

## Culture Shock Childfree Phenomenon in Indonesia from A Biopsychological and Humanistic Perspective

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### ABSTRACT

The childfree phenomenon—voluntarily choosing not to have children—has emerged as a controversial lifestyle choice in Indonesia, generating significant discourse around reproductive autonomy, cultural values, and mental well-being. This study examines the Culture Shock Childfree Phenomenon in Indonesia from A Biopsychological and Humanistic Perspective, analyzing it through integrated biopsychological and Maslow's humanistic theoretical frameworks. Employing a library research methodology, this study systematically reviews and synthesizes scholarly literature, including peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and empirical studies from multiple databases, to construct a comprehensive theoretical analysis. The biopsychological perspective reveals that childfree decisions are influenced by complex interactions between reproductive health conditions, neurobiological factors, environmental contexts, and psychological characteristics across physiological, ontogenetic, evolutionary, and functional dimensions. Maslow's humanistic framework demonstrates that contemporary redefinitions of human needs position childfree choices as expressions of self-actualization and personal autonomy rather than deficiencies. However, Indonesia's collectivist cultural orientation generates substantial social stigma and psychological pressure against childfree individuals, resulting in culture shock experiences characterized by value conflicts, social isolation, and identity negotiation. The findings suggest that childfree individuals in Indonesia navigate tensions between personal autonomy and cultural expectations, requiring mental health support systems and broader societal awareness to reduce stigmatization. This research contributes theoretically by integrating biological and humanistic perspectives on reproductive choice, and practically by informing counseling approaches and social policies that respect reproductive diversity while acknowledging cultural contexts.

**Keywords:** *Biopsychology, Humanistic, Culture Shock, Childfree.*

### INTRODUCTION

The global landscape of reproductive choices has undergone a dramatic transformation over the past several decades, with voluntary childlessness—commonly termed childfree—emerging as an increasingly visible lifestyle option across diverse cultural contexts (Luchenski, 2023). The term childfree was first coined and popularized in the late 20th century, distinguishing individuals who actively choose not to have children from those who are involuntarily childless. However, historical analysis reveals that this phenomenon has deeper roots, particularly in the United States during the 1930s Great Depression, when economic uncertainty and psychological distress prompted many couples to forgo parenthood in order to secure their financial futures (Zhafira et al., 2024). This historical precedent demonstrates that childfree choices often emerge at the intersections of economic conditions, social transformations, and evolving conceptualizations of personal fulfilment (Wooten, 2023).

Contemporary manifestations of the childfree movement are intrinsically linked to broader socio-political developments, including feminist body autonomy campaigns and changing gender role expectations. Proponents of childfree lifestyles argue from a human rights perspective that individuals cannot and should not be coerced into parenthood, emphasizing reproductive autonomy as a fundamental freedom (Martinez Phillips, 2025; Wootton, 2024). The "politics of the body" discourse, which asserts that women possess inherent sovereignty over their own bodies and reproductive capacities, has significantly influenced increasing acceptance of childfree choices in Western contexts (Abusneineh, 2022). This philosophical framework challenges traditional assumptions that link womanhood inextricably to motherhood, positioning childfree decisions as legitimate expressions of self-determination rather than deviant rejections of social responsibility.

Globalization and digitalization have accelerated the diffusion of childfree ideologies across cultural boundaries, including into societies with traditionally pronatalist orientations such as Indonesia (Stephani, 2025). However, the reception and experience of childfree choices vary dramatically across cultural contexts, shaped by local traditions, religious values, family structures, and economic conditions (Darojat et al., 2025; Luchenski, 2023; Pertiwi et al., 2023). In Indonesia, a nation characterized by strong collectivist orientations and deeply embedded family-centered values, the emergence of childfree lifestyles generates significant social tension and psychological complexity (Bedi, 2024). Indonesian society traditionally views marriage and procreation as inseparable components of adult identity and social responsibility, with married couples generally expected—indeed, often pressured—to produce children as a moral obligation. This expectation is reinforced through multiple channels, including family systems, religious teachings, community norms, and institutional practices, creating a powerful pronatalist environment that problematizes childfree choices.

Recent demographic data reveal notable shifts in Indonesian reproductive patterns that warrant scholarly attention (Rosnani et al., 2025; Utomo et al., 2022). According to Indonesia's National Central Statistics Agency (BPS, 2023), approximately 8.2% of Indonesian women are currently childfree, with this proportion showing consistent upward trends over the past four years. Demographic analysis indicates that childfree choices are particularly concentrated among individuals with higher educational attainment and those experiencing economic difficulties, suggesting that socioeconomic factors significantly influence reproductive decision-making. Furthermore, the childfree phenomenon has developed most prominently in urban areas where modernization, feminist ideologies, and career opportunities enable women to adopt social roles beyond traditional domestic and maternal functions (Nikma, 2024). This urban–rural divide in childfree prevalence highlights how exposure to diverse value systems and economic structures shapes reproductive choices, with urban environments providing both ideological support and practical alternatives to traditional family-centered life pathways.

The childfree phenomenon in Indonesia can be conceptualized as generating culture shock—a state of psychological disorientation and social tension arising from encountering values, beliefs, and practices that fundamentally contradict one's cultural conditioning (Pertiwi et al., 2023; Syarafuddin & Fauzi, 2023). For Indonesians who choose childfree lifestyles, culture shock manifests through multiple dimensions: cognitive dissonance between personal values and societal expectations, social isolation and stigmatization, identity conflicts regarding self-worth and social belonging, and ongoing negotiation between autonomy and conformity. Conversely, pronatalist Indonesians may experience culture shock when confronting childfree individuals, struggling to comprehend choices that violate deeply held assumptions about human nature, social responsibility, and the meaning of fulfillment. This bidirectional culture shock creates fertile ground for misunderstanding, judgment, and psychological distress on both sides, necessitating deeper examination of the factors underlying childfree choices and their psychological implications (Cednick, 2025; Oyuyo, 2024).

Despite growing attention to childfree phenomena globally, significant research gaps persist, particularly regarding non-Western cultural contexts. Previous studies have predominantly focused on Western individualistic societies where personal autonomy is culturally prioritized, leaving limited understanding of how childfree choices operate within collectivist frameworks that emphasize social interdependence and conformity. While existing literature has examined demographic correlates of childlessness, psychological motivations for childfree choices, and social responses to voluntary childlessness, few studies have integrated biological, psychological, and cultural dimensions into comprehensive theoretical frameworks. Furthermore, research specifically addressing Indonesian contexts remains scarce, with most available literature consisting of descriptive accounts rather than theoretically grounded analyses that could inform both scholarly understanding and practical interventions (Fitriadi et al., 2024; Prastyatama, 2024; Sukirman & Kabilan, 2023).

Additionally, previous research has often failed to adequately distinguish between involuntary childlessness (due to infertility or circumstance) and voluntary childfree choices, conflating distinct phenomena with different psychological meanings and social implications. The psychological literature has documented various factors associated with childfree decisions—including unresolved childhood trauma, ambivalence about caregiving responsibilities, prioritization of career or personal goals, environmental concerns, and relationship dynamics—yet has not systematically examined how these factors interact with cultural contexts to shape individual experiences and social responses (Zhafira et al., 2024; Fitriyani et al., 2023). Moreover, theoretical frameworks employed in childfree research have been largely limited to sociological or feminist perspectives, with insufficient integration of biological and humanistic psychological theories that could provide a more nuanced understanding of reproductive decision-making processes.

The novelty of this study lies in its multiple distinctive contributions to the existing literature. First, this research uniquely integrates biopsychological and Maslow's humanistic theoretical frameworks to analyze childfree phenomena, providing a comprehensive multi-level analysis spanning biological substrates, psychological processes, and existential

meaning-making that has not been systematically applied to this topic in Indonesian contexts. Second, this study specifically examines the childfree phenomenon as a form of culture shock in Indonesia's collectivist cultural environment, addressing a significant gap in understanding how cultural orientation shapes the experience and reception of reproductive choices. Third, by employing biopsychological analysis across four explanatory levels—physiological, ontogenetic, evolutionary, and functional—this research offers a detailed examination of biological and developmental factors influencing childfree decisions that extends beyond purely sociological accounts.

This study examines the childfree phenomenon in Indonesia as a form of culture shock, analyzing it through integrated biopsychological and Maslow's humanistic frameworks. The theoretical benefits of this research include advancing integrated biopsychosocial models of reproductive decision-making, enriching cross-cultural psychology literature on value conflicts and acculturation, and contributing to positive psychology frameworks that recognize diverse pathways to human flourishing. Practically, this research informs mental health practitioners working with childfree individuals or couples navigating cultural pressures and provides insights for family counselors addressing intergenerational conflicts around reproductive choices.

## METHOD

This study employed a systematic library research methodology to examine the *childfree* phenomenon in Indonesia from biopsychological and humanistic perspectives. Data sources included peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, empirical research reports, and credible online publications related to *childfree* phenomena, *culture shock*, biopsychology, humanistic psychology, and Indonesian cultural contexts. Literature searches were conducted across several academic databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, PubMed, PsycINFO, Google Scholar, and Garuda (Garba Rujukan Digital), to capture both international and local scholarship. Search terms combined keywords such as "childfree," "voluntarily childless," "culture shock," "biopsychology," "humanistic psychology," "Maslow," "Indonesia," "collectivism," and "reproductive choice," in both English and Bahasa Indonesia.

The data collection process involved systematic identification, screening, and selection of relevant literature according to predetermined inclusion criteria: (1) publication date primarily from 2019–2024, with selective use of earlier seminal works; (2) relevance to *childfree* phenomena, biopsychological perspectives, humanistic psychology, or Indonesian cultural contexts; (3) scholarly credibility based on peer-review status, author expertise, and publication quality; and (4) accessibility of full-text versions. Excluded were non-academic sources, studies focused solely on involuntary childlessness, and materials not directly relevant to the research objectives.

Data analysis applied integrative synthesis techniques to organize, interpret, and connect findings across diverse sources. The process involved extracting key concepts and theoretical frameworks, coding themes to identify patterns relevant to biopsychological and humanistic perspectives, critically evaluating evidence, and integrating insights to construct explanatory frameworks. The biopsychological analysis was structured according to four levels of explanation—physiological, ontogenetic, evolutionary, and functional—while the humanistic analysis drew on Maslow's hierarchy of needs as an organizing framework.



Figure 1. Research Flow

The research flow proceeded systematically through several stages: (1) problem identification and research question formulation; (2) comprehensive literature search and source identification; (3) screening and selection of relevant materials based on inclusion criteria; (4) systematic reading and data extraction from selected sources; (5) coding and thematic organization of extracted information; (6) analytical synthesis guided by theoretical frameworks; (7) interpretation and critical evaluation of integrated findings; and (8) construction of coherent narrative and conclusions addressing research objectives. This systematic approach ensured rigor, transparency, and comprehensiveness in literature analysis.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Many concepts in psychology represent phenomena childfree, like: innerchild who have not recovered from past injuries; inability to take care of children; Decision; self-acceptance as an unproductive person in terms of reproduction; the responsibility of parenthood; awareness of developmental tasks; and the existence of a self-concept that is hurt

(Zhafira et al., 2024). Moreover childfree can also be affected by the medical condition that is the reason for a person to choose childfree (Fitriyani et al., 2023).

Changing societal perspectives is one of the most significant changes affecting couples childfree. Some people in Indonesia believe that having children is a selfish act and goes against traditional values. This condition shows Culture Shock or cultural shock since the phenomenon childfree because families and children in Indonesia are highly valued. This concept is not common in Western countries. Marriage and having children are an important part of building a family and extending lineage more common in Indonesian. This means that Indonesians who choose childfree will experience social pressure or culture shock. In cases where a person chooses to childfree, family and environment find it low or strange making it difficult to understand or accept the decision.

Different perspectives and values regarding child ownership can be very different between individuals and groups, resulting in culture shock. On the other hand, people who choose childfree can experience culture shock because they find a pro-natalistic and pro-parenting perspective. Feeling isolated, blamed, or feeling like their choices are not recognized or rewarded leads to negative reactions such as anger or loneliness, which interfere with cognitive health. Conversely, people who are pro-natalistic can experience culture shock when they find people who choose to be childfree. In the midst of social pressure, he may feel the need to maintain his beliefs in order to accept the decision, or he may be confused and misunderstood by the choice which leads to negative reactions such as frustration or disappointment, as well as causing conflict in social relationships. Therefore, when a couple decides to be childfree, the phenomenon can be considered a socio-cultural change that changes the situation and conditions of society. Internal and external factors that affect society, such as changes in norms, principles, technology, and the environment, can lead to socio-cultural changes.

Individual desire for something is one of the internal factors that affect the individual's perception of an issue. The three main issues discussed in biopsychology research are: the relationship between the mind, body, and brain; the role of nature and nurture; and, codes of ethics in research and career opportunities in relevant fields. Biopsychology is a field of research and the perspective of biological aspects will be used to study childfree problems from the perspective of biopsychology. Biological explanations of behavior are used to anticipate general understandings that are not based on certain theories or logic.

### **Physiological Explanation**

Physiological explanation examines a study of the relationship between behavior and activity of the brain and other organs. Reproductive health contributes to mental, social, and physical well-being. Having children is accepted as a psychological, biological, social, and cultural need for almost every community. Because of cultural expectations, couples think about how many children they want and when they want them rather than considering whether the couple can have children. The phase of readiness of the female reproductive organs and the view of pregnancy as a component of a woman's well-being and a way to manifest her maternal instincts (Lutkiewicz et al., 2023). In Indonesia, infertility is considered embarrassing and is often associated with societal myths, some of which involve troubling supernatural forces. This situation can affect the couple's mental well-being, highlighting the need for support from a variety of sources, with a particular emphasis on family.

### **Ontogenetic Explanation**

Ontogenetic explanation is the study of behaviors influenced by genes, nutrition, experiences, and interactions. Couples who do not have children include their options for childfree. This phenomenon is currently a discussion closely related to reproduction. Spouse childfree Holding the perspective that assuming the role of a parent is a conscious decision, which includes not only the fulfillment but also the challenges associated with parenthood. In developed countries, the increasing number of women involved in careers and the pursuit of self-interest plays an important role in choosing life childfree. Women who choose to childfree consider their decisions as freedom in various aspects of life, even if they still experience the natural instincts of motherhood, such as showing affection when interacting with young children. Other facts besides childfree There are people who are forced to have no children because childless. In addition, one considers a woman's choice to childfree Because of its reproductive health where each person has different reproductive organs and has the possibility if they have problems and refer to certain diseases. This means that a woman has the freedom to choose childfree because he is responsible for his own body. In Indonesia, living and growing up in a country that holds tightly to Eastern culture, the decision to SquirrelSquirt It is not considered the right thing to do, especially if a person already has the intention and is happy to become a mother or parent in the future (Nikma, 2024).

### **Evolutionary Explanation**

Evolutionary explanation is a study shaped by history and evolution. Every socio-cultural phenomenon must be comprehensively understood because it is considered part of the socio-cultural dynamics that are always changing and

evolving. Therefore, the phenomenon childfree as Culture Shock should be viewed in a broader cultural context, encompassing social norms and prevailing societal values. In Indonesia, the traditional idea that having children for a married couple is a moral responsibility that must be fulfilled is still very strong. However, in recent years there has been a change in more and more young couples who choose not to have children at all or postpone marriage. This is due to the increased cost of living, reproductive health, difficulty in obtaining adequate housing, and increased awareness of environmental problems. In addition, having children occurs because the status and existence of women are only measured by the number of offspring produced. Thus, women have the personal freedom to make their own decisions and have no threat to their children as the times develop.

### **Functional Explanation**

Functional explanation is a study of behavior that is formed based on its benefits. In the psychological literature, results childfree considered a defense against trauma or unpleasant life. Despite this, women are more often influenced by other people's parenting models, see parenting as the opposite of work and leisure, claim that they lack maternal instincts, and men are more likely to refuse to be parents than women because of the sacrifices they face, including costs. Identify two distinct but interrelated reasons for choosing childfree, is an attraction for childfree and the refusal to be a mother. The first reason, characterized by freedom and better relationships with others, while the second reason involves loss of identity and rejection of activities with the mother. Although it has a negative impact, some studies have found something different. People who choose childfree rate their married life as highly qualified and happy, and have a closer relationship with their partner, family, and friends (Höglund and Hildingsson, 2023). Married couples consider themselves as one because of the feeling of belonging to each other, which is used to overcome the absence of children. In addition, a person may choose not to have children because they feel more financially wealthy

Maslow's humanistic perspective always emphasizes great expectations for humans because it allows the optimization of human internal potential (Masbur, 2015). Maslow's thought, known as humanistic psychology, is in tune with problems childfree. According to Syamsu and Nurihsan, humanism can be defined as a theoretical orientation that emphasizes unique human qualities. This is mainly related to freedom (freewill) and the ability to develop oneself. Like creativity, love, solitude, and self-development, humanistic psychologists focus on things that are very important to humans. Abraham Maslow constructed his theory of motivation based on hierarchy. This theory is better known as Maslow's Needs Hierarchy Theory or Theory of Human Motivation.

### **Physical and Biological Needs**

Humans are biological creatures because they need food and physical activities such as increasing the number of offspring (Myrtati & Joseph, 2019). Maslow emphasized that physiological needs are the most basic needs among other needs. Thus, this concept is in line with the goal of building a family, which is to increase the number of offspring according to human nature (Cornellia et al., 2022). However, the meaning of family is changing, and having children or offspring is no longer considered an important thing that must exist. In fact, for some people, having children will signal the possibility of new mental and financial problems. Means ChildFree Train shifting human nature in physiological needs in the context of the potential emergence of economic problems. In addition, because humans must multiply offspring as biological beings, the absence of children is considered an obstacle for humans to carry out their nature.

### **Safety and Security Needs**

According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, parents are responsible for keeping their children safe and secure. This is in line with the idea that the presence of children brings a lot of responsibility, so some parents are afraid that they will not be able to maintain trust and it is better to live happily with their partner (Asta, 2021). In addition, some people who care about the environment believe that having children will help reduce the burden on the world's population and minimize the environmental impact of human consumption and pollution so that the environment and the residence are maintained.

### **Affiliation or Acceptance Needs**

Human nature as a social or social creature who cannot live alone and must live among others (Dedi & Diananta, 2018). To meet their social needs, humans need to interact with others, which leads to marriage, family formation, and friendship (City, 2020). Maslow defined this need as the need to be loved and loved in his social community. However, there are some people who prefer to focus their attention on the relationship with their current partner or family rather than expanding their family by having children.

### Esteem Status Needs

Some people choose childfree because they are worried about their mental and physical health if they have children. According to Maslow's theory, the need to be appreciated can be described as the feeling that we need the trust and responsibility of others. To achieve individual happiness fully having children is not a measure of happiness (Cornellia et al., 2022).

### Self-actualization

Everyone has the right to have their own perspective and life decisions because having children is a human right, childfree is not something that can be forced. This is the reason why childfree is optional (Tiara, 2022). Consideration childfree is a legitimate life choice because they want to pursue a career or other activity without considering the responsibilities of parenthood. In addition, feminism and the rush of work raise concerns that children whose mothers are career women will not be well taken care of (Cornellia et al., 2022). Thus, consideration childfree related Self-actualization correlates with the ability to prove oneself to others.

It is difficult to remove the stigma of one's own society about childfree in Indonesia. This is due to the strong culture of collectivism in Indonesia, which is something that is unacceptable to be considered a state childfree. Collectivism is a culture where people have feelings, beliefs, and intentions to behave with others and care about them. In addition, there are several reasons. First, the inheritance must be passed on to the heir, or his children. Second, the clan must be passed down through lineage, because in some Indonesian cultures, the clan name is a symbol of social status and pride. In addition, the differences between rural communities (rural) and urban (urban) gradual. An independent system is one of the characteristics that distinguishes urban and rural communities. Bahlan is sometimes said to be at odds in addressing problems and resource opportunities because they have different social structures, social functions, and social processes (Dzakia & Maemonah, 2023). Therefore, the idea of being childfree is very difficult to apply in a country that maintains a culture of collectivism. This becomes more difficult because Indonesia is a very religious country, with each of its scriptures talking about family and having descendants (Zhafira et al., 2024).

### CONCLUSION

The childfree phenomenon can be considered a form of culture shock. In a biopsychological perspective, an individual's decision to be childfree can be caused by the individual's reproductive health related to the psychological aspects of the individual as well as his or her environment. The humanistic perspective states that childfree is a representation of freewill and the potential for self-development. On the other hand, Indonesian culture that is synonymous with collectivism develops a negative stigma so that childfree is difficult to accept. Future research should examine prevalence, characteristics, and experiences of childfree individuals across diverse Indonesian ethnic groups, socioeconomic levels, and geographic regions; investigating longitudinal trajectories of childfree decision-making, life satisfaction, and wellbeing across the adult lifespan.

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