

# Public Tolerance and Private Convictions: Indonesian University Students' Perspectives on the Childfree Lifestyle

Siti Jaro'ah<sup>1\*</sup>, Khotamanisah<sup>2</sup>, Erlina Anggraini<sup>1</sup>, Siti Ina Savira<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Faculty of Psychology, Universitas Negeri Surabaya, Indonesia

<sup>2</sup>Faculty of Psychology and Education, Harkat Negeri University, Tegal, Indonesia

<sup>3</sup>Faculty of Education, Universiti Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

**Abstract.** The increasing visibility of the childfree lifestyle is generating public discussion in Indonesia, particularly in relation to personal autonomy, readiness for parenthood, and religious-cultural expectations. Therefore, this study aimed to explore university students' perspectives on the childfree phenomenon and the reasons underlying their supportive or opposing stand. The method used was a descriptive qualitative design, comprising 82 students enrolled in Gender Psychology courses at a university in Surabaya, Indonesia. Participants consisted of 67 females and 15 males aged 18-22 years, selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected using an online open-ended questionnaire and analyzed by iterative thematic analysis. The results showed that 54 and 46% of participants disagreed and agreed with the childfree choice, respectively. Supportive responses were generally framed from a public or third-person perspective, emphasizing individual autonomy, readiness, past experiences, environmental concerns, and medical factors. In contrast, opposing responses were more often expressed through personal and normative perspectives. This emphasized religious beliefs, children as successors and sources of happiness, personal desire for parenthood, and expectations of care in old age. In conclusion, the results suggest that students' views on the childfree lifestyle are shaped by the interaction between personal evaluations, perceived readiness, and religious-cultural norms.

**Keywords:** childfree, autonomy, readiness, religious norms, university students

**Psymphatic :**

**Jurnal Ilmiah Psikologi**

Vol 13:1, June 2026,

Page 29-40

eISSN: 2502-2903

pISSN: 2356-3591

**Article Info**

**Received:**

November 05, 2025

**Accepted:**

April 27, 2026

**Published:**

June 30, 2026

**DOI:**

<https://doi.org/10.15575/psy.v13i1.51815>

**Copyright** © 2026 The Author(s). Published by Fakultas Psikologi UIN SGD Bandung, Indonesia.

This is an Open Access article under the CC BY 4.0 license

\*Corresponding author: Faculty of Psychology, Universitas Negeri Surabaya, Indonesia

E-mail: [sitijaroah@unesa.ac.id](mailto:sitijaroah@unesa.ac.id)

## Introduction

The relationship between childbearing and birth rates is characterized by intriguing patterns that resonate globally, particularly in the context of Indonesia. Several countries have experienced declining birth rates, a trend often linked to shifting societal norms, improved access to education for females, and changing economic conditions. These factors encourage delay in marriage and childbearing, leading to a significant decrease in fertility rates. For example, the total fertility rate in the United States dropped to an all-time low of 1.64 births per woman in 2020. This trend is worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic, which significantly impacted fertility preferences and intentions (Kahn et al., 2021).

Study shows that the postponement of childbearing is associated with a decrease in intentions, as many individuals prioritize education and career development before starting families (Lindberg & Kost, 2013). Additionally, lower birth rates relate to a cultural shift toward accepting childlessness as a

legitimate choice. Previous studies showed a rise in the "childfree" movement, particularly among educated females in industrialized societies (Doyle et al., 2012). For instance, young adults in Italy have low intrinsic motivation to bear children, contributing to the trend of postponing childbearing (Luppi et al., 2024). In Indonesia, the situation presents both similarities and departures from global trends. The total fertility rate has witnessed a significant decline, predominantly due to increased access to education, family planning services, and economic development (Herartri et al., 2022).

Current studies on childfree choices, particularly among young people, have identified a complex interplay of personal, economic, environmental, and sociocultural factors shaping such decisions. As more youths choose not to have children, understanding the motivations behind these choices is crucial for comprehending broader societal trends. A significant motivating factor for choosing to be childfree relates to environmental concerns. Studies show that fears about

overpopulation and resource overconsumption foster the adoption of a childfree lifestyle as a means of contributing positively to the environment. Participants in various studies underscore the motivation as a conscious choice reflecting a sense of responsibility toward climate change. This signified a shift in attitudes in which childlessness is viewed as an environmentally friendly option (Helm et al. 2021; Nakkerud, 2021). The relationship between environmental values and reproductive choices underscores the evolving ideology surrounding family planning in the context of global sustainability.

In addition to environmental considerations, psychological and social motivations also play a crucial role. A study shows that individuals opting for childfree lives often experience societal stigma or social pressure. This can lead to feelings of regret or satisfaction depending on the circumstances and support systems (Ekelund & Ask, 2021; Neal & Neal, 2021). The societal perception of being childfree has begun to change due to growing communities around the psychological aspects of voluntary childlessness. In these communities, youths received validation and social support from like-minded individuals, which helped reduce stigma associated with traditional family expectations (Ciesielski, 2023; Stahnke et al., 2020).

The study has identified personal and economic reasons as predominant factors influencing the decision to forego parenthood. Youths increasingly prioritize careers and personal development over starting families, often citing concerns about financial stability, work-life balance, and the potential impact of children on lifestyle (Fadilah et al., 2025; Yazid et al., 2023). This perspective is in line with global trends in which increasing educational attainment and urban living conditions shift priorities away from traditional family structures (Parlak & Tekin, 2020). In various contexts, including Indonesia, these choices are influenced by a mix of personal aspirations and societal pressures that shape perceptions of family life (Daulay et al., 2023; Syafi'i et al., 2023).

In the Indonesian context, the childfree phenomenon often intersects with cultural and religious beliefs. Despite traditional views that prioritize procreation, a growing discourse among youth debates the legitimacy of choosing childlessness. An increasing number of youths in urban areas of the country view the childfree choice as a valid lifestyle option. The youths challenge historical norms and engage in discussions that incorporate religious and philosophical reflections on parenthood (Jafar et al., 2023; Meidina & Puspita, 2023; Siswanto & Nurhasanah, 2022).

The Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) was used as a sensitizing framework to interpret participants' perspectives on the childfree phenomenon. In this theory, behavioral intentions are

shaped by three components, namely attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. Although this study did not aim to measure participants' personal intentions to become childfree, the framework was useful for understanding how responses reflected personal evaluations, perceived social or religious expectations, and perceived readiness for parenthood. In the context of reproductive decision-making, attitudes refer to individuals' evaluations of childlessness and parenthood, including considerations related to personal autonomy and life priorities. Subjective norms reflect perceived expectations from important social groups, namely family, community, and religious institutions, which often frame parenthood as a social or moral responsibility. Meanwhile, perceived behavioral control relates to perceptions of readiness or capability to undertake parenthood, including financial stability, emotional preparedness, and life circumstances. The application of this framework helps the present study interpret how personal beliefs, perceived social expectations, and perceived readiness are reflected in students' perspectives toward the childfree lifestyle. Previous reports have also shown that reproductive intentions are strongly influenced by the interplay of these psychological and social factors (Ajzen, 1991; Dommermuth et al., 2015; Miller, 2011).

Despite the growing visibility of childfree discourse in Indonesia, empirical studies examining how university students interpret and evaluate lifestyle choices remain limited, particularly among those exposed to discussions on gender, family, and social expectations. Students enrolled in Gender Psychology courses represent a relevant group for the present study. This is because familiarity with gender-related issues may have enabled more open expression of views on reproductive choices. However, the perspectives should not be treated as representative of youths in Indonesia. The responses provided insight into how a specific group interpreted the childfree phenomenon within a socio-cultural context where parenthood remained closely associated with religious, familial, and moral expectations.

This study aims to explore the factors that shape university students' perspectives on the childfree lifestyle by examining the reasons underlying both support for and opposition to the choice. Guided by the Theory of Planned Behavior, the following question was addressed: What factors influenced support for or opposition to the childfree lifestyle among university students enrolled in Gender Psychology courses?

## Methods

### Study Design

A descriptive qualitative design was adopted because the objective was to describe participants' views,

interpretations, and reasons regarding the childfree phenomenon rather than to test causal relationships or statistically measure behavioral intentions. The study used open-ended questionnaire responses to identify recurring themes in the support for or opposition to the childfree lifestyle. Therefore, the results should be understood as a thematic description of participants' perspectives within a specific educational context, not as a general representation of Indonesian youth attitudes.

### Participants

The participants were 82 undergraduate students, consisting of 67 females and 15 males, aged 18–22 years. Furthermore, the selection process was conducted using a purposive sampling method. The inclusion criteria were university students enrolled in Gender Psychology courses at a university in Surabaya, as well as exposed to discussions related to gender, family, and reproductive choices, including the childfree issue. This sampling strategy was adopted because the study aimed to explore perspectives from students who were able to provide reflective responses to gender-related social issues.

The gender composition of the participants was uneven, with females substantially outnumbering males. This imbalance reflects the actual composition of students in the Gender Psychology classes. Consequently, the results, which particularly include comparisons between male and female participants, should be interpreted cautiously. Female perspectives were more strongly represented in the data, while male responses provided supplementary rather than equally comparable insights.

### Procedure

Data were collected after Gender Psychology lectures by distributing an online open-ended questionnaire through a Google Form link. Before completing the questionnaire, participants were asked to read the study information and provide informed consent as a prerequisite.

The questionnaire consisted of four main questions covering participants' gender, age, level of agreement or disagreement with the childfree phenomenon, and the reasons underlying their responses. The question was intended to capture views on childfree as a social phenomenon rather than personal intentions regarding this lifestyle in the future. Therefore, participants could answer either from a general/public perspective or from a personal standpoint. This distinction was important in interpreting the results, as supportive responses were often framed in the third person, while opposing responses more frequently reflected personal beliefs or normative commitments. Completing the questionnaire lasted approximately 5–10 minutes, and money,

grades, or other forms of reward were not provided for participation.

### Data Analysis

The analysis was conducted using an iterative thematic method (Morgan & Nica, 2020). First, responses were grouped based on level of agreement or disagreement with the childfree phenomenon. The open-ended responses were repeatedly read to identify meaningful words, phrases, and statements related to participants' reasons. Similar responses were grouped into preliminary codes, then organized into sub-themes and broader themes.

During the analysis, attention was given to the point of view used by participants when presenting arguments. Responses supporting childfree were frequently expressed through a general or third-person perspective, such as references to “their rights,” “their choice,” or “their trauma.” In contrast, the opposition to childfree were more often expressed through a personal or normative perspective, including “I want to be a mother,” “our successors,” or “our family.” This distinction was considered when interpreting the results because participants' agreement or disagreement may reflect different levels of personal engagement in the issue.

To enhance analytic consistency, the codes and themes were reviewed through repeated reading and discussion. Ambiguous responses were examined carefully to ensure that the final themes remained grounded in participants' statements.

### Ethical Considerations

This study did not require formal approval from an institutional ethics committee. However, ethical principles were strictly followed throughout the process. Participation was entirely voluntary, and participants were informed about the purpose of the study before providing consent to participate. To protect privacy, all data were anonymized, and no identifying information was included in the analysis or reporting. Furthermore, the collected data were stored securely and used solely for study purposes.

## Results and Discussion

### Results

The study presents quantitative data in the form of participant percentages and demographic results, which are shown in Table 1. Approximately 54%, both male and female, disagreed with the childfree phenomenon. The largest number of participants were at the ages of 19 and 20, at 40% and 42% respectively. Both groups had contradictory perspectives, with the younger age group having a more positive view of the childfree concept. In addition to the age group of 19, the 21-year-olds also had a relatively positive view.

Table 1.  
Demographics of study participants

Aspects	Agree		Disagree	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
N = 82	38	46	44	54
<b>Sex</b>				
Male	7	9	8	10
Female	31	38	36	44
<b>Age</b>				
18	-		2	2
19	20	24	13	16
20	11	13	24	29
21	6	7	4	5
22	1	1	1	1

Table 2.  
Reasons why males agree to go childfree

Theme	Illustrations
Personal Rights	Spouse's right to choose; their right; a preference or choice; already well thought out;
Readiness	Not ready...because of economics, mental state, or something else; Not everyone wants and is able to have children, both emotionally and psychologically; still inappropriate and still immature...to care for and raise children does not only require material capital but includes mental preparedness....
Allowed (by religion) (forced by) situation	Allowed (by religion); Islam, as far as I know, does not forbid such behaviour. situations and conditions forced them to choose it;

Before presenting the themes by gender, two interpretive considerations should be observed. First, participants did not always respond from the same point of view. The majority who supported childfree discussed it as a general or public choice made by other people, using expressions such as “their rights”, “their choice”, or “their trauma”. In contrast, participants in opposition to childfree more often used personal or normative expressions, such as “I want to be a mother”, “our successors”, or “our family”. This suggests that the support may not necessarily signify a personal intention to become childfree, but rather an acceptance of other people’s right to make the choice. Second, the gender distribution of participants was highly uneven, with 67 females and only 15 males. Therefore, the comparison between male and female responses should be interpreted as descriptive rather than a balanced gender comparison. The larger number of female participants may have contributed to the wider variety of themes observed in females responses.

The qualitative analysis captured the reasons for participants’ acceptance and opposition to the concept of childfree, distributed between males and females. Some males agreed to this lifestyle due to: 1) personal rights; 2) readiness; 3) allowed (by religion); and 4) forced by circumstance. More varied reasons were given by females who agreed, namely: 1) personal

rights; 2) readiness; 3) experience; 4) environment; and 5) medical reasons. Table 2 presents data regarding the answers submitted by male participants who have a positive view of the childfree phenomenon.

Participants mentioned that the decision to have children or remain childfree is a deliberate choice considered by the couple. Readiness in physical, economic, and mental aspects was also considered an important factor underlying the decision. A participant stated:

*Childfree menurut saya adalah sebuah preferensi atau pilihan, jika seseorang merasa bahwa ia masih belum pantas untuk merawat seorang anak ... maka ia boleh saja memilih untuk childfree, dikarenakan untuk merawat dan membesarkan anak tidak hanya butuh modal materi saja, namun termasuk persiapan mental dalam proses membesarkan anak tersebut. (P40)*

In my opinion, childfree is a preference or choice. When someone feels not suitable to take care of a child ... then choosing to be childfree may be appropriate, because parenting requires not only material capital, but also mental readiness throughout the process. (P40)

Table 3.

*Reasons why females agree to go childfree*

Theme	Sub-theme	Illustrations
Personal rights	(a) choice	The rights of each individual, specifically a wife/mother; they have their own choices...choose to live happily together; because it is their choice; everyone has their own opinion; each person is free to choose what they want to do with their life; it is their right; people are entitled to choices in their lives; decisions are freely chosen by the couple; all people are free to make their own life choices; the decision to be childfree is up to each individual; everyone's decision and right; should not easily judge or judge directly on someone's choice; the decision of each individual; human free will; the decision of each individual where everyone has the right to make decisions for themselves
	Mutual agreement	Depends on the mutual agreement between the two parties; the decision of the couple; ... of course, have an agreement with their partner; through talks to both parties before marriage, and our parents, but still the decision is in our hands; agreed not to have children for good reasons;
	(no) desire	Not all females want to be mothers; want to enjoy life without a child; a mother who does not want to have children; does not want to have children
Readiness	Readiness	Not everyone is ready to become a parent; towards delaying it until it is stable in terms of finances, mentally and so on; taking care of children is not easy; Many things must be prepared such as mental, material, physical, and so on; not emotionally or financially capable; also good for the mental health of couples who are not ready to have children; has many considerations...the unpreparedness to have children; feeling emotionally or financially incapable; needs to be ready both mentally and financially;
	Responsibility	A big responsibility; a big responsibility; there is a big responsibility when becoming a parent;
Experiences	Trauma	(they) have different traumas and thoughts; the inner child is still wounded; there is trauma in the past; there is childhood trauma...they have not recovered from their childhood wounds, so they are afraid that it will affect their children; there is self-conflict
	Parenting	Motivated by the parents' parenting, harsh parenting will project that parenting onto their children
Environment	Over-population	Overpopulation; reducing the human population in Indonesia itself; the amount of population in the world, specifically in Indonesia; the number of inhabitants or human population on earth;
Medical reasons	Health/infertility	Fear of not being able to have children/suffering from infertility; health problems; medical condition

Table 4.

*Reasons why males disagree to go childfree*

Theme	Illustrations
Source of happiness	Without a child, I don't think a family life is complete; normally, a married couple would want a child; the presence of children themselves will make you happy; a complement in the household that will make the marriage relationship more valuable; coveted not only for husband and wife, but also for the families of both parties.
Successors	Children are our next generation...agents of change for the future; children are our successors; continue and pass on genetics; have a family in the future;
Religion	Low level of devotion to God; violating the nature of females, namely pregnancy and breastfeeding; in our religious teachings, we are required to have children;
Expectation	Children will also be expected to take care of us in our old age. My parents will definitely want a grandchild to accompany them in their old age.

Similar to male participants, females considered personal rights and readiness as major factors underlying the decision to be childfree. However, females expressed additional sub-themes related to personal rights, including choice, mutual agreement, and the desire to remain without children. The sub-themes of mutual agreement and the desire not to have

children were not conveyed by male participants. Females reported that the decision not to remain childfree was not a unilateral choice but an outcome reached through discussion with a partner, as reflected in the following statement:

Table 5.

*Reasons why females disagree to go childfree*

Theme	Illustrations
Religion	It is a gift and sustenance from God that should not be rejected; Because the concept is prohibited by religion; If the concept is connected to religion, then the concept is wrong; bringing blessings to the family; it is against nature; not in accordance with God's command; children are a gift; religious view.... children are something that we consider a gift; from a religious and environmental perspective it is wrong; We should have offspring if we can, especially since religion also supports that every couple should have children; In Islam it is recommended to continue the lineage by having children; children are a gift and a sustenance; I adhere to the teachings of Islam that children are a gift from Allah SWT; I come from an Islamic family, which always emphasizes that children are a blessing from God; children are a gift and as a fitrah of human beings; children are a gift, sustenance and entrustment from God;
Successors	Humans need to reproduce; Indonesia could face a shortage of skilled human resources; having children ensures the continuity of the family lineage; the extinction of humanity in the future; the impact on the continuity of human generations; the loss of a nation's or people's civilization due to a low birth rate; children are also the successors of the nation; the purpose of marriage is to have offspring; life need to continue and regenerate; children are an integral part of life, allowing us to grow and learn; continuing the family lineage with the partner;
Sources of happiness	Retirement will be more enjoyable if we have happy children and grandchildren; we will feel part of a thriving family... happy with children or grandchildren, we won't feel lonely; not feeling truly alone in old age; a marriage without children seems empty; children are expected to be a source of happiness for the family; the happiness of parents lies in their children; they must feel lonely and unable to express their affection if they don't have children; children can be friends, companions with whom to share stories or family conversations. Children can also be a source of happiness for the family; building a happy family, children are one of the sources of happiness in the family.
Desires to have children	Taking care of children is one of my aspirations; I want to be a mother, because I want to have children, because I want to be a mom. Personally, I really want to have children... Motherhood is part of my dream.
Expectations	There are children who take care of us in our old age; they can contribute to achieving goals that their parents could not reach; no child can pray for their parents to respect their last wishes and fulfill them; children can help their parents in conflicts and even help prevent divorce.
Principles	Not in accordance with my principles; because it is different from my principles.

*...tetapi hal tersebut harus melalui pembicaraan kepada dua belah pihak sebelum menikah...(P73)*  
*...but it must be discussed with both parties before marriage...(P73)*

Females expressed that the enormity of the responsibility of parenthood contributes to unpreparedness, thereby inducing couples to choose childfree.

Past experiences related to childhood trauma and parenting, environmental concerns associated with overpopulation, and medical considerations were also mentioned by females as reasons for supporting a childfree lifestyle. These factors were not identified in the responses provided by males in the dataset. Regarding trauma, participants expressed concern that unresolved childhood experiences could affect future parenting and potentially impact children, leading some individuals to choose not to have children. In addition, several participants viewed voluntary non-parenthood as a possible response to overpopulation, particularly in Indonesia. A participant stated:

*Menurut saya konsep child free cukup bagus untuk diterapkan, mengingat banyaknya populasi di dunia ini khususnya di Indonesia..." (P46)*  
*I think the concept of childfree is quite beneficial to implement, considering the large population in the world, specifically in Indonesia..." (P46)*

Tables 4 and 5 present the reasons male and female participants opposed the childfree lifestyle. Although both groups expressed similar reasons, the order of importance differed. Male participants primarily viewed children as a source of happiness, which contributed to opposition toward voluntary non-parenthood. Meanwhile, among female participants, this reason ranked third. Religious considerations, which ranked third among males, constituted the primary basis for opposition among females.

As shown in Table 4, males mentioned that children bring happiness to the family and complete the marital union. Children are also expected to be the next generation who will take care of their parents in their old age. Furthermore, males stated that choosing to be childless implies opposing human nature, specifically as a female.

Table 5 shows that the primary reason female participants opposed a childfree lifestyle was the belief that it contradicts religious values. Children were regarded as blessings and a source of sustenance and should not be rejected. Perceptions of children as the next generation and a source of happiness ranked second and third, respectively. Other reasons included the desire to become parents, social expectations, and personal principles.

### Discussion

Opposition toward the childfree lifestyle was more prevalent among participants, but acceptance was expressed by a considerable proportion. The reasons underlying acceptance and opposition among male and female participants reflected similar themes, even though the relative importance of these reasons differed across genders. Interpreted through the lens of the Theory of Planned Behavior, the results suggest that perspectives on the childfree lifestyle were shaped by the interaction of personal attitudes, perceived social expectations, and perceived readiness for parenthood. Although personal intentions to adopt a childfree lifestyle were not examined, the framework provided insight into how participants' responses reflected attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control.

A key result from the data concerns the perspectives participants adopted regarding childlessness. Favorable responses were often framed as an acknowledgment of individual autonomy, rather than an expression of a personal desire to remain childfree. Many participants described childfree as "a choice" or "a right," suggesting that approval often reflected tolerance for others' decisions, rather than personal adherence to this lifestyle. Conversely, unfavorable responses were more frequently based on personal beliefs, religious commitments, family expectations, and a view of future parenting. These trends show that attitudes toward childfree were influenced not only by agreement or disagreement, but also by whether participants were speaking as observers of others' decisions or from the perspective of personal family plans.

Participants of both genders identified personal freedom of choice as the primary reason for supporting the decision not to have children. Within the framework of the Theory of Planned Behavior, this theme reflects the attitudinal component, as individuals evaluate the perceived benefits of remaining childfree in terms of autonomy, career aspirations, and personal identity. This result is consistent with previous studies by (Höglund & Hildingsson, 2023; Smith et al., 2019), who showed that the decision not to have children is often perceived as an expression of individual freedom. Proponents of the decision further argue that it can facilitate the achievement of personal goals, including

career development and identity formation (Khoiriyah et al., 2023; Yonathan & Primadini, 2024).

Previous studies show that the childfree lifestyle is increasingly accepted as individuals recognize the right to define happiness without adhering to traditional norms of parenthood (Khoiriyah et al., 2023; Savelieva et al., 2021). Female participants further stated that the freedom of choice is based on a joint decision with a partner, and not everyone wants to be a mother.

Readiness was recognized as another important factor influencing support for childfree choices among both male and female participants. In the context of the Theory of Planned Behavior, this theme can be interpreted as perceived behavioral control, referring to individuals' perceptions of the capability or readiness to undertake parental responsibilities. Participants emphasized considerations related to financial stability, psychological preparedness, and life circumstances when evaluating whether parenthood is feasible or desirable. Previous studies similarly underscore that perceptions of economic security, emotional readiness, and life priorities significantly shape reproductive intentions and family planning decisions (Ajzen, 2020; Höglund & Hildingsson, 2023; Smith et al., 2019).

Female participants conveyed more diverse reasons for supporting childfree, including past experiences, environmental concerns, and medical or health-related considerations. In relation to past experiences, participants referred mainly to childhood trauma, wounded inner-child experiences, and parenting patterns. These responses suggest parenthood as a responsibility that requires emotional readiness. Previous studies also show that psychological trauma may shape individuals' perceptions of parenting, emotional readiness, and concerns about repeating negative relational patterns (Isobel et al., 2017; Matthews & Desjardins, 2016; Zotti et al., 2012). The present results should be interpreted more narrowly, as participants' responses referred primarily to childhood experiences and parenting concerns rather than to specific forms of trauma. Therefore, unresolved experiences and concerns about repeating negative parenting patterns may shape how some participants evaluate the decision to have children.

For the environmental issues, increasing awareness motivates some to opt for a childfree lifestyle, with concerns that additional population growth worsens environmental degradation. This leads individuals to perceive childlessness as a more responsible choice (Chehreh et al., 2021; Khoiriyah et al., 2023). The childfree community may frame their decision as a commitment to sustainable living and stewardship of the planet. The broader range of answers among female participants may be related to their larger number in this study. In addition to differences in the number of participants, more in-

depth answers could also be due to moral responsibility (Ashburn-Nardo, 2017) and the risk of social impact (Koropecj-Cox & Pendell, 2007), which is greater for females related to offspring.

Religion becomes the main justification for opposing the concept of childfree, specifically among female participants. Within the framework of the Theory of Planned Behavior, this theme reflects subjective norms, particularly perceived expectations from significant social groups. In several religious communities, especially within Islamic contexts, childfree choices may be perceived as conflicting with teachings and cultural expectations that encourage procreation and family continuity (Putri & Labib, 2024; Sapinatunajah et al., 2022). However, in the Indonesian context, religious beliefs are often intertwined with family expectations, communal values, as well as moral evaluations of adulthood, marriage, and parenthood. Therefore, opposition should not be understood solely in terms of individual religious obedience, but also as a response to perceived social expectations. Participants' references to children as gifts from God, successors, and sources of family happiness show that parenthood is positioned as a socially and morally valued role.

Other reasons included viewing children as successors, sources of happiness, actualization of the desire for parenthood, and potential caregivers in old age. Many individuals strongly associate personal identity with the role of being a parent. Previous studies reported that the desire for parenthood remains a strong psychological motivation, with parenting often perceived as an important component of identity and future happiness (Hecht et al., 2024; Mattei et al., 2021; Zurlo et al., 2023). These perceptions may contribute to resistance toward the childfree concept, as parenthood is frequently associated with life purpose and personal meaning. Concerns regarding possible future regret also influenced opposition to childfree choices. Some individuals feared social isolation in later life and believed that having children could provide emotional support and companionship during old age (Hecht et al., 2024; Zurlo et al., 2023). Perceived long-term consequences related to family continuity, emotional security, and legacy, hence shaped negative attitudes toward childfree lifestyles.

The results underscore the complex interaction between personal autonomy, perceived readiness for parenthood, and social expectations related to religion and family norms in shaping university students' perspectives on the childfree lifestyle. In line with the Theory of Planned Behavior, students' views on the childfree phenomenon appear to reflect the dynamic interaction between individual beliefs, perceived readiness, and perceived social pressures within a specific cultural context.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, both male and female participants generally expressed difficulty in fully accepting the childfree lifestyle, although some showed openness toward such perspectives. Support for voluntary childlessness was mainly associated with personal freedom and perceived readiness for parenthood, particularly when individuals felt psychologically unprepared due to trauma or financial instability. In contrast, religious beliefs became the primary reason for rejecting childfree choices. This is because many participants viewed the choice as incompatible with Islamic teachings and cultural expectations surrounding procreation. Interpreted through the Theory of Planned Behavior proposed by Icek Ajzen, these results showed how reproductive attitudes among university students are shaped by the interaction between personal evaluations of autonomy, perceived readiness for parenthood, and strong religious and cultural expectations. Theoretically, the study emphasized the usefulness of the theory as an interpretive framework for understanding how attitudes, perceived readiness, and subjective norms are reflected in students' perspectives on the childfree phenomenon. Practically, the results provided insights for educators and counselors in understanding the complex factors shaping university students' views on family formation and reproductive choices.

This study has several limitations that should be addressed. First, the participants were recruited only from Gender Psychology courses at a university in Surabaya. Therefore, the results cannot be generalized to youths in Indonesia as a whole. Students in these courses may have greater exposure to gender-related discussions than those from other academic backgrounds. Second, the gender composition of the participants was uneven, with 67 females and 15 males. As a result, female perspectives were more strongly represented, and comparisons between responses from both genders should be interpreted cautiously. Third, the use of an online open-ended questionnaire enabled participants to express their views efficiently and anonymously. However, follow-up interviews could have provided richer explanations for some responses, particularly related to readiness, past experiences, and religious or family expectations. Finally, the questionnaire assessed participants' agreement or disagreement with the childfree phenomenon rather than their personal intention. Future studies should distinguish more clearly between attitudes toward childfree as a public choice and personal reproductive intentions. The investigations may also include participants from more diverse educational, religious, cultural, and socio-demographic backgrounds to provide a broader understanding of how attitudes are formed in Indonesia.

## Declaration

### Acknowledgments

The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to all participants who voluntarily participated in this study. Their willingness to share their thoughts, experiences, and perspectives provided valuable insights that formed the basis of this research. The authors deeply appreciate the time, effort, and thoughtful responses contributed by each participant.

### Funding

No funding was received for the conduct of this study. The authors did not receive any financial support from public, commercial, or not-for-profit organizations for the research, authorship, and publication of this article.

### Author Contributions

Conceptualization: S.J.; Methodology: S.J.; Data collection and investigation: S.J; K.; Data analysis: S.J.; Writing—Original Draft Preparation: S.J; K.; Writing—Review & Editing: S.J.; E.A.; S.I.S; Supervision: S.J.; S.I.S.

### Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

### Use of Artificial Intelligence

The authors used AI-assisted tools, specifically DeepL for translation and Grammarly for proofreading and language editing, to improve the manuscript's readability and linguistic quality. These tools were used solely for language support purposes. They were not used for study design, data collection, data analysis, interpretation of findings, or the generation of scientific content. All scientific decisions, interpretations, and conclusions presented in this manuscript are the sole responsibility of the authors.

### Ethical Clearance

Formal ethical approval was not required for this study because it involved minimal-risk research using an open-ended questionnaire. All participants were informed about the purpose of the study and voluntarily provided informed consent before completing the questionnaire. Participation was voluntary, and respondents could discontinue their participation at any time. The study was conducted in accordance with accepted ethical standards for research involving human participants.

### Data Availability

The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

## References

- Ajzen, I. (1991). The theory of planned behavior. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 50(2), 179–211. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0749-5978\(91\)90020-T](https://doi.org/10.1016/0749-5978(91)90020-T)
- Ajzen, I. (2020). The theory of planned behavior: Frequently asked questions. *Human Behavior and Emerging Technologies*, 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1002/hbe2.195>
- Ashburn-Nardo, L. (2017). Parenthood as a moral imperative? Moral outrage and the stigmatization of voluntarily childfree women and men. *Sex Roles: A Journal of Research*, 76(5–6), 393–401. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-016-0606-1>
- Chehreh, R., Ozgoli, G., Abolmaali, K., Nasiri, M., & Karamelahi, Z. (2021). Child-free lifestyle and the need for parenthood and relationship with marital satisfaction among infertile couples. *Iranian Journal of Psychiatry*, 16(3). <https://doi.org/10.18502/ijps.v16i3.6249>
- Ciesielski, P. (2023). Predictors of prejudice towards childfree individuals in Poland. *Scandinavian Journal of Psychology*, 65(3), 403–410. <https://doi.org/10.1111/sjop.12985>
- Daulay, H., Widyarti, E., Ismail, R., & Saladin, T. (2023). Psychology of newly married couples in Indonesia: Is it possible to choose childfree by choice or face the gossip of society and family?. *International Journal of Innovative Research and Scientific Studies*, 6(4), 1023–1031. <https://doi.org/10.53894/ijriss.v6i4.2260>
- Dommermuth, L., Klobas, J., & Lappega, T. (2015). Realization of fertility intentions by different time frames. *Advances in Life Course Research*, 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.alcr.2015.02.001>
- Doyle, J., Pooley, J., & Breen, L. (2012). A phenomenological exploration of the childfree choice in a sample of Australian women. *Journal of Health Psychology*, 18(3), 397–407. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1359105312444647>
- Ekelund, M., & Ask, K. (2021). Stigmatization of voluntarily childfree women and men in the UK. *Social Psychology*, 52(5), 275–286. <https://doi.org/10.1027/1864-9335/a000455>
- Fadilah, I., Sofyan, A., Hariyadi, E., Wibisono, B., & Setyari, A. (2025). Childfree discourse in the Kasisolusi podcast: Critical discourse analysis of Teun A. van Dijk's model. *International Journal of Social Science and Human Research*, 8(1). <https://doi.org/10.47191/ijssh/v8-i1-75>
- Hecht, L., Joseph-Mofford, G., Iacobelli, R., Ahmed, M., Haley, E., Loree, A., ... & Miller-Matero, L. (2024). Anxiety, depression, and infertility-specific distress among women with female factor infertility. *Journal of Health Psychology*,

- 30(1), 32–39. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13591053241235092>
- Helm, S., Kemper, J., & White, S. (2021). No future, no kids—no kids, no future? *Population and Environment*, 43(1), 108–129. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11111-021-00379-5>
- Herartri, R., Nugroho, D., & Pebrianti, R. (2022). Marriage pattern and fertility in DKI Jakarta province. *Jurnal Kesehatan Masyarakat*, 17(4), 483–489. <https://doi.org/10.15294/kemas.v17i4.26132>
- Höglund, B., & Hildingsson, I. (2023). Why and when choosing child-free life in Sweden? Reasons, influencing factors and personal and societal factors: Individual interviews during 2020-2021. *Sexual & Reproductive Healthcare: Official Journal of the Swedish Association of Midwives*, 35, Article 100809. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.srhc.2022.100809>
- Isobel, S., Goodyear, M., & Foster, K. (2017). Psychological trauma in the context of familial relationships: A concept analysis. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, 20(4), 549–559. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1524838017726424>
- Jafar, W., Zulfikri, Z., Sadiqin, A., Jayadi, U., & Suriyani, I. (2023). The childfree phenomenon based on Islamic law and its respond on Muslim society. *Al-Istinbath: Jurnal Hukum Islam*, 8(2), 389. <https://doi.org/10.29240/jhi.v8i2.7865>
- Kahn, L., Trasande, L., Liu, M., Mehta-Lee, S., Brubaker, S., & Jacobson, M. (2021). Factors associated with changes in pregnancy intention among women who were mothers of young children in New York City following the COVID-19 outbreak. *JAMA Network Open*, 4(9), Article e2124273. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2021.24273>
- Khoiriyah, N., Anggraeni, D., Rosit, M., & Said, M. (2023). Childfree, an existentialist feminist perspective: A critical discourse analysis of YouTube Cretivox content 'Mending punya anak atau tidak punya anak????'. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Analysis*, 6(12). <https://doi.org/10.47191/ijmra/v6-i12-84>
- Koropecjy-Cox, T., & Pendell, G. (2007). The gender gap in attitudes about childlessness in the United States. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 69(4), 899–915. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3737.2007.00420.x>
- Lindberg, L., & Kost, K. (2013). Exploring U.S. men's birth intentions. *Maternal and Child Health Journal*, 18(3), 625–633. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10995-013-1286-x>
- Luppi, F., Rosina, A., & Testa, M. (2024). An overview on low fertility motivations among Italian young-adults. OSF Preprints. <https://doi.org/10.31235/osf.io/hf78t>
- Mattei, V., Perego, G., Taranto, P., Rancoita, P., Maglione, M., Notarianni, L., ... & Candiani, M. (2021). Factors associated with a high motivation to undergo fertility preservation in female cancer patients. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12, Article 782073. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.782073>
- Matthews, E., & Desjardins, M. (2016). Remaking our identities. *The Family Journal*, 25(1), 31–39. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1066480716679643>
- Meidina, A., & Puspita, M. (2023). Childfree practices in Indonesia. *Hayula: Indonesian Journal of Multidisciplinary Islamic Studies*, 7(1), 17–32. <https://doi.org/10.21009/hayula.007.01.02>
- Miller, W. B. (2011). Differences between fertility desires and intentions: Implications for theory, research and policy. *Vienna Yearbook of Population Research*, 9, 75–98. <https://doi.org/10.1553/populationyearbook2011s75>
- Morgan, D. L., & Nica, A. (2020). Iterative thematic inquiry: A new method for analyzing qualitative data. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 19. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406920955118>
- Nakkerud, E. (2021). Ideological dilemmas actualised by the idea of living environmentally childfree. *Human Arenas*, 6(4), 886–910. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42087-021-00255-6>
- Neal, J., & Neal, Z. (2021). Prevalence and characteristics of childfree adults in Michigan (USA). *PLOS ONE*, 16(6), Article e0252528. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0252528>
- Parlak, S., & Tekin, I. (2020). A phenomenological study on voluntarily childless women. *Psikoloji Çalışmaları / Studies in Psychology*, 40(1), 161–186. <https://doi.org/10.26650/sp2019-0034>
- Putri, K., & Labib, M. (2024). Childfree in the perspective of Manhaj Tarjih Muhammadiyah: An analytic study of childfree with Bayani, Burhani, and Irfani approaches. *Gender Equality: International Journal of Child and Gender Studies*, 10(1), 1. <https://doi.org/10.22373/equality.v10i1.19044>
- Sapinatunajah, P., Ermansyah, T., & Nasichah, N. (2022). Analisis content influencer Gitasav pada statement “childfree” dalam prespektif Islam. *Jkomdis: Jurnal Ilmu Komunikasi dan Media Sosial*, 2(1), 180–186. <https://doi.org/10.47233/jkomdis.v2i1.266>
- Savelieva, K., Jokela, M., & Rotkirch, A. (2021). Reasons to postpone childbearing during fertility decline in Finland. OSF Preprints. <https://doi.org/10.31235/osf.io/4x3us>

- Siswanto, A., & Nurhasanah, N. (2022). Analisis fenomena childfree di Indonesia. *Bandung Conference Series: Islamic Family Law*, 2(2). <https://doi.org/10.29313/bcsifl.v2i2.2684>
- Smith, I., Knight, T., Fletcher, R., & Macdonald, J. A. (2019). When men choose to be childless: An interpretative phenomenological analysis. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 37(1), 325–344. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407519864444>
- Stahnke, B., Blackstone, A., & Howard, H. (2020). Lived experiences and life satisfaction of childfree women in late life. *The Family Journal*, 28(2), 159–167. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1066480720911611>
- Syafi'i, I., Hamidah, T., Yasin, N., & Umar, M. (2023). Childfree in Islamic law perspective of Nahdlatul Ulama. *Al-Ahkam*, 33(1), 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.21580/ahkam.2023.33.1.14576>
- Yazid, A., Karimullah, S., & Sugitanata, A. (2023). Comparative study on childfree marriage in some selected countries. *Jurnal Al-Hakim: Jurnal Ilmiah Mahasiswa Studi Syariah, Hukum dan Filantropi*, 5(2), 267–284. <https://doi.org/10.22515/jurnalalhakim.v5i2.7869>
- Yonathan, M., & Primadini, I. (2024). Childfree men: The reasons behind the decision. *Jurnal Komunikasi Ikatan Sarjana Komunikasi Indonesia*, 8(2), 349–358. <https://doi.org/10.25008/jkiski.v8i2.865>
- Zotti, M., Williams, A., Robertson, M., Horney, J., & Hsia, J. (2012). Post-disaster reproductive health outcomes. *Maternal and Child Health Journal*, 17(5), 783–796. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10995-012-1068-x>
- Zurlo, M., Volta, M., & Vallone, F. (2023). Paths towards parenthood after repeated treatment failures: A comparative study on predictors of psychological health outcomes in infertile couples persisting in treatments or opting for adoption. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 14, Article 1147926. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1147926>

This page has been intentionally left blank