

# Perceptions and Decision-Making Regarding Childfree Choices Among College Students in Indonesia: A Study at Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung

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## **Abstract**

*This article examines the perceptions and decision-making processes regarding the concept of being childfree (choosing to live without children) among students at Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN) Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung. This university provides a compelling case for study due to its mission of cultivating mentally, spiritually, and intellectually capable individuals. The emphasis on 'spirituality' highlights the expectation for UIN Bandung students to develop a strong understanding of religion, which influences decision-making, including on social and religious issues such as the childfree phenomenon. This study seeks to explore UIN Bandung students' perceptions of the childfree phenomenon, identify the factors influencing these perceptions, and analyze their decision-making processes regarding childfree choices. Using a descriptive method with a mixed-methods approach, data were collected through surveys and unstructured interviews. The findings reveal that the majority of UIN Bandung students perceive the concept of being childfree negatively. Factors influencing their perceptions include internal factors, such as personality traits (attitudes, interests, and experiences), and external factors, such as societal conditions. The study categorizes student decision-making into three groups: those who perceive childfree negatively and desire to have children, those who perceive childfree positively and choose to remain childfree, and those who perceive childfree positively but still desire to have children.*

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**Keywords**

*Childfree, college students, decision making, perceptions*

**Abstrak**

Artikel ini mengkaji persepsi dan pengambilan keputusan terkait childfree (kehidupan tanpa anak) di kalangan mahasiswa Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN) Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung. Kampus ini menarik untuk diteliti mengingat misinya dalam membentuk sumber daya manusia yang cakap secara mental, spiritual, dan intelektual. Istilah ‘spiritual’ menegaskan bahwa mahasiswa UIN Bandung diharapkan memiliki pemahaman agama yang baik, terutama dalam pengambilan keputusan, termasuk mengenai isu childfree dalam konteks sosial dan agama. Artikel ini bertujuan untuk mengungkapkan persepsi mahasiswa UIN Bandung tentang fenomena childfree, menjelaskan faktor-faktor yang memengaruhi persepsi tersebut, dan menganalisis pengambilan keputusan mahasiswa terkait childfree. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode deskriptif dengan pendekatan mixed method, di mana data dikumpulkan melalui survei dan wawancara tidak terstruktur. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa sebagian besar mahasiswa UIN Bandung cenderung mempersepsikan childfree sebagai hal yang negatif. Faktor-faktor yang memengaruhi persepsi tersebut meliputi faktor internal, yaitu kepribadian yang mencakup sikap, minat, dan pengalaman, serta faktor eksternal, yaitu kondisi sosial masyarakat. Pengambilan keputusan mahasiswa UIN Bandung setelah mempersepsikan childfree diklasifikasikan ke dalam tiga kategori: mahasiswa yang mempersepsikan childfree secara negatif dan menginginkan anak, mahasiswa yang mempersepsikan childfree secara positif dan memilih hidup tanpa anak, serta mahasiswa yang mempersepsikan childfree secara positif namun tetap menginginkan anak.

**Kata-kata Kunci**

Bebas-anak, mahasiswa, pengambilan keputusan, persepsi

**Introduction**

According to the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation at the University of Washington (as cited in Gallagher, 2020), it is estimated that by the end of this century, 183 out of 195 countries worldwide will experience below-average fertility rates, signaling a global decline in birth

rates. For instance, countries in Asia, such as Japan and South Korea, are grappling with demographic issues due to low birth rates. In Japan, this decline has been ongoing since World War II, with current population growth at only -0.4% per year (World Bank, 2023). Similarly, South Korea faces a population crisis; in July 2023, only 19,102 babies were born, a 6.7% decrease from the previous year, marking ten consecutive months of fertility decline (Antara News, 2023).

In Indonesia, population growth has also declined. Data from the Badan Pusat Statistik (2020) shows that population growth decreased by 0.24% between 2010 and 2020. Factors contributing to the global decline in birth rates include the rise of feminist movements, delays in marriage and childbearing, and modernization. Increasingly, women are postponing marriage and pregnancy or opting not to marry or have children at all (Haganta, Arrasy, & Masrurroh, 2022).

One phenomenon linked to declining birth rates is the childfree lifestyle, where individuals or couples choose to live without children. Studies in Japan indicate a connection between population decline and the childfree phenomenon, as the choice to remain childfree has become commonplace among adults. This demographic crisis poses significant challenges for the Japanese government as birth rates continue to decline (Nugroho et al., 2022).

In the United States, Thomas Frejka (2017) noted in his research titled "Childlessness in the United States" that the percentage of people choosing not to have children increased by 10% over three decades, from the 1970s to the 2000s. The rising popularity of the childfree lifestyle has been further fueled by the pervasive influence of social media, which encourages individuals to question traditional norms, including the necessity of having children. This influence has contributed to the growing acceptance of the childfree trend in modern society.

Improvements in education and technology have also shifted mindsets, particularly among women. Greater access to education has created opportunities for women to pursue careers, often delaying or deprioritizing marriage and motherhood (Rahmayanti, 2022). Moreover, modernity has challenged patriarchal values, further contributing to the rise of the childfree trend (Ela et al., 2022).

The childfree trend, particularly prevalent among individuals with higher educational backgrounds, raises questions about how it is perceived

among educated groups such as university students. As future leaders and decision-makers, university students are an important demographic to study in understanding the broader implications of the childfree phenomenon.

This research examines perceptions and decision-making regarding the childfree lifestyle among students at Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN) Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung. This Islamic university is a compelling case study due to its mission to produce individuals who are mentally, spiritually, and intellectually capable (UIN Sunan Gunung Djati, 2023). The emphasis on “spirituality” suggests that UIN Bandung students are expected to base their decisions, including those related to childfree living, on religious principles.

Ramdhani and Tsabitah (2022), in their article “The Childfree Phenomenon and the Principles of Family Idealism in the Perspective of Students,” found that students are aware of the childfree phenomenon and can assess it from diverse perspectives. While some view childfree as a positive innovation in family ideals, others see it as a deviation from natural and religious norms. Similarly, Audinovic and Nugroho (2023), in their study “Perceptions of Childfree Among the East Java Zillennial Generation,” revealed that Generation Z in East Java generally accepts the concept of childfree, with many viewing it positively and respecting individuals’ choices to live without children.

Fillaili and Martini (2023), in their article “Childfree Trends Among Millennial Couples,” identified internal factors (mental and physical readiness, health, past trauma, and busy lifestyles) and external factors (financial conditions and parenting concerns) as key drivers behind the childfree decision. Their findings also highlight how childfree couples sustain their commitment to living without children.

While these studies provide valuable insights into the childfree phenomenon, they do not fully address the relationship between perception and decision-making, particularly among university students. Therefore, this research aims to fill that gap by exploring both the perceptions and decision-making processes of students regarding the childfree lifestyle, focusing on the factors that influence their views and choices. By examining perceptions and decision-making among students at UIN Bandung, this research seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of how the childfree phenomenon is viewed and navigated within the context of an Islamic campus.

Data collection for this study involved surveys and unstructured interviews. The surveys utilized a Guttman scale, which provides dichotomous options to generate interval or ratio data. The sampling method employed multi-stage sampling, dividing the population into clusters based on faculty, department, and class levels, with individuals randomly selected from each cluster (Sugiyono, 2013). Additionally, unstructured in-depth interviews were conducted with purposively selected students who met specific criteria, such as being active students at UIN Bandung and having completed the survey. These interviews aimed to explore open-ended issues, gathering insights into students' ideas, opinions, and perceptions (Jamaludin, 2021).

### **The Concept of Childfree as a Life Choice**

The term “childfree” first appeared in the Merriam-Webster English Dictionary before 1901, defined as “without children” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, accessed November 21, 2023). The Macmillan Dictionary defines childfree as “someone who has decided not to have children,” while the Collins Dictionary describes it as “having no children, especially by choice” (Macmillan Dictionary and Collins Dictionary, accessed November 21, 2023). Collectively, these definitions highlight that childfree represents a personal decision to not have children, made voluntarily and without external coercion or constraints.

The concept of childfree, as a deliberate life choice, has historical roots. It is said to have been introduced as early as the late 20th century by St. Augustine, a Manichaeism adherent. Manichaeism, a dualistic belief system, viewed procreation as immoral because it entrapped souls in impermanent physical bodies (Siswanto and Nurhasanah 2022; Muthohiroh and Arifin 2023). Over time, the notion of living without children evolved into a broader lifestyle choice.

Evidence of the childfree phenomenon can also be traced back to rural Europe in the 1500s, where many people, particularly women, prioritized careers over family life. Rachel Chrastil noted that in France, England, and the Netherlands, many delayed marriage, with 15–20% never marrying at all (as cited in Tunggono 2021). This trend persisted into the 1800s during the Industrial Revolution, when economic growth led many women to join the workforce, sidelining traditional roles such as child-

rearing. Consequently, the rate of voluntary childlessness in Europe and America increased significantly during this period (Dahnia, Adsana, and Putri 2023).

After World War II, the childfree trend temporarily declined due to a population explosion, as societies sought to restore post-war demographics. However, the advent of modern contraceptives reignited the trend, which has continued to grow globally (Fakriansyah 2023).

In Indonesia, the childfree phenomenon is often perceived as problematic. As a pronatalist society that values high birth rates, Indonesian culture places significant pressure on couples to have children soon after marriage. This societal expectation often views childlessness as incomplete or flawed (Hanandita 2022). While childfree is seen as a deliberate lifestyle choice, distinct from childless (which refers to the inability to have children due to biological or health limitations), it remains culturally controversial.

Unlike childless couples, who desire children but face physical or medical barriers, childfree individuals voluntarily choose not to have children. For this reason, the concept is often referred to in academic literature as “voluntary childlessness” (Rahmayanti 2022).

Societal views on childlessness often frame it as a misfortune, while childfree choices are sometimes regarded as a violation of human nature’s reproductive instincts (Hanandita 2022). Additionally, cultural norms and familial expectations in Indonesia present challenges for those who choose to remain childfree (Fillaili and Martini 2023).

Victoria Tunggono, in her book *Childfree & Happy*, notes that the idea of living childfree often begins in adolescence and can stem from various factors, including traumatic experiences, family role models, or personal circumstances that support the decision. However, she also emphasizes that these perspectives may change over time due to evolving life experiences and conditions (Tunggono 2021).

The concept of childfree reflects a conscious and voluntary decision not to have children, distinct from being childless due to external factors. While it has gained acceptance in some societies, it continues to challenge cultural norms and provoke diverse responses, particularly in traditional, pronatalist settings like Indonesia.

## Perception of UIN Bandung Students on the Childfree Phenomenon

Perception is a process of understanding gained through the five senses, which are then stimulated to form information that can be interpreted into a particular perspective (Hilmy 2023). Perception can be categorized into two types: positive perception and negative perception. Positive perception involves support for or agreement with an object or idea, perceiving it as valid or beneficial. Conversely, negative perception implies disapproval or rejection of the perceived object or idea.

In the context of this study, perceptions of the childfree phenomenon are divided into two opposing views: those who perceive childfree as a positive phenomenon and those who view it negatively. The results of the questionnaire, as shown in Figure 1, indicate that the majority of respondents (70%) perceive childfree as a negative phenomenon. In contrast, 30% of respondents view it positively. This division reflects varying interpretations and attitudes among students at UIN Bandung regarding the concept of living without children.

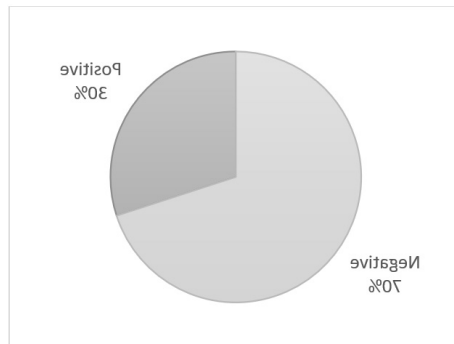


Figure 1

### Perceptions of UIN Bandung Students on the Childfree Phenomenon

Thirty percent of respondents described childfree as a positive phenomenon. UIN Bandung students cited several reasons for this perspective, including the belief that it represents individual freedom to determine one's own life, affirms the authority over one's body (particularly for women), contributes to controlling Indonesia's already large population, and helps prevent the issue of abandoned children.

One of the informants, Rahmawati, a student at the Faculty of Education, highlighted the potential benefits of the childfree phenomenon for societal well-being. Her perspective reflects a broader understanding of the practical and social implications of childfree living, emphasizing autonomy and societal challenges. She explained:

There are many positive aspects to choosing to be childfree. People who choose this path are not constrained by the responsibilities of raising children; they are free to travel and express themselves fully, or to engage with their partners without the burden of child-related dependencies. Moreover, given the already high population and unstable economic conditions, many children are neglected due to their parents' lack of preparedness. I think childfree has numerous positive impacts on our society (Interview, 17 February 2024).

Another perspective emphasizes that women have authority over their own bodies and the right to determine their lives without societal pressure, including decisions about pregnancy, childbirth, and breastfeeding. The childfree phenomenon is seen as a means to empower women with the freedom to choose their own path without being constrained by societal expectations. This perspective highlights that childfree creates space for individuals to express themselves fully and authentically, free from traditional demands (Interview with Aulia Darmayanti, a student at the Faculty of Social and Political Science, 26 February 2024).

In contrast to the opinions supporting childfree, 70% of respondents perceive it as a negative phenomenon. They argue that childfree obstructs national regeneration, leads to loneliness in old age, and violates the natural human inclination to reproduce. Mutiara, a student from the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, emphasized that rejecting the idea of having children altogether undermines the development of future human resources and contradicts religious principles. She stated:

I don't think children are something that should be rejected outright. However, rejecting the idea of having children for life goes against my religious norms. Additionally, the potential of future human resources (HR) would be hindered, affecting the country's development. While I acknowledge that our current HR quality is low partly because of the rising birth rate, I don't think childfree is the solution. In fact, it could worsen things in the future (Interview, February 19, 2024).



Similarly, Yanti expressed that the childfree phenomenon contradicts human nature and religious teachings. She explained:

Based on my understanding, the childfree phenomenon deviates from human nature, especially for women, whose natural role is to be mothers. In my religion (Islam), we are encouraged to multiply our offspring. This phenomenon directly opposes that principle. To me, it violates the nature of a woman, whose womb is meant to give life. This is my understanding, and it is my principle (Interview, 26 February 2024).

These perspectives demonstrate that UIN Bandung students generally hold a negative perception of childfree. This is supported by the questionnaire results, which reflect low alignment with the fundamental components of perception—such as needs, interests, expectations, and beliefs—regarding childfree. Furthermore, based on the perception type indicators, only a small portion of respondents (30%) consider childfree as a positive phenomenon.

### **Factors Influencing UIN Bandung Students' Perceptions of the Childfree Phenomenon**

Having explored the perceptions of UIN Bandung students regarding the childfree phenomenon, this section delves into the factors influencing those perceptions. In general, individuals' perceptions of an object or phenomenon are shaped by internal and external factors. This article focuses on internal factors, specifically personality—encompassing attitudes, interests, and experiences—and external factors, namely societal social conditions.

#### *Personality Factors*

According to Figure 2, the questionnaire data reveals that the majority of respondents (90%) enjoy the presence of children around them, while only 10% expressed a dislike for children's presence. Similarly, 85% of respondents agree that having children is important, whereas only 15% believe otherwise. This indicates a strong inclination among most students to value the presence of children in their lives. When it comes to personal experiences, 84% of respondents reported no negative experiences that would make them lean toward the childfree choice. Conversely, 16%

admitted having adverse experiences related to children, which influenced their desire to consider childfree.

These findings suggest that personality factors, particularly attitudes and interests, play a significant role in shaping students' perceptions of the childfree phenomenon. Positive experiences and a general fondness for children reinforce the tendency to view childfree negatively. However, for a minority, negative personal experiences appear to have a direct influence on their openness to the idea of childfree.

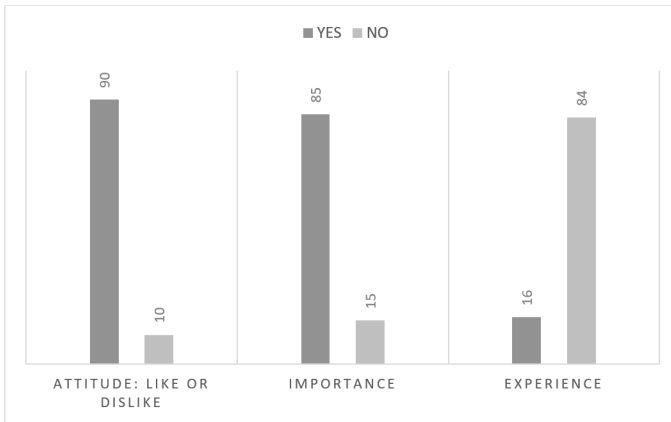


Figure 2

### Personality Factors that Influence UIN Bandung Students' Perceptions of the Childfree Phenomenon

This research explores how the presence of children relates to the childfree phenomenon. The presence of children can influence an individual's desire to have children or not. The findings show that people who enjoy having children around often experience an increase in happiness hormones, such as endorphins, which boost feelings of pleasure, comfort, and energy.

However, 10% of respondents expressed a dislike for the presence of children. According to the informants interviewed, their discomfort stems from the challenges of managing children, which makes them uneasy when interacting with or being around them. Rahmawati explained:

To be honest, I don't like the presence of children, especially small children, because I don't like being in a crowd. Small children are usually hyperactive and unruly, it's just their nature. I feel uncomfortable when seeing small children, and I can't manage them. So, I am quite uncomfortable with their presence near me (Interview, 17 February 2024).

Similarly, Taufiq shared that his discomfort around children was due to the noise they make, which he worries could affect their development. He believes that staying away from children is the best way to maintain his own stability (Interview, 19 February 2024).

This suggests that those who enjoy the presence of children are influenced by the positive emotional reactions, such as pleasure and entertainment, triggered by their innocent behavior. On the other hand, those who dislike children may experience discomfort due to the perceived disturbance, which they feel unable to avoid or control.

The survey results (Figure 2) revealed two differing perspectives regarding the importance of having children. 85% of respondents stated that having children is important. The reasons cited include the belief that children can contribute to the family economy, provide motivation in life, and strengthen family relationships.

In contrast, about 10% of respondents argued that children are not essential. They pointed out that raising children is expensive and challenging. Taufiq, for example, argued that children could create a rift in the household, as the presence of children might lead to disagreements between husband and wife. He also mentioned that having children could hinder his personal ambitions.

Those who consider children important tend to view them as a source of reciprocity between parents and children, seeing them as a motivation for life, a way to strengthen family bonds, and a means of improving personal growth and capabilities. On the other hand, those who believe children are less important often cite the difficulties and costs associated with raising children, the potential for marital conflict, and the hindrance children may present to personal goals.

Life experiences play a significant role in shaping people's perceptions. These experiences can be personal or vicarious—gained through observing others, paying attention to their stories, or learning from their experiences. According to the survey, 86% of respondents reported

no personal experiences that led them to consider being childfree. Instead, they have had experiences—either their own or those of people around them—that reinforced their belief that having children is the right choice. However, 16% of respondents shared that negative experiences, such as divorce, strongly influenced their interest in the childfree lifestyle (Figure 2).

### *Social Conditions and Situational Factors*

Social conditions and situations play a significant role in shaping perceptions. In Indonesia, it is particularly challenging for individuals or couples to choose a childfree lifestyle due to societal norms that do not readily accept this concept. This is supported by the survey results, where nearly all respondents (93%) indicated that the social conditions in their communities do not support the choice of living childfree. Only 7% of respondents felt that the current societal situation would allow them to consider the childfree option (Figure 3).

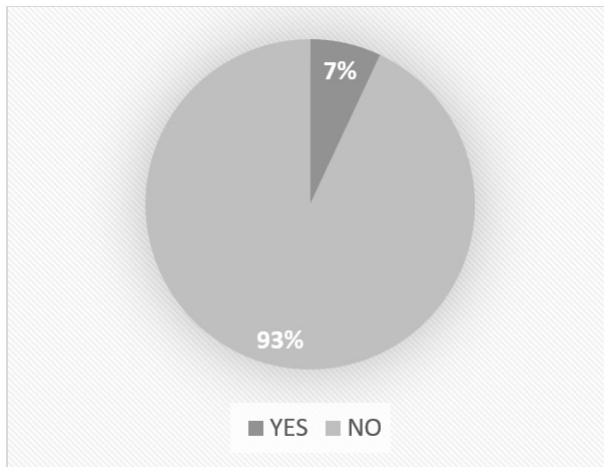


Figure 3

Social Condition Situational Factors that Influence the Perceptions of  
UIN Bandung Students on the Childfree Phenomenon

The majority of respondents as shown in Figure 3 indicated that the social situation and conditions in their place of residence did not allow them to choose childfree. One informant, Rahmawati, said that most Indonesians are very supportive of the birth rate as evidenced by the demand for families to have children immediately after marriage, in addition, traditions and beliefs influence people's thinking regarding children. She revealed:

For now, I see that it is difficult for someone to choose childfree in my neighborhood because it will be difficult to oppose the existing cultures. For example, if we come to the house with someone of the opposite sex, the people around us, family or neighbors, assume it's his girlfriend, even though it's not necessarily his girlfriend. After that, we're asked when we're going to get married, we're asked when we're going to have children, it's like a structured, template in society, and it's like that in my family too. Moreover, I live with my extended family, even though they don't live in the same house, they pay attention because that's how life is for us. In addition, as Sundanese people say, it's difficult for us to go far away, whether it's to migrate or travel far away for a long time because according to our parents, when we were born, we kept the *bali* (placenta) behind the house, which makes it difficult for us to go anywhere. According to this belief, if we are married and have children, we should build a house behind our current house, so it is not far from our family. My family really believes in that. It's a bit difficult to choose childfree (Interview, 17 February 2024).

The majority of respondents, as shown in Figure 3, indicated that the social conditions and situations in their communities do not support the choice of living childfree. One informant, Rahmawati, explained that most Indonesians are very supportive of high birth rates, as evidenced by the societal expectation for families to have children soon after marriage. She also noted that cultural traditions and beliefs significantly influence people's views on having children. Rahmawati shared:

For now, I see that it's difficult for someone to choose a childfree lifestyle in my neighborhood because it's hard to oppose the prevailing cultural norms. For example, if a man and woman visit a house together, people around us, including family and neighbors, automatically assume they're a couple, even though that may not be the case. After that, they ask when we're getting married and when

we'll have children. It's like a societal template, and it's the same in my own family. I live with my extended family—though not in the same house, they still pay attention because that's how life is for us. Additionally, as Sundanese people, we're taught that it's difficult to go far away, whether to migrate or travel long distances. According to our parents, when we were born, we kept the 'bali' (placenta) behind the house, which makes it hard to leave. The belief is that when we marry and have children, we must build a house behind our current home, so it's close to the family. My family strongly believes in this tradition, so it's a bit difficult to choose childfree (Interview, 17 February 2024).

The difficulty of choosing a childfree lifestyle is also influenced by society's perception that children are an investment, with the belief that more children bring more sustenance. This view often prevents individuals from expressing their desire to remain childfree. Taufiq shared:

I think it's difficult for someone to decide to be childfree, especially in my neighborhood, because Indonesian society sees children as an investment. The belief is that many children mean many blessings. In my opinion, this makes it hard for us to express ourselves according to our own wishes. For example, there are couples who have been married for just a year and are already being asked when they'll have children. So, I don't think it's realistic for someone to choose to be childfree (Interview, 19 February 2024).

Only around 7% of respondents reported that their social situation and conditions made it possible to choose a childfree lifestyle. This can be attributed to the apathy prevalent in modern society and the rapid advancement of technology, which has led to less personal information being shared publicly, such as through anonymous social media accounts. Mutiara Adinda explained:

Currently, I think people can still choose a childfree lifestyle. It's not necessarily because society fully accepts it, but more due to the growing apathy. For example, neighbors don't know each other. So, in today's environment, it's possible to choose to be childfree, but you have to be indifferent and not care about what others think. There are also many media platforms now. In the home environment, you can simply keep quiet about your decision to be childfree, but on social

media, you can openly share your choice. There are two different sides: the anonymity on social media allows you to express yourself, and if people don't like it, they won't approach you. So, I believe it's possible to choose childfree, but there are social consequences in the real world, where many might indirectly reject the idea (Interview, 19 February 2024).

Based on the information above, it is clear that the current social environment in Indonesia makes it very difficult to accept the childfree lifestyle. This presents a significant challenge for individuals and couples who decide to be childfree, given Indonesia's pro-natalist culture and the societal expectation to have children shortly after marriage. However, adopting a childfree lifestyle is still possible, albeit with the need for apathy in an unsupportive environment.

### **Childfree Decision Making of UIN Bandung Students**

As shown in Figure 1, 70% of respondents view childfree as a negative phenomenon and have decided to have children. Meanwhile, 30% of respondents have a positive view of the childfree phenomenon, with their decisions split between choosing to have children and choosing a childfree lifestyle. Based on the interview results, UIN Bandung students' decision-making regarding childfree is categorized into three groups: first, students who view childfree positively but still choose to have children; second, students who view childfree positively and choose a childfree lifestyle; and third, students who view childfree negatively but still choose to have children.

#### *Positive Perceptions of Childfree and the Decision to Have Children*

The findings in this study reveal that individuals who perceive the childfree phenomenon positively do not necessarily choose to live a childfree life; many still desire the presence of children. For these individuals, the childfree phenomenon is viewed positively when there are strong, well-considered reasons behind the decision, ensuring that children are not brought into situations where their parents are unprepared. Ariska Julianti shared:

I want the presence of a child in my life, but I am not against the childfree phenomenon and consider it a positive choice. It all depends on the parents' readiness. If parents are not ready psychologically, financially, or in other aspects, and they don't have a clear reason to have children, then they are not ready to become parents. If forced, the child could suffer. So, childfree is positive because it allows people to make an informed decision based on readiness—whether they want to focus on their career, reduce the population, or for other reasons (Interview, 16 February 2024).

Syifa Kinan echoed a similar sentiment, stating that while she wants children, she views childfree as a positive phenomenon if it is based on clear, deliberate goals. She emphasized that when parents are unprepared, children may become victims of physical and emotional neglect, and hopes that the childfree movement could help reduce abandoned children and control global population growth (Interview, 28 February 2024).

Based on the above explanations, students who choose to have children but view the childfree phenomenon positively do so because they believe in making responsible, well-considered decisions. They see childfree as a way to prevent children from becoming victims of unprepared or unfit parenting.

### *Positive Perception of Childfree and the Decision to Choose Childfree*

Informants who perceive childfree as a positive choice and decide to embrace it view it as a rational decision in light of unstable societal conditions such as overpopulation and educational uncertainty, which can lead to poverty. They believe that not having children is the best option. Rahmawati shared:

In Indonesia, the population growth has been enormous, and many people lack education and access to a decent life. I think choosing to be childfree is very rational. It's not just about thinking of ourselves, but also about the environment. We contribute to the country, even if it's on a small scale. So, I see childfree as a way to improve our lives (Interview, 17 February 2024).

Another reason for considering childfree as a rational decision is the difficulty of raising and educating a child in the modern era. Aulia Darmayanti expressed:



I think being childfree is quite rational because nowadays it's hard to raise a child. Maybe my parents found it difficult to educate me and my younger siblings. Especially now, with the rapid development of technology, it's hard to keep things under control. So, it's better not to have children. Educating children according to social norms is tough, and it's hard to manage peer associations (Interview, 26 February 2024).

Based on the information provided, it's clear that the decision to choose childfree is viewed as a rational choice. However, these informants also emphasized that their decision is not absolute and could change over time. Rahmawati explained:

For me, there's a possibility that it could change. If I continue living here in Indonesia and don't plan to move abroad, it might be because of family and partner factors. If you look at men today, their minds are not yet open—especially when it comes to childfree. They still hold onto the traditional view of having children because their parents did. There needs to be a shift in thinking for me to decide to have children (Interview, 17 February 2024).

Similarly, Taufiq noted that his decision to be childfree could change with time and experience, as he is still exploring the importance of having children and how to raise them. From the information shared, it's clear that while the decision to choose childfree is currently in place, it may evolve due to future structural challenges. Environmental factors play a significant role, as the current situation and conditions are not conducive to embracing childfree (Interview, 19 February 2024).

### *Negative Perceptions of Childfree and the Decision to Choose to Have Children*

One of the key reasons UIN Bandung students decide to have children is the fear of experiencing a lonely and sad old age without the presence of children. Mutiara Adinda expressed:

I want a child because I want to have a companion in my old age. I don't want to live alone. While the world may not be an ideal place for children due to various existing problems, I will filter out the negative aspects and do my best to ensure my child receives a better education and is shielded from negativity, providing them with a good understanding (Interview, 19 February 2024).

Additionally, the desire to create a *sakinah mawadah warahmah* family—a harmonious, loving, and compassionate family—is seen as incomplete without the presence of children, as children are viewed as the result of love between a husband and wife. Yanti shared:

One of the purposes of marriage is to have children. In building a household, we definitely want a family that is *sakinah mawadah warahmah*, where children complement the family and align with the religious understanding of Islam, where getting married means one of the goals is to have children (Interview, 26 February 2024).

The reasons for having children, from these perspectives, stem from the wish to prevent loneliness in later years and to establish a family that aligns with religious values. Both motivations highlight the importance of children in ensuring companionship and fulfilling religious expectations within a marriage.

## Conclusion

This article reveals that students at the State Islamic University Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung (UIN Bandung) have diverse perceptions of the childfree phenomenon. The majority of students, 70%, view childfree negatively, while 30% perceive it positively. Factors influencing these perceptions include personality traits such as attitudes, interests, and experiences, as well as broader social conditions. The findings suggest that UIN Bandung students are significantly impacted by the social environment, particularly in the context of Indonesia's predominantly Muslim and pro-natalist culture. Regarding decision-making, the study categorizes students into three groups: those who perceive childfree positively and choose to be childfree, those who perceive childfree positively but choose to have children, and those who have a negative perception of childfree but still opt to have children.

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