

HOW INDONESIAN WOMEN CHOOSE TO BE CHILDFREE IN PATRIARCHY CULTURE

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ABSTRACT

“Many children, much fortune” is a sentence that is believed by some people in Indonesia. In addition, ethnic groups in Indonesia also consider children to be able to pass on culture and heritage from one generation to another. But as time goes by, Indonesian people find it easier to access information from abroad. One of this information is the childfree phenomenon which has been developing in western countries since 1972 and was first used by the National Organization for Non-Parents. Indonesian people are starting to consider the childfree concept as an option. The aim of this research is to get an overview of the decision-making process with the main aim being the reason why women decide to be childfree. Researchers will discuss how women in Indonesia decide to be childfree in an environment that does not support this. The research method used is qualitative narrative which will be analyzed using thematic techniques. Participants are three women who live in Indonesia and have decided to be childfree. The findings show there are various reasons why women decide to be childfree. The strongest reasons that emerge from them are incompatibility with the role of mother, mental and financial unpreparedness, as well as environmental reasons such as a world that is overpopulated or a world that is unstable so they don't want their children to live in an unhealthy environment.

Keywords: Childfree, patriarchy, decision making process

1. PREFACE

Since long ago, Indonesian people already recognize popular terms “many children, much fortune” and started to believe it (Rahayu & Rahmah, 2020). Some ethnic groups in Indonesia still believe that children can pass on culture and heritage from one generation to another. In addition, Indonesia is a pronatalist country so the local community puts on couples to have children and labels couples who do not have children as having an imperfect marriage (Patnani, Takwin, & Mansoer, 2020).

But as time progresses, Indonesian people can access information from abroad easily. The existence of social media makes it easier for people to express their personal views to the general public. One of the phenomena being discussed on social media is the concept of childfree. Childfree is a concept that indicates someone who has no desire to have children (Agrillo & Nelini, 2008). Childfree was first used by the National Organization for Non-Parents to differentiate with childless (Agrillo & Nelini, 2008). Childless is a condition where someone wants to have a child but are not-yet-parents (Neal & Neal, 2021). From a previous study, it was found that there are several reasons why Indonesian women choose to be childfree. The most popular reason was overpopulation, resources are overused and/or wasted, and cost of kids or even living nowadays is too expensive (Helm, Kemper, & White, 2021).

Previous studies mention that childfree women are described as someone who is emotionally unstable, selfish, cold, materialistic, and unable to adjust well (Blackstone & Stewart, 2012).

Childfree women are also highly criticized, especially by those around them for being too involved with their work (Blackstone & Stewart, 2012). This proves that the childfree decision is still considered a deviation event in western countries. In this paper, researchers want to find out how childfree women in Indonesia make their decisions and live with these decisions and the negative stigmas that are the consequences, especially in pronatalist countries,

In Indonesia itself, the term childfree appeared in 2014 by establishing a community called Indonesia Childfree Community with 1300 members (Komala & Warmiyati, 2022). But it has only started becoming popular since 2018 where an Indonesian youtuber who lives in Germany comes out to the public that she decided to be childfree. Since then, some opinions have been controversial on the internet and there are so many pros and cons which are being debated. There are still many Indonesian people who do not agree with childfree, especially with the customs that exist in Indonesia.

Therefore, this research wants to find out what the response is from the family or closest relatives of the decision maker. This research also wants to know the decision-making process of childfree women in Indonesia. The theory used in this research is Halpern's decision-making framework. According to Halpern's decision making framework, there are seven steps in the decision-making process: (a) Identification, Recognition, and Framing of Decision; (b) Generation of Alternatives; (c) Evaluation of Alternatives; (d) Selection of Alternatives and Action; (e) Re-evaluation, Re-framing, Re-generation; (f) Act on Decision; (g) Check Outcome (Halpern & Dunn, 2023).

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses qualitative methodology with narrative analysis. In qualitative studies, we measure with alternatives to numbers, and measurement is less a separate research step. Because the process is more inductive, we are measuring and creating new concepts simultaneously with the process of gathering data (Neuman, 2014). Narrative analysis takes the story unit of analysis. The stories are usually gathered from the accounts of participants and each approach focuses on a different feature of the story (Frost, 2011). By using narrative analysis, researchers can understand participants' decision-making processes in a coherent manner and the reasons why participants decided to be childfree. Researchers can also find out how participants live after deciding to be childfree. Researchers use purposive sampling techniques in choosing participants. Purposive sampling is a method to choose participants because they have unique characteristics that can help researchers to explore a phenomenon to a deeper level (Frost, 2011).

The participants of this research were found from a comment column in the Childfree community at Instagram called @childfreelife.id. The researchers contacted accounts in Instagram one by one to tell them about the criteria we need to become a participant and ask them if they meet the criteria. We also asked about their willingness to become participants. From many Instagram accounts that we contacted; three participants were selected who were willing to become interview participants. We arranged a suitable schedule for conducting interviews which were carried out via the Zoom meeting application. Before the interview was conducted, the researchers provided an informed consent which must be signed by the participant.

Participants

Participants of this research are 3 mature women deciding to be childfree for the rest of their lives. The first participant is G who is 27 years old. She already decided to be childfree since she was in middle school. Currently she is engaged with a man and already been in the relationship for twelve years. The second participant is K who is 37 years old. She decided to be childfree in 2019 and

currently dated a man for two and a half years. The third participant, V, decided to be childfree in 2013 at the ninth age of marriage. V is 48 years old and has been married for 19 years with her husband. Data collection was carried out three times with three different participants by interviewing via an online meeting application.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

According to Halperns decision making framework, there are seven steps in the decision-making process: (a) Identification, Recognition, and Framing of Decision; (b) Generation of Alternatives; (c) Evaluation of Alternatives; (d) Selection of Alternatives and Action; (e) Re-evaluation, Re-framing, Re-generation; (f) Act on Decision; (g) Check Outcome (Halpern & Dunn, 2023).

In the first step identification, recognition, and framing of decision is when someone realizes a decision has to be made. In this step the participants identify that they realize they don't like children, and feel that being a parent, especially a mother, is not an easy task and a lifetime commitment. Participants also looked around them and it turns out that having a child doesn't make them any happier. One participant says "I realize that getting pregnant and giving birth is not an easy task. I feel like that not all women can be a mother and I was too selfish to decide that I don't want to have children". Environmental issues are also being considered. "I feel like the world is getting cruller, global warming and pollution everywhere. I can't imagine if my children need to live in a world like this. Poor thing". From what participants said in the interview, participants know themselves and their problems so they choose to be childfree and believe it is the best decision for them.

The second step is generation of alternatives. In this step participants are thinking about another possible solution for their problem. Some alternatives that the participants mention is surrogate mother and kids' adoption. After participants generate all the other alternatives that are possible, they mention what are the considerations they are not choosing those alternatives and it is including the third step evaluation of alternatives. "I was once considered a surrogate mother but for me it is not solving the existing problem. First surrogate mother is very expensive and it is still difficult to reach especially for us those lives in Indonesia. So, I eliminated surrogate mothers from my options. For adoption I never want to do an adoption there is no specific reason. I would like to help children from an orphanage, but to adopt them as my child, I don't think it is for me". Other participants say "I have offered adoption to my husband, but actually I don't want to do that and Thank God my husband also refused that idea". Participants ever consider other alternatives; they also consider the costs and benefits of the alternatives but at the end of the day participants still choose to be childfree. So, they have also passed the fourth stage, namely selection of alternatives and action. Participants do not choose alternatives but they take an action to choose childfree as their way of life.

Fifth step is re-evaluation, re-framing, and re-generation. In this step participants evaluate the childfree decision that they already made. After sometime living their life as a childfree woman, researchers ask whether or not they regretted their decision. The three participants surely answer it with no. Although they mentioned that one of the costs of being childfree is what other people say, they still think that childfree is the best decision for them. The sixth step is to act on decisions. From the previous statement, it can be seen that these women behave positively towards the childfree decision. Even one woman decided to be childfree before she met her significant other and she is looking for a man who can accept her decision.

The last step is to check the outcome. The examination of results means how the people around them react to the decisions they make. For G, she already sounded to her parents many years before. At first as parents in a patriarchal society they were shocked and persuaded G to change her mind. But as time goes by, her parents respect her decision and will support their children. As for her big family, they still try to convince G to change her mind and have children. Meanwhile, G's friend is always supportive with G's decision and even some of G's friends also decide to be childfree. In contrast with G, V never told her family openly about her decision. She has been married for 19 years and just decided to be childfree 10 years ago. So, her family is used to V's situation of not having children. But, sometimes V posts about childfree content on her facebook and she never covers up about the childfree decision. "I never told my extended family, but if someone asked, I wouldn't hide it either". Even though the views of people around them do not support them, they still adhere to their stance on being childfree.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of an interview with three participants provides a conclusion that there are three main reasons why they decide to be childfree. First, participants sense that being pregnant and giving birth is not an easy task to do. Participants think that being a mother is not for every woman so they decided to be childfree. Another reason is that there is a huge responsibility to become a parent. It is not a temporary job and it is a lifetime commitment so you can't ever leave the situation. The last reason is because of the environmental issues that the world is going through. Nowadays, there are so many environmental problems that make the earth unhealthy to live in.

From Halpern's decision-making framework, participants passed all the steps in making decisions. First of all, they identify their problems and look for solutions. participants found childfree as a solution but there are still other options to solve the problem. So, they are reviewing other alternatives such as surrogate mother and adoption. They found the costs and benefits of other alternatives. After reviewing the alternatives, participants finally decide that they didn't choose the alternatives and still to be childfree. After making the decision, they live their life content and peacefully.

For further research, researchers suggest further research into the participant's background such as ethnicity and religion. Researchers also suggest more uniformity in the selection of participants, especially in terms of participants, especially in terms of relationship status.

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