

WHEN SPOUSE DECIDE TO BE CHILDFREE: ARE THEY HAPPY WITHOUT CHILD?

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ABSTRACT. An investigation into the psychological and physiological impacts of infertility on married couples. A childfree adult is one who has never wanted children and has no plans to do so in the future. They have no physical or mental limitations that would prevent them from having children, yet they make the decision not to. The relevance, motivations, experiences, and modes of communication between childless husbands and wives are the primary foci of this study project. The principles of phenomenology and social construction are used in this research to build reality. Interviews with single participants are a key component of the phenomenological approach to data collection. This poll found that eight of the married couples who do not have children have been together for at least three years but have not been successful in having children. The data was examined using interpretive research methods as well as literary research procedures. The findings of this study show that the presence of children is not considered to be a defining characteristic of marriage, and they also show that not having children can have positive effects on other aspects of life, particularly on the capacity of a husband and wife to know and appreciate each other. According to field research, the relationship between married couples who do not have any children is found to be a healthy one. Multiple variables, including a lack of desire for children, individual circumstances and job goals, health concerns, and personal opinions against bringing more physical people into the world, can affect complex life decisions. Some examples of these causes are: It is possible that a person might be better off if they did not have children, despite the fact that there does not seem to be an evolutionary rationale for this choice.

KEYWORDS: Childfree; Married Couples; Communication

1 INTRODUCTION

The term "childfree" refers to an individual who has no plans or desires to have children. In 1972, the National Non-Parental Organization first embraced the term. The terms "childfree" and "childless" are distinct. People who choose not to have children are those who have enough money and health to have children but choose not to (Moore, 2014). They are perfectly able to have children, but choose not to do so. "Parentless" differs from "childless" in that the latter refers to those who want to become parents but are unable to do so due to biological factors. Children are those born to an individual or couple. Whether a person or couple has children depends on external factors, such as choices and physical and biological circumstances (Nugroho *et al.*, 2022).

Gita Savitri Devi and her husband Paul Andre have agreed that they want to live alone without the presence of children, which has prompted widespread discussion among the Indonesian populace. Gita Savitri and her husband Paul Andre have decided that they want to live without the presence of children. They think that having children in a marriage is a choice and not a must. Childfree was selected out of concern that they would not be able to assume responsibility and adequately care for their kids in the future. However, the decision to become Childfree's partner in Indonesia raises benefits and downsides

and is quite an alien one, owing to the country's strong patriarchal culture and the societal shame associated with married women who do not have children for their husbands.

Marriage is one route of procreation, particularly for Easterners, whose culture emphasizes the superiority of procreating via marriage. Indonesia is considered to be one of the pro-natalist nations, which means that it still views the presence of children in the marriage process as a method of preserving the family lineage. In addition, Indonesia still harbors the misconception that many youngsters are well-nourished (Hanandita, 2022). The local community often exerts pressure on newlyweds to have children as soon as possible; if the couple does not have children, their marriage is seen as flawed. This is in sharp contrast to the "childfree" idea, which describes the lifestyle choice of contemporary married couples. The presence of children in a family is related to the child's function towards parents or the fulfillment of the needs and expectations of parents as a continuation of the lineage, heirs to family traditions, outpouring of love and affection, and the expectations of parents for children. Furthermore, the presence of a child can improve the family's economic situation, because children are thought to be food carriers. These factors strengthen the urge for an immediate kid in a pro-natalist culture.

Nonetheless, some women and married couples have decided not to have children or offspring as a result of the modernization and liberalization of some Indonesians' attitudes. Having children is not a must, but rather a personal decision and a mutual agreement between husband and wife. Having children is a significant obligation. In addition to giving birth to, caring for, and educating their children, every couple that wants to have children must also fulfill their rights and mold them into well-rounded individuals. There are several reasons why an individual or couple may opt not to have children. The first is emancipation from parental obligations and more opportunity for self-actualization and spontaneous movement. Moreover, some marriages that want to stay childfree do so because they are close and do not wish to have their lives limited by the presence of a child (Indah & Zuhdi, 2022).

According to the results of the researcher's initial survey of long-married couples who choose to be childfree, there are a variety of reasons why they choose not to have children, beginning with internal factors such as financial reasons, still pursuing unachieved goals, family background (lack of a good parental figure), mental health reasons, and, of course, their own unwillingness to have children. Moreover, external factors such as pollution, climate change, global warming, the emergence of new viruses, and a growing population are often cited as the reasons why married couples choose not to procreate. Thus, it may be said that Childfree aims to slow the rise of the global population.

Similar to what Cinta Laura did, who also identified herself as a childfree. The choice to become childfree while being unmarried is a result of existing societal circumstances. One of them is the number of neglected children. According to Cinta Laura, caring for abandoned children is preferable to adding to the already crowded human population. As of December 31, 2021, the Directorate General of Population and Civil Registration (Dukcapil) of the Ministry of Home Affairs reports that the population of Indonesia has reached 273,87 million. This number indicates that Indonesia's population expanded by 1.64 million between June and December of 2021. On August 1, 2010, this entry was published (Kusnandar, 2022).

Those with such an increasingly modern worldview are often seen in urban areas. There are compelling reasons for a person's decision to live without children or as a childfree individual, including urban characteristics such as a busy work life; an emphasis on careers; education, literacy; and an open mind; independence; and a desire not to be bothered by the presence of children. Women with more education are less likely to be childless. Educated women have a strong desire to not have children or to have fewer children. Also, people who live in cities are less likely to follow or accept traditional gender roles (Tunggono, 2021).

The development of science in the fields of technology and education is the first step in altering the mentality of individuals, especially women. Many women are also highly educated and successful in the realm of work. Numerous women are pleased to be professional women and to set aside their nature, which sooner or later transforms into that of a mother. There are also women who are prepared to forego

motherhood for the sake of their job and happiness. This means that Childfree is one of the choices that can be made so that it can work in public without being hampered by children.

Among a number of comparable study findings involving Childfree, married couples living in rural areas want more children than married couples living in metropolitan areas (Bimha & Chadwick, 2016). According to a second survey dubbed "Childfree by Choice," one in ten Canadians between the ages of 20 and 34 do not want children and want to be child-free. In addition, the research found that nonreligious people tend not to desire children (Rastogi, 2019). In addition, research examines the child-free viewpoint on women's reproductive rights in Islam. The decision to remain childless must be accompanied by mature and thoughtful consideration. One of the applications of reproductive rights, specifically the freedom to reject pregnancy, is the choice to choose childlessness. To achieve this right, the notion of a husband-wife partnership must be implemented inside the home. The choice to forego having children must be preceded by a conversation between the husband and wife. Regarding the choice to not have children, both parties, particularly the woman, must be candid throughout the conversation. To make sure that neither side is hurt, these reasons must be backed up by strong fundamental reasons (Shofita *et al.*, 2021)

Based on the aforementioned issue, the researcher is interested in doing more research on the Childfree social phenomenon, which focuses on married couples who choose not to have children. This study was undertaken by analyzing the significance, motivation, and experience of communication among childfree or child-free-by-choice couples. It is believed that a phenomenological method is appropriate for this study since phenomenology examines how things are perceived in the realms of consciousness, thinking, and action. Through phenomenology, the formation of meaning in married couples about the Childfree phenomena is tailored to the study couple's experience and awareness. Therefore, the researcher attempts to enter the world of the subject being investigated in order to comprehend what and how a phenomenon develops in the subject's everyday life. In this way, the researcher tries to figure out how the meaning of "childfree" develops among married couples who choose not to have children.

2 METHOD

In this study, qualitative research methods were used. Qualitative research is a method for generating data in the form of written and spoken phrases based on observations of the subject and his behavior (Nursanti *et al.*, 2021). This research tries to comprehend why some married couples choose not to have children. On the basis of the meaning established by this event, the attitude and determination behind the husband and wife's decision not to have children will be understood.

Because the phenomenological tradition emphasizes conscious individual experiences, researchers use a phenomenological method. Individuals will interpret their experiences and understandings of their lives, which are founded on their experiences in the social environment (Cresswell *et al.*, 2018). Consequently, phenomenology will attempt to comprehend the meaning of childfree in married couples based on their behaviors and experiences in dealing with family, the surrounding environment, and friends.

Participants in this research were required to be childfree by choice, to have never had biological children, and to have been married for at least three years. This married couple is resolved to avoid having children from the start of their relationship. This research included a total of six individuals who were selected using a sample approach known as purposive sampling. The participant data is shown in the following table:

Table 1: Characteristics of Informants

Informan	Age	Gender	Wedding time	Profession
RA	35	Female	5 year	Private sector employee
MC	36	Male	5 year	Private sector employee
WT	30	Male	4 year	Private sector employee
CL	28	Female	4 year	Private sector employee

MR	30	Female	3 year	Private sector employee
TT	30	Male	3 year	Private sector employee
LM	35	Female	4 year	Private sector employee
SN	35	Male	4 year	Private sector employee

Individual participant interviews were the mode of data gathering. The topic of child freedom is delicate, so it is vital to adopt a unique approach in order to develop closeness and confidence so that participants will be prepared to share information freely and honestly. Therefore, efforts must be made to create rapport and instill trust in participants by stressing that the information gathered would be utilized only for this study and that the participants' identities will be concealed from others. During interviews, an interview guide including open-ended questions was used. The interview question is: what is the significance of children? What influence does childlessness have on a marriage? What are the requirements for a successful marriage for participants? The aforementioned three questions are open-ended, allowing participants to submit comprehensive and in-depth responses. During the interview process, probing (asking participants to say something) and prompting (asking participants to explain what they said) were used to learn more about the data.

3. Results And Discussion

The data received from the interviews was transcribed verbatim and then coded to identify the resulting themes. In general, one of the six interviewees judged that children are one of the most significant aspects of a marriage and complete or perfect it. The other four respondents stated that the most important aspect of a marriage is the quality of the marriage rather than the presence or absence of children. Nonetheless, these four individuals believed that children were an essential component of a marriage. In the first year of their marriage, just one participant used contraception to postpone conception.

3.1.1 Life Without Children After Marriage

Nearly all participants saw children as a priceless gift from God. The high estimation of children is supported by the premise that they are gifts, i.e., things that are regarded as very precious presents from God. In light of the fact that the presence of a kid cannot be replaced by any other item, having a child is a goal that almost all couples want. Therefore, most married couples make significant attempts to produce biological children, despite the high costs involved. Due to its extreme value, the kid is seen as a deposit or trust that must be managed as carefully as possible by the parents. However, this is not the same as married couples who want to remain childfree. They say that parents should really be responsible for caring for and teaching their kids, as well as meeting their material needs and enjoying family life.

Several actions are required for married couples to actualize their desire to live without children. They first decided to defer having children, but then changed their minds about not having children for the remainder of their lives. Several studies provide evidence that the reason couples choose not to procreate is due to the influence of macro-social dynamics, such as the rise in female labor force participation. In contrast to statistics from the field, the informant revealed that financial and economic considerations were the primary factors for couples who opted not to have children. According to interviews with informants, couples who choose not to have children for financial and psychological reasons are credited with preventing the birth of one person who would have been born below the poverty line. In addition, having children is a lengthy process, so financial and mental preparations must be carefully considered (Roux & Figeac, 2022).

The statistics in the field also demonstrate that getting married is not an act motivated by "wanting to have children," but rather by the desire to cohabitate with one's spouse. The informant acknowledged

that life after marriage is not just about "children," as there are other work difficulties, daily home demands, and others to consider. Informants in the field acknowledged that avoiding overpopulation by avoiding having children after marriage is possible. If Indonesia maintains its current birth rate, the population will grow quickly. The informant acknowledged that overpopulation may have significant effects on the nation. Furthermore, there is significant international migration every year because a government cannot provide its citizens with their fundamental rights.

The decision not to have children is seen as a way to resist "pronatalist" societal influences that encourage women to conceive and the universal purpose of encouraging parenting (Hintz & Brown, 2019). Consequently, couples who choose not to have children for various reasons are adversely constructed by society, particularly in pronatalist nations, thus generating a stereotype of the married couple. The pronatalist society's perspective on the situation of childlessness reveals that the fact that at least women become mothers might create moral terror. For instance, Europe needs more newborns to avert a demographic disaster. The pronatalist society thinks that birth may influence the future quality of employment (Verniers *et al.*, 2022).

Negative personal attributions, such as having an unhappy upbringing, might be attributed to couples who choose not to have children. There are two societal elements that affect the acceptability of childlessness. First, a discussion of societal opinions about the couple's responsibility to procreate. Second, the emptiness experienced by childless couples. Society's rejection of the couple's choice not to have children is inextricably linked to the perpetuation of stereotypes. Two sorts of stereotypes exist: prescriptive and proscriptive stereotypes (Ekelund & Ask, 2021). Prescriptive stereotypes are made up of actions that people think are typical of a social group, while proscriptive stereotypes are made up of expectations about how people should act.

It is believed that couples who choose not to have children relieve suffering by lowering the load of an overpopulated globe (Leroux *et al.*, 2021). Local population expansion is seen to have outpaced existing resources, resulting in migration. The government views low population growth as evidence of the rulers' affluence and authority, yet the choice not to have children leads to a loss of family and individual dignity. One of the informants acknowledged that, as a married couple, they were subjected to intense pressure from their surroundings to have children. They feel terrible for failing to be the ideal husband and wife due to these obligations. The fact that the environment has more of an effect than a partner shows that a gender bias idea is still around (Mandujano-Salazar, 2019).

Because motivation is defined by Schutz as a reference to the individual's history while acting (Utamidewi *et al.*, 2017). The activities of married couples who choose not to have children are influenced by individual experiences in the social environment and the family. Behind the diverse backgrounds of acts, the researchers observed parallels in financial, psychological, and environmental issues that had a significant impact on the informants' behaviors. Based on what we've talked about so far, the reasons people choose not to have children are shown in the figure below.

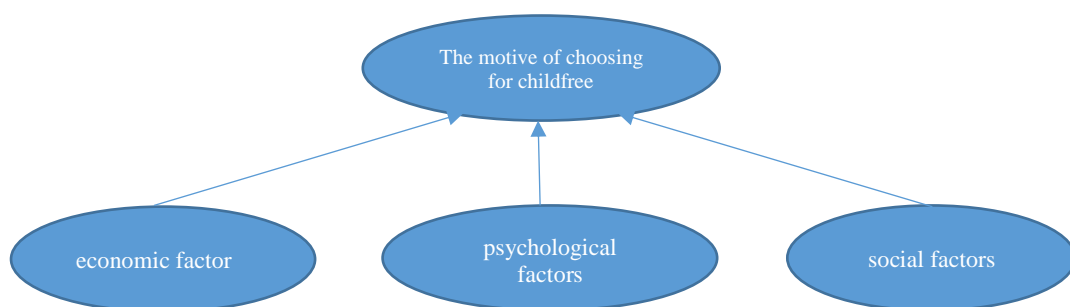


Figure 1 The motive for choosing childfree
Source: Researcher

3.1.2 Childfree Stereotypes of Non-Parental Couples (Childfree)

"No kid" is not synonymous with "no child." In the construction of Indonesian society, childfree is more acceptable than the choices and choosing of children without children. Eastern culture, social constructs, and stigma have been capable of embracing the new topic of childlessness. Negative stereotypes pertain to childless marriages from the perspective of women (childfree). Couples who opt to remain childless are ostracized and seen poorly by society. Berger and Luckmann's theory of reality, called the "social construction theory," says that each social order has its own reality (Alwi *et al.*, 2021). In this example, the relationship is that the notion of childlessness cannot be completely embraced, particularly in a pronatalist community. Therefore, for married couples who are "adherents" to being childfree, this is established by the surrounding community, which ultimately gives birth to assumptions that differ based on one's knowledge and understanding of reality construction. The conception of stereotyping as a process, namely the disposition or conduct of people who see the behavior or condition of others as unacceptable. In other words, stigma refers to the idea that a married couple without children is odd. The findings of the field study support the idea that infertile married couples are seen as inflexible, hedonistic, and reckless. (Stahnke *et al.*, 2020).

Sociocultural and ideological norms influence parenting choices and behavior. The birth of a child signifies a woman's identity as a mother and her desire to love and nurture (Walker *et al.*, 2021). It may enhance social standing, continuity, and immortality. As moms, women innately provide meaning to existence. The choice to live without children after marriage is very susceptible to social stigma since it is seen as interfering with prevailing social structures, particularly for women who are the focus of motherhood. In contrast to males, significantly less attention is paid to their situation in society since the stigma they endure is often related to gender normative notions.

According to the interviews conducted, the informants realize that the choice to not have children after marriage is a personal one. They claimed to have recently discovered the choice not to have children. The informant learned about this choice via social media posts made by influential individuals. The informant acknowledged that the choice to not have children was a peculiar one. This anomaly exists because our culture promotes the "norm of being a parent" and feels that having children without being selfish is reasonable.

The choice to not have children may also be seen as a personal and societal dilemma. Research was done on seven Surabaya-based couples. To offer an evolutionary perspective on the choice to remain childless, field data results indicate that three out of seven individuals present no evidence of procreation (Khasanah & Ridho, 2021). In a strange way, natural selection is indirectly responsible for this behavior, which leads to low fertility and childlessness and has clear negative effects on evolution. According to this viewpoint, the impacts of such a situation would not be apparent until lately owing to the increased empowerment of women in wealthy nations. It is known that natural selection favors genes that influence behavior that drives the desire for sex and mating, but it also rewards generations that foster attributes associated with the desire to live long or leave something for future generations. Leaving something for the future does not entail an investment in reproduction and childrearing when women have liberty and wealth. This urge may manifest itself in a variety of ways, dependent on what the informant did after experiencing the stigma of being childfree. The stigma is spread among neighbors and friends. Moreover, this study demonstrated that having children is not a need for marriage. Children are no longer the most important thing; instead, the integrity and harmony of the husband-wife relationship are of paramount importance. Even without children, the informants retain solid and durable family ties (Watling Neal & Neal, 2021).

The whole range of human actions undergoes a habituation process (habituation). The fact that humans marry and subsequently have children is a result of habituation leading to reproduction. Humans exist in an objective world that is influenced by their surroundings. The influence is then generated via the habituation process. Actions that become routine retain their meaning, which has significance even if the meaning they carry is ingrained as a regular aspect of common knowledge. The choice becomes

more limited as a result of habit. This argument is consistent with the evidence in the field, which suggests that living without children should be a choice, despite the growing social norm that after marriage, we must have children. This indicates that habituation begins to restrict human decision-making. In reality, evidence from the field shows that the lack of children in emerging nations is a sign that people's minds are growing up.

3.1.3 Childfree Social Interaction: Married Couples

After conducting interviews and reviewing literature available, the study believes that personal, financial, and family history; concerns about child development; environmental issues or problems; and emotional "instincts" or motherhood were among the causes for the decision to not have children. This alternative is quite individualistic. However, it is feasible that there would be other repercussions, such as the formation of negative stigma within society and even inside the family. This stigma also strive to use commercially acceptable for childless couples to be subjected to public pressure.

When people are presented with the reality of not having children, according to the findings of the study and the discussion of those findings, amazement may be the major emotion that they have. Why get married if you're not going to start a family? From the perspective of our global civilization as a whole, these cannot be separated. A person who has attained adulthood is required or expected by the culture of society to get married, after which they will be questioned about the location of their children and grandchildren. This judgment has been defended using a few different lines of reasoning. One of the fascinating reasons is the difficulties or worries that are associated with the environment. The population of the world is growing at a rate that is incompatible with the "health" of the planet as well as the availability of food supplies. Therefore, the absence of children is chosen as the best option. (Ruegamer & Dziengel, 2021).

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Grief and sadness were unavoidable outcomes due to the fact that several of the participants, at the outset of their marriages, felt immense pressure from their vast families to have children. The second option is for one partner in the partnership to prioritize their professional life to the exclusion of the other. Certain couples, whose marriages are often less cordial and in which there is little emotional contact, consider this situation to be fairly frightening and attribute it to the fact that there is no emotional connection between them. In spite of the unfavorable circumstances, the couple thinks that their marriage is still valuable enough to be maintained. The ability of the couple to coexist peacefully, provide for all of life's necessities, and maintain harmony within the family unit is the element of their marriage that they value the most at the current time. They also see their childlessness as an opportunity to focus on strengthening their connection with one another. This is shown by the many opportunities available to participate in activities with a partner, each of which contributes favorably to the process of developing a connection with one's companion. The lack of parental responsibilities confers a financial benefit on the spouses, who are then free to pursue other interests or make investments with the money that would have been spent on the children. The happiness level of the couple's finances will unquestionably rise as a result of this condition. Participants do not have the responsibility of looking after youngsters, so they do not feel restricted in their ability to do anything or go anywhere.

Evaluations of the quality of marriage by informants tend to be highly different. According to the informants, there are various factors for a quality marriage, which may be grouped into four groups: individual, relational, societal, and spiritual characteristics. Individual criteria is an evaluation of the quality of a marriage based on an individual's requirements; for example, a marriage is seen to be of high quality if it makes the couple feel happy and fulfilled. Relational criteria concern connections with partners; for example, a marriage is said to be of high quality if the spouses respect, are loyal to, and support one another. Social factors are associated with intimate interactions with external parties, such as extended families and society at large. Spiritual criteria pertain to the couple's religious life; a marriage is seen to be of high quality if it brings the couple closer to God (Iskandar *et al.*, 2019).

Many attempts have been made by childless married couples, including the search for internal causes in each spouse. Among the efforts made are loyalty to their respective partners; having strong emotional bonds with partners; mutual respect for each other; flexibility with partners; intense communication with partners; listening to partners with sensitivity; meeting each partner's spiritual needs; maintaining relationships with each other's family environment; loving and understanding partner; and participating in society with partner.

Optimism toward diverse internal endeavors is a weapon against pessimism brought on by the lack of children. The findings of studies on the future optimism of childless married couples reveal a similar pattern. This optimism is due to religious faith. Additionally, contentment with one another is a factor. According to the conclusions of research, even if they do not have children but each couple is able to create a feeling of comfort and contentment, the family will undoubtedly survive.

Theoretically, the informant's (the child-free couple's) attempts to keep their family, as defined by McCubbin and Thompson, have two sides: internal reinforcement with their spouse and external reinforcement, meaning the social environment. The term "reinforcement" refers to the strengthening of interpersonal loyalty pledges in conjunction with a partner. Outward reinforcement with a spouse is more of a demonstration of a partner's commitment to their neighbors and the community. If these two factors operate together, then family resilience as "family resilience" may be achieved. Harmonization between the family and the community is the result.

4. CONCLUSION

There are some parents who do not wish to acknowledge the "gift" of having children. Some parents have the opinion that having children is a challenging choice or perspective for a number of reasons: the majority of parents lose control over themselves and their future; there is a lack of financial resources; there are additional responsibilities; there is an impact on marital harmony; there are opportunities for fulfillment through alternative goals; and finally, there are moral and social responsibilities. It is humanity in the perspective of those other people. It is clear from these findings that a lot of variables, such as a lack of desire for children, individual circumstances and professional objectives, physical and health concerns, and personal ideals about the avoidance of bringing more people into the world, all play a role in complex life decisions. Even in the absence of an explanation that makes sense from an evolutionary point of view, the choice to abstain from having children could have beneficial implications on an individual level. However, from a biological standpoint, such choices may be advantageous only if the decision to remain childless is temporary; otherwise, no fitness benefit was observed. These options provide individuals, especially women, with economic and career prospects.

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