



The *Childfree* Phenomenon in Indonesia: UIN Jakarta Students' Perspectives in Responding to the Contradiction Between Traditional Values and Modernity

Ima Qimmatul Maflahah

State Islamic University Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta

kartiniima@gmail.com

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the views of Generation Z students on the childfree phenomenon in Indonesia. The method used is a qualitative approach with online in-depth interviews with students of the State Islamic University (UIN) Jakarta. This research uses thematic analysis techniques to understand the interviewees' perspectives. The results showed that childfree is a growing trend with the potential to increase interest in the future. UIN Jakarta students understand childfree as a couple's decision not to have children in marriage, based on various reasons, such as economic considerations, mental health, and individual freedom. However, students' opinions are divided: some support it on the grounds of individual freedom rights, while others reject it because it is considered contrary to the cultural and social values of Indonesian society. Despite the pros and cons, the majority of students agree that childfree is a form of individual freedom in determining their life path.

Keywords: *childfree, generation Z, UIN Jakarta students, individual freedom, Indonesian culture.*

INTRODUCTION

In all aspects of life, there will always be a change that cannot be avoided.

This includes changes in society consisting of norms, behaviours, shifting views, cultural phenomena, and so on. These changes occur due to the influence of the times and the progress of the human mindset. One of the social changes that is currently being discussed is the phenomenon of marriage without

children, which is called *childfree*. The term *childfree* is a life choice taken by individuals and couples not to have children in their marriage, either biological or adopted children (Nallanie & Nathanto, 2024).

The phenomenon of *childfree* in Indonesian society is a new thing, although in western countries such as the United States whose population has recognised and considered the

phenomenon of *childfree* a common thing. The results of the report from the National Survey of Family Growth explain that there are 15% of women and 24% of men who choose not to have children. Furthermore, in 2001 in Canada reported data from the results of the General Social Survey which stated that 7% of people in Canada aged 20 - 34 years, representing 434,000 people, decided not to have children (Sunarto & Imamah, 2023).

The term *childfree* began to spread and was widely discussed in Indonesia after a video carried by a well-known Muslim *influencer*, Gita Savitri Devi, who made a statement that she made the decision to choose a *childfree* marriage in her marriage which was agreed upon with her husband, Paul Partohap, on the grounds that there were concerns that she could not be responsible for her child and would cause injury to her child." (Leliana, 2023)

The couple's *childfree* choice led to a number of criticisms from various Indonesian netizens who considered the phenomenon of childless marriage to be contrary to the prevailing culture in society which considers that children are the goal of marriage." (Ramdani & Kurniawan, 2023)

The decision not to have children in marriage has the potential to grow in

Indonesian society, which is reinforced by the decline in the birth rate in the last five decades based on data released by the National Statistics Agency. This is illustrated by the total fertility rate (TFR) in the 1971 census of 5.61 which in the long form of the 2020 population census fell to

2.18. Based on data from the National Statistics Agency Publication (2023) which explains that the prevalence of *childfree* women living in Indonesia is currently 8.2% and has tended to increase in the last four years. In addition, the National Socio-Economic Survey data estimates a figure of 71 thousand for women aged 15-49 years who have been married but have not given birth and do not use family planning tools (Nikma, 2024).

The various reasons behind the decision of some individuals and couples in Indonesia to choose *childfree* are factors such as economic problems, health, mental (psychological) problems, concerns about poor child development, reasons related to the environment, or other reasons that make them think that *childfree* is the right solution (Rahman et al., 2023).

Childfree is a trend that has increased in Indonesia, especially in generation Z, referred to as Gen-Z, which is a group with birth years 1997-2012

who face challenges and social changes that are different from previous generations including changes in mindset and life values that have shifted. With the advancement of technology in the current era, it is easy for them to access various social media platforms that provide space for them to share their views on life choices (Jurianto & Islam, 2024).

Generation Z is known as a generation that is independent, critical, and has the courage to change the traditional mindset that is still embraced by most Indonesians. One of the impacts is the emergence of new views on the concept of family, including the phenomenon of *childfree*. This phenomenon, which refers to an individual's or couple's decision not to have children, has become a hot topic of conversation in Indonesia as its existence is often considered contrary to social norms, culture, and traditional religious values of society. This research is interesting because there is a *gap* between traditional values, which consider

children as a gift and an important part of family life, and the progressive thinking of Generation Z, which tends to prioritise individual freedom and quality of life. This gap indicates the existence of complex social dynamics and ongoing cultural changes, making the *childfree*

phenomenon a relevant issue to be researched in the Indonesian social and cultural context.

This research aims to identify the views of Generation Z, particularly university students, towards the *childfree* phenomenon. The main focus is to understand how Generation Z's values of individualism, modernity and freedom of expression influence their attitudes towards the decision not to have children. By exploring this perspective, the research not only provides new insights into the mindset of generation Z but also offers a critical analysis of changing social values in an increasingly plural society.

METHODS

The method used in this research is a qualitative method that aims to understand a phenomenon that is happening in society (Maleong, 2014). The approach in this research uses a descriptive approach which aims to describe and explain thoroughly the views of the speakers regarding the *childfree* phenomenon in Indonesia. This research uses interview techniques by asking several lists of questions that have been adjusted to the research discussion (Sugiyono, 2015). There are limitations and obstacles related to distance that do not allow interviews to be conducted directly, so interviews for this research

were conducted online.

The data sources used in this research consist of primary data sources which are data sources obtained from the results of interviews with generation z with the criteria of students born in 1997 - 2000. Then, this research uses secondary data sources which are data sources sourced from several literatures such as scientific papers, journals, books related to the writing of this research. The data that has been obtained is then summarised by taking things that are relevant to the research needs. Furthermore, the set of data is analysed and arranged in text form to be able to draw conclusions (Farid, 2018).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Researchers limit the specifications in finding respondents, namely only interviewing respondents with the criteria of students with birth numbers 1997 - 2000 who are classified as Generation Z, which is in line with the title in the study which focuses on finding out how students view the *childfree* phenomenon in Indonesia. To avoid saturation of the reader, the researcher sorted the number of respondent data presented in this study. The number of respondents involved was 4 students of Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University Jakarta.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Understanding of the Term *Childfree*

Interviewee 1 stated that "*childfree* is the attitude or decision of a married couple who decide not to have children with various influencing factors, such as past trauma, financial problems, psychological problems that make the couple think that the step to choose *childfree* is the best way for their marriage." (WF, personal communication, 11 September 2024)

Interviewee 2 argued that "*childfree* is a decision not to have a *child* either by bloodline or adoption for various reasons, one of which is the reason for freedom in making life choices." (SR, personal communication, 11 September 2024)

Interviewee 3 stated that "*childfree* is a choice not to have children throughout one's life, either deliberately because of a lifestyle that focuses on individual freedom or for a specific reason." (SA, personal communication, 11 September 2024)

Interviewee 4 argued that "*childfree* is the life choice of a person or couple who decides not to have children, either biologically or through adoption. This choice is often made after considering various factors, such as the desire to focus on career, financial stability, or mental health." (WN, personal

communication, 11 September 2024)

A look at t at the *Childfree* Phenomenon in Indonesia

Interviewee 1 argued that "the concept of *childfree* is familiar to the community and in my opinion *childfree* cannot be said to be contrary to the existing culture in society. This is because social and cultural values cannot bind and regulate a person in making decisions. In addition, there is no law that regulates the prohibition of *childfree* decisions. So, if there is someone or a couple who has decided to be *childfree*, it cannot be said to be a conflict, because everyone has the right to the way of life they choose as long as it does not harm others or a problem in society." (WF, personal communication, 11 September 2024)

Interviewee 2 argued that "the phenomenon of *childfree* that is present in Indonesia in my view is often expressed from feelings of trauma towards subjects who have experienced an unpleasant past. *Childfree* can be expressed as financial unpreparedness which is used as an excuse by some people or couples as a life choice, given the needs in Indonesia, especially in the field of education which costs quite a lot. The *childfree* decision, in my opinion, cannot be said to be a contradictory decision, because the decision should not be justified as

immoral or

out of culture values, considering that domestic decisions are private matters that do not disturb the public." (SR, personal communication, 11 September 2024)

Interviewee 3 argued that "*the childfree* trend is not a new thing, but has emerged in recent times and is growing along with changes in social and cultural values that are more supportive of individual freedom in choosing their life path. In today's modern society, with the growing access to education, career freedom and life decisions, more people feel more comfortable with *childfree* choices without worrying about social judgement. In my opinion, the concept of *childfree* is clearly contrary to the culture of Indonesian society, which views parenting as an essential part of marriage (family life). In addition, it contradicts the value of family as the purpose of life with children being considered as the heirs of the family who not only play a role in continuing the lineage but also play a role in maintaining family values and traditions." (SA, personal communication, 11 September 2024)

Interviewee 4 argued that "the phenomenon of *childfree* in Indonesia is still relatively new, although the trend is growing among the younger generation. For me, the decision not to have children goes against the social or cultural values in

society, because Indonesia still instills the value of family and continuity of lineage which makes the decision to go *childfree* unusual and even unacceptable. In addition, there is a social expectation that when one decides to get married, the marriage should be followed by the presence of children, as society still emphasises the importance of parenting roles."(WN, personal communication, 11 September 2024)

Views on the Importance of Children in Marriage

Interviewee 1 stated that "I choose to put aside whether or not children are important, because in my opinion the most important thing in a marriage is the strong foundation of the relationship between husband and wife in maintaining the marriage itself. Because, children are also a destiny that has been determined by the almighty, which we cannot arrange for their presence."(WF, personal communication, 11 September 2024)

Interviewee 2 stated that "for some people, the presence of children can bring a new colour to daily life and be a factor that affects domestic happiness. However, for me personally this is not the case. Because, the presence or absence of children, happiness can be sought with other happiness alternatives such as doing new things by spending time together

with your partner to maintain household harmony."(SR, personal communication, 11 September 2024)

Interviewee 3 stated that "the existence of children is important, because children are the sustenance and qadha of Allah to us, and the existence of children will clearly provide happiness and influence the quality of one's life. Children will later become a motivation for

parents to always be optimal in running an ongoing life and trying to become a better person, considering that children are a treasure that has no comparable value."(SA, personal communication, 11 September 2024)

Interviewee 4 stated that "the presence of children is important, not only because children are a blessing and a gift, but also because the presence of children will make us try to be a better person, because our responsibilities as human beings, which were previously only as a husband/wife, have increased to the responsibility of being a parent."(WN, personal communication, 11 September 2024)

Childfree in the light of traditional and modern values

In general, the informants in this study have sufficient knowledge about *childfree*. *Childfree* can be understood as a decision that has been agreed between a

married couple not to have children either biologically or through adoption with various reasons behind it. In line with what was conveyed by Qiyan F. et al., who said that *childfree* is a term related to the choice of a person or couple to live without a child in their married life with several factors that cause married couples to decide not to have children, including economic, psychological, and social factors (Persada et al., 2023).

The phenomenon of *childfree* is not new in society, but it is often accompanied by stigma and negative views towards individuals or couples who choose not to have children. This choice is often seen as a deviation from human biological nature which is believed to give birth and reproduce offspring. In the view of many, having children is considered the ultimate goal of marriage and is seen as proof of the success of the relationship. This stigma reinforces the idea that a childless marriage is incomplete or even socially invalid.

In addition, the *childfree* phenomenon goes against cultural values that strongly emphasise the importance of large families and offspring in society. In many cultures, children are considered a blessing or sustenance from God that should be gratefully received. This thinking often makes the decision not to have children perceived as a rejection of

the basic concepts that define family and community life. Within the social framework, children are not only considered as the heirs of the family, but also as successors to the family's hopes and traditions.

However, despite how *childfree* is often perceived, it should be understood as a legitimate choice within the context of individual freedom. Society should begin to open upspace for different views on family and family life, which includes the right to determine the number of children one has, without being shackled by rigid and traditional social norms."(Patnani et al., 2021) In this discussion, Interviewees 1 and 2 expressed similar views on the *childfree* phenomenon in Indonesia, which is increasingly being discussed and receiving widespread

attention. Both agreed that the decision to choose *childfree* is a personal right of each individual that cannot be regulated or imposed by any party. This is in line with the fundamental principle of individual freedom in various perspectives, including human rights. In this case, they emphasise that there are no laws or rules that can limit an individual's right to determine whether they want to have children or not.

Furthermore, this view is rooted in the realisation that culture, despite

having strong traditional values, is inherently flexible and can evolve over time. Evolving cultural values do not necessarily lead to the rejection of personal decisions such as *childfree*, as culture itself is a social construct that can change according to existing social dynamics. In addition, they argue that *childfree* decisions do not conflict with social or cultural values, as long as the choice is the result of mature personal judgement.

In this context, the Human Rights perspective provides a strong foundation to support the decision to *go childfree*. Article 28B paragraph (2) of the 1945 Constitution also recognises the right of every individual to form a family and continue offspring, but without the obligation to have children. In addition, Law No. 39 of 1999 on Human Rights clearly states that "human rights are basic rights that are inherently inherent in human beings, are universal and lasting, therefore they must be protected, respected, defended, and may not be ignored, reduced, or deprived by anyone." This confirms that the right to decide whether or not to have children is part of the freedom that must be respected by society and the state.

Human rights also include a person's private rights including sexuality and reproductive rights in terms of

determining when and how many children they want. Of course, this right cannot be intervened by other parties. (Najih & Hakim, 2023) Therefore, the decision to *go childfree* should not be said to be against the social or cultural values of the community because there is no legal law governing this decision considering that *childfree* is included in personal rights that are entitled to be protected and respected.

In addition to emphasising human rights, informant 2 made the decision to *go childfree* not a contradiction in terms, considering financial factors to be a reason that should be understood by the community. Looking at the current situation, where finding a job is so difficult, competition is increasing, especially among young people. In addition, inflation continues to increase making the necessities of life all expensive (Lastika et al., 2024). So they have a sense of worry and uncertainty can not fulfil their own lives let alone a partner. So, they think that having children will certainly increase the cost of living and it is burdensome.

Views on the phenomenon of *childfree* among Indonesians show a sharp divide between the pros and cons of this choice. Interviewees 1 and 2 in favour of *childfree* argue that

the decision not to have children is an

individual freedom that should not be questioned in a social or cultural context. They argue that society needs to respect this personal choice without seeing it as a threat to existing values. In contrast, informants 3 and 4 provide a more conservative view and consider that *childfree* is contrary to the prevailing culture and social norms in Indonesia, especially in the context of family and marriage.

In Indonesian culture, family is often seen as the main foundation of social life and cultural values, with the role of parents as part of the essence of marriage. Society generally considers that offspring are the successors of the lineage who maintain ancestral traditions and values. Therefore, the decision not to have children in a marriage is considered difficult to accept and can cause social tension. The phenomenon of *childfree* is seen as a deviation from societal expectations of family functions, which should involve the birth of children to continue traditions and maintain social existence.

This view is in line with sociological studies of families, which show that social norms strongly influence expectations of families. Indonesian society tends to perceive that choosing not to have children violates generally accepted norms, which can then lead to

stigma and negative judgement. Individuals or couples who choose to go *childfree* may face social pressure in the form of criticism or even ostracisation, reflecting disapproval of the deviation from traditional norms. As a result, they may feel isolated or depressed as a result of social judgement against their choice (Rahmah, 2023).

In general, couples want children in their marriage because children are considered to provide psychological, cultural, religious, social, and security benefits when parents are old (Patnani et al., 2021). However, there are certain conditions that make a couple consider that the presence of children is not the only important thing in a household, so they decide not to have children consciously and deliberately for several reasons that have been considered.

The views of the interviewees in the discussion on *childfree* reflect the realisation that marital happiness does not only depend on the presence of children. Interviewee 2 stated that children are not the only element that determines marital happiness, a view that reminds us that marital happiness is also related to emotional closeness between spouses, good communication, and mutual understanding. This is in line with the emphasis of interviewee 1, who argued that building the foundation of a strong

relationship between husband and wife should be a top priority before thinking about children. This view evokes the reflection that children are, in many ways, a God-given destiny that cannot be forced. Therefore, in this perspective, social pressures regarding children should not be the main factor in assessing the quality of a marriage.

Furthermore, although the role of parents in raising children is enormous and requires a lot of responsibility-from pregnancy, birth, nurturing, to education-the presence of children also brings countless blessings and benefits. Research shows that having children is not only a matter of responsibility, but also brings peace and happiness to the family (al-Qaradawi, 2013). The process of parenting, although challenging, provides deep life values for parents. However, the decision to have children remains a personal choice that is heavily influenced by various internal and external factors, including religious, social, and economic perspectives.

Thus, the phenomenon of *childfree* can be understood as a form of individual freedom in determining one's life path, which should be respected without negative judgement, despite the more traditional view that children are an essential part of a marriage (Aulia & Munafiah, 2023).

In line with the interviewees' views, the presence of children in the family is considered a gift, sustenance and blessing from Allah SWT that plays an important role in improving the quality of family life. This perspective is in line with theological and sociological views that place children as a significant element in building family life. In Islam, children are seen as a mandate given by Allah SWT to be nurtured, educated and guarded, as confirmed in the Qur'an (QS. Al-Anfal: 28) that wealth and children are a test, as well as a source of happiness in the world and the hereafter if managed properly.

Sociologically, children also play a profound role in strengthening the emotional and social bonds between family members. Children not only continue the lineage, but also shape the identity of the family and society. This perspective supports the family function theory in sociology, which emphasises that the family as a social institution has the responsibility to educate and shape the character of the next generation (Giddens, 2013). Interviewees' views on children as a quality of life enhancing factor show that the role of parenthood provides meaning, purpose and happiness in the lives of married couples, as revealed by various psychological studies showing that the role of parenthood can

increase subjective happiness, especially in cultures that value children as social and spiritual assets.

However, this view is not free from criticism and modern dynamics, especially in the midst of the development of the concept of *childfree*. The decision not to have children is often based on economic considerations, mental health, or the desire for greater freedom (Diener & Seligman, 2004). Therefore, it is important to understand that the meaning of children can be different for each individual and couple, depending on the social context, culture, and values (Collins, 1982). In Indonesian society, strong religious and cultural values make children a symbol of blessing and happiness, which not only provides emotional benefits but also strengthens the social structure of the family.

The emphasis on children as a gift that can improve the quality of family life reflects traditional values that are still strong in Indonesian society. This view, while relevant in the context of the majority, should be kept open for discussion to honour other life choices in an increasingly pluralistic society.

CONCLUSIONS

The phenomenon of *childfree* is not new to society, as this trend has been growing and shows potential to continue to increase. However, the concept of

childfree elicits diverse views, resulting in pro and con responses that create tension between individuals or couples who choose *childfree* and social norms that prioritise the desire to have children. This phenomenon is considered contradictory when *childfree* is glorified or used as an invitation, because it can affect population decline which has implications for various aspects, including the sustainability of the next generation in maintaining the sovereignty of the country. Conversely, *childfree* is also seen as the right of individual or couple freedom to determine the path of life without the intervention of other parties. As a form of freedom, the *childfree* decision must be respected and not considered problematic in society. It is a personal preference based on carefully considered reasons, so others cannot impose the general principles of society on them. Thus, awareness is needed to respect differences in life choices in order to create harmony in a plural society.

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