligns with evidence that social pressure is a crucial factor in fertility decision-making, both among childless individuals and those with one child (Ciritel et al., 2019). Specifically, individuals with strong fertility intentions tend to report more positive perceptions of social support and marital satisfaction compared to those who do not intend to have children (Araban et al., 2020). These influences operate across multiple levels, as both broader social norms and group-level expectations have been shown to significantly affect fertility intentions (Yu & Liang, 2022). In the context of second-child planning, subjective norms may even emerge as the most dominant predictor among TPB variables (Yao, 2024). Interestingly, descriptive statistics in this study indicate that the husband's expectations constitute the most influential normative factor, compared to parents or peers. This finding may reflect the relatively stronger salience of spousal expectations compared with those of parents or peers in this urban sample.

Meanwhile, attitudes toward having children show the smallest contribution, although their effect remains statistically significant. Descriptively, respondents tend to hold highly positive views about children, perceiving them as sources of happiness and family fulfillment. At the same time, perceived drawbacks such as increased expenses or reduced personal comfort receive relatively less endorsement. This relatively uniform positivity suggests a potential ceiling effect, where attitudes may play a more limited role in differentiating fertility intentions within this context. In this context, favorable attitudes alone are insufficient to generate intentions without the support of perceived control and social alignment, as demonstrated in TPB-based studies by (Klobas et al., 2010), which emphasize the interaction between attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived control in explaining fertility intentions. This is further supported by (Dommermuth et al., 2011), who show that positive attitudes do not consistently distinguish the timing of fertility intentions, whereas social norms and perceived control play a more decisive role in determining whether individuals intend to have children sooner or later. This finding is consistent with the argument that attitudes toward children are shaped by family systems and the availability of kin support, which may influence intentions differently depending on whether individuals are planning to start or expand a family (Mönkediek & Bras, 2018).

Furthermore, the use of a three-year time frame in measuring fertility intentions indicates that respondents' reproductive orientations are temporally bounded. This suggests that fertility intentions are not purely abstract preferences, but also reflect considerations regarding when such behaviors are expected to be realized, as shown by (Dommermuth et al., 2011), who distinguish between immediate and near-future fertility intentions. Within the TPB framework, temporal specification of intentions is also associated with individuals' readiness to act. Ajzen & Klobas (2013) further noted that fertility intentions in the Generations and Gender Survey (GGS) were commonly measured using a single item asking whether respondents intended to have a child within the next three years. Their findings across several European countries demonstrated that attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control significantly contributed to the prediction of short-term fertility intentions, supporting the relevance of temporally specific fertility intentions within the TPB framework. In this regard, the present study adopts a similar conceptualization by focusing on near-term fertility planning among married women transitioning to first or second parenthood in an urban low-fertility setting.

From a practical perspective, these findings have implications for family guidance and counseling. Within the TPB framework, efforts to support reproductive decision-making may benefit from not only focusing on emphasize fostering positive attitudes toward children, but also addressing perceived barriers and strengthen perceived control and social support. Counseling approaches may benefit from facilitating discussions regarding economic preparedness, work–family balance, timing of parenthood, and shared reproductive expectations between partners.This approach is consistent with the concept of the Reproductive Life Plan, which encourages individuals and couples to reflect on their reproductive goals and strategies to achieve them (Tydén et al., 2016). In addition, counseling may include financial planning, division of household roles, and joint decision-making processes within couples. Strengthening communication between partners is crucial for aligning expectations and reducing potential disagreements in fertility intentions, which in turn may influence the realization of childbearing decisions. More broadly, recent findings suggest that fertility intentions are often accompanied by high levels of uncertainty and are closely linked to timing considerations and individual life conditions (Badolato et al., 2025).

This study has several limitations. The use of a cross-sectional design limits the ability to capture changes in fertility intentions over time as well as the relationship between intentions and their realization. Additionally, the study focused specifically on married women with no children or one child, representing individuals in the transition to first or second parenthood. Therefore, the findings may not reflect fertility intentions among women with larger family sizes or different reproductive life stages. The study's focus on selected urban areas also limit the broader generalizability of the findings. In addition, fertility intention was measured using a single-item construct focusing strictly on a three-year timeframe, which may not fully capture the multidimensional nature of the fertility intention. The relatively modest explanatory power of the model ($R^2 = 0.285$) also suggests that additional factors beyond the TPB constructs might influence fertility intentions, such as partner intentions, housing conditions, childcare support, and employment security. Future research is therefore recommended to employ longitudinal approaches to examine the consistency between fertility intentions and actual behavior, as well as to extend the research context to both rural and urban areas in order to obtain a more comprehensive understanding.

Conclusions

Fertility intentions among married women in this urban context are associated with personal attitudes, perceived social expectations, and perceived behavioral control, with perceived behavioral control showing the relatively large contribution among the TPB constructs examined. These finding suggest that short-term fertility intention are closely linked to individuals' perceptions of economic readiness, family roles, and their capacity to navigate family, and life demands. Within the Theory of Planned Behavior framework, this study highlights the relevance of psychological and social considerations in understanding fertility intention among married women transitioning to first or second parenthood in urban setting with low-fertility rates. However, the model's moderate explanatory power suggests that additional contextual factors beyond the TPB constructs may also shape fertility intentions, warranting further investigation. From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that reproductive health and family counseling initiatives may benefit from addressing perceived readiness, economic concerns, partner communication, life planning consideration. Future studies are recommended to use a longitudinal approach and a broader population group to better understand the relationship between fertility intentions and subsequent reproductive behavior.

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