



No kids, no problems: exploring the lived experiences of child-free Filipino Millennials

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Abstract – This qualitative study addresses the problem of understanding the motivations, experiences, and influencing factors behind Filipino Millennials' decision to remain child-free. This choice directly challenges the Philippines' strong cultural emphasis on procreation and familial responsibility. Employing a phenomenological design within an interpretivist paradigm and a qualitative approach, the research utilised in-depth semi-structured interviews with thirteen purposefully selected child-free married Filipino Millennials to gather rich, detailed data. Thematic analysis was systematically applied, revealing that motivations for childfree living primarily stemmed from career aspirations, significant financial considerations, and a strong desire for personal freedom and autonomy. Participants consistently navigated considerable societal pressure rooted in deeply ingrained pro-natalist norms, particularly from immediate family and community members, which often led to feelings of judgment and misunderstanding. In response, they developed various strategies for setting boundaries, including clear and assertive communication of their choice, and at times, selective avoidance of interactions that might lead to criticism or unsolicited advice.

Furthermore, participants demonstrated proactive and meticulous engagement in planning for a childfree future, emphasising their commitment to financial security and building robust, non-traditional support networks to ensure their well-being in later life. The results consistently indicated that despite external challenges, participants experienced a profound sense of self-determination and fulfillment in their decision. Ultimately, this study sheds light on the evolving concepts of adulthood and parenthood within the unique Philippine context, offering valuable insights into the intricate intersection of generational values, individual identity, and prevailing social norms with deeply personal reproductive choices. These findings contribute significantly to the growing national and global discourse on reproductive autonomy and the acceptance of diverse life paths in contemporary Filipino society.

Keywords: Child-free, Filipino Millennials, Parenthood, Societal pressure, Coping mechanisms, Family planning, Non-traditional family

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I. INTRODUCTION

THE PHENOMENON of individuals and couples intentionally choosing not to have children, known as being "childfree," is gaining increasing recognition. This concept, formally introduced in 1972, distinctly separates the deliberate decision to forgo parenthood from "childlessness," which typically refers to an inability to conceive (Yazid et al., 2023). While earlier research often confined the absence of children to involuntary "childlessness," the terms "childfree" and "childless-by-choice" emerged to emphasise the volitional nature of this lifestyle (Stahnke et al., 2020). Across contemporary developed societies, declining fertility rates, delayed childbearing, and increased lifetime childlessness reflect a profound transformation in family dynamics (Maříková, 2021).

Historically, choosing not to have children was often stigmatised as a form of social deviance (Blackstone & Stewart, 2012). Despite parenting remaining a prevalent norm, many individuals opt out of parenthood (Sakman, 2021). Although childfree choices are becoming more normalised, with reduced negative judgment from society, individuals who embark on this path still encounter various challenges (Zapanta et al., 2023). Culturally, especially in societies where children are highly valued, motherhood is frequently viewed as integral to a

woman's identity and the very definition of family (Relon, 2018). This societal emphasis has historically led to the marginalisation of women who choose not to have children (Doyle et al., 2013). Furthermore, a common societal belief posits that a meaningful and fulfilling life is achieved exclusively through parenthood, potentially leading to distress and inadequacy for those who do not pursue this path (Blackstone & Stewart, 2012; Claney, 2024). Negative views toward childfree individuals often stem from this assumption that happiness is exclusive to parenthood (Chehreh et al., 2021).

In the Philippines, a nation deeply rooted in strong family-centric cultural values where kinship and procreation are traditionally central, the emergence of childfree couples presents a notable challenge to long-held familial views. The decision to have children is generally considered the expected norm following marriage. However, there remains a significant gap in understanding the specific lived experiences, motivations, and contextual factors influencing married Filipino millennials who choose to remain childfree.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is grounded in anti-natalism. While anti-natalist sentiments have existed for centuries found in ancient philosophies, the term "anti-natalism" in its current philosophical usage began gaining wider recognition in the 2000s. Théophile de Giraud popularised it in

his 2006 book *L'art de guillotiner les procréateurs* (de Giraud, 2006), while David Benatar's *Better Never to Have Been* (2006) provided a scholarly foundation. However, the *Oxford English Dictionary* notes that the term dates to the 1960s (Oxford University Press, n.d.). Moreover, it referred to population control policies like China's One-Child Policy, not the contemporary anti-procreation stance (Morioka, 2021). This philosophy challenges the pro-natalist view, positing that having children is morally problematic. Proponents argue against bringing new lives into existence due to the potential for suffering, the lack of consent from the unborn, or the belief that creating sentient beings is inherently negative (Benatar, 2006, as cited in Brown, 2020). Hence, some advocate for directing resources toward improving the well-being of existing individuals. While related, environmental concerns for not having children, as promoted by organisations like Population Matters, differ from strict anti-natalism; they focus on human population sustainability rather than extinction (Griffin, 2019).

Benatar's argument for anti-natalism is a prominent perspective, asserting that coming into existence is inherently harmful (Karuga et al., 2022). His justification centers on the asymmetry between life's positives and negatives, contending that suffering often outweighs pleasure, even in seemingly comfortable lives. Benatar's argument includes two sub-arguments: the *asymmetry argument*, which states that the absence of harm is good even when not experienced, while the absence of benefit is not bad unless there is somebody for whom its absence is a deprivation; and a *quality of life argument*, which asserts that even lives typically regarded as good are burdened by suffering and psychological biases such that people tend to overestimate life's positives and underestimate its negatives (Benatar, 2006). Recent discussions on anti-natalism have been fueled by worsening environmental conditions, social challenges, global mental health decline, and pandemics (Karuga et al., 2022). Anti-natalist policies, aimed at reducing birth rates, have been implemented in countries like China, India, and Nigeria to manage rapid population growth.

The concept of anti-natalism provides a crucial theoretical backdrop for contextualising their experiences. The philosophical stance that birth is inherently harmful offers a radical counterpoint to the societal pro-natalist norms often encountered by child-free individuals, particularly in a culturally pro-natalist country like the Philippines. Understanding anti-natalism helps to delineate the motivations of the study's participants, distinguishing their personal lifestyle choice from a moral or philosophical imperative against procreation. For instance, while a child-free individual might cite financial stability or personal freedom as reasons for their choice, an anti-natalist fundamentally believes that bringing any sentient being into a world rife with suffering is morally objectionable. Therefore, examining anti-natalism within the context of this study allows for a deeper appreciation of the spectrum of reasons for not having children, from personal preference to a principled ethical stance. It also highlights the diverse challenges and societal pressures faced by those who deviate from traditional familial expectations. Furthermore, this distinction underscores the varying degrees of agency and conviction behind the decision to forgo parenthood, enriching the nuanced understanding of a complex social phenomenon.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

Shifting Norms and Societal Perceptions of Childfree Lifestyles

Historically, voluntary childlessness was often characterised as social deviance (Blackstone & Stewart, 2012). However, there is a growing normalisation of childfree choices, with couples facing less negative judgment from society (Zapanta et al., 2023). This shift is reflected in the rise of childfree influencers and online communities, indicating evolving cultural expectations around parenthood (Savage, 2023). Despite increasing acceptance, childfree couples face various challenges (Zapanta et al., 2023).

Traditional cultural values often intertwine motherhood with womanhood and family identity (Relon, 2018). Scientific disciplines, including psychology and medicine, have historically reinforced this

link, inadvertently marginalising women who choose not to have children (Doyle et al., 2013). A widespread societal belief persists that a meaningful life is only achieved through parenthood, though recent studies confirm that the expectation of having children can lead to significant emotional distress and feelings of inadequacy (Stahnke et al., 2020; Cloney, 2024). Childfree women are often labeled selfish for their decision. Beyond societal judgment, childless couples frequently encounter communication difficulties with friends who have children (Balén & Bos, 2009). While parenthood can bring joy, it also entails fatigue and conflicts, and negative views towards child-free individuals often stem from an assumption that true happiness is exclusive to parenthood (Chehreh et al., 2021).

Motivations and demographic trends in childfree choices

Generational differences significantly influence views on childbearing, with millennials increasingly committing to childfree married lives, driven by their familiarity with digital technology and a globalised worldview (Anis et al., 2024; Ramadan et al., 2023). Health concerns, lack of childcare experience, and feelings of parental unsuitability are reported motivations for remaining childfree (Anis et al., 2024; Höglund & Hildingsson, 2022). The age at which men transition to parenthood is also rising, with their choices shaped by internal motivations and external influences, despite growing societal acceptance (Smith et al., 2019; Kyzlinková & Šťastná, 2018, as cited in Maříková, 2021).

Recent studies highlighted a global trend towards remaining childfree. A 2021 Pew Research Center survey found 44% of non-parents aged 18-49 in the United States do not intend to have children, primarily due to personal choice (Savage, 2023). Similar trends are observed in the United Kingdom, where over half of childless British adults aged 35-44 do not plan to have children (Savage, 2023). Financial considerations are a significant factor, with nearly 38% of childfree millennials citing the high costs of raising children (El Issa, 2024). Environmental concerns, including climate change, influence reproductive choices among millennials (Green, 2021). This childfree trend is evident not only in Western countries but also in collectivist Asian societies like Japan and South Korea, which have experienced historic lows in birth rates (Neal & Neal, 2023; Yonathan & Primadini, 2023).

Further reasons for being childfree include career aspirations, a desire for personal freedom, lack of a partner, and age (Ramadan et al., 2023). Minkin et al. (2024) indicate that younger individuals are more likely to cite simply not wanting children (57%) compared to older individuals (31%), alongside a stronger preference for focusing on careers and personal interests (44% vs. 21%), and greater concerns about the state of the world and environmental issues (Minkin et al., 2024). Access to affordable and long-acting contraceptives has also contributed to millennials' ability to postpone pregnancy (Dam, 2023). The feminist movement has significantly impacted women's aspirations for career progression, autonomy, and life choices, further influencing childfree trends globally (Nimah & Tahir, 2024).

Childfree experience in the Philippine context

In the Philippines, a country where family is a central cultural value, the emergence of childfree couples challenges traditional views of family, which are deeply characterised by loyalty, respect, and kinship (Cabonce et al., 2019). Religious spirituality also plays a significant role, leading Filipinos often to view fertility and pregnancy through a religious lens, with infertility sometimes seen as "God's plan" (Liamzon et al., 2021). Modernisation and globalisation have profoundly influenced younger Filipino generations, leading to a departure from traditional norms and contributing to modern family challenges (Redillas, 2024).

The increasing prevalence of the childfree lifestyle in the Philippines is evident in online discussions and local studies (Arnaldo, 2019, as cited in Cabonce et al., 2019). Childfree couples in the Philippines have been found to defy common stereotypes (Cabonce et al., 2019). The Philippine Statistics Authority (2022) reports that the country's fertility rate has fallen below the replacement level, with nearly half of married women

aged 15-49 desiring no more children or preferring to delay pregnancies.

Choosing to be childfree impacts both society and an individual's lifestyle. Zapanta et al. (2023) describe this as being "positively child-free" for women who do not see themselves suited for motherhood. Despite growing acceptance, openly disliking children remains a significant social stigma. While policymakers in many countries promote higher birth rates, couples often choose not to have children due to various political, economic, and cultural factors (Ahmadzadeh et al., 2023). In the Philippines, cultural pressure to have children remains palpable, leading to challenges for childless couples (Zapanta et al., 2023). Research indicates that the childfree lifestyle in the Philippines is rarely discussed and often attracts mixed reactions, with Filipino Millennials' decisions influenced by upbringing, personal experiences, financial considerations, and the pursuit of life satisfaction, alongside facing stereotyping and criticism (Anis et al., 2024). In Filipino culture, having children is often equated with success and fulfillment, leading to skepticism and criticism for those who deviate from this norm (Malasig, 2023). The decision to have children requires careful consideration, and a growing awareness among Gen Z and millennials to challenge traditional expectations is shaping a more progressive societal future (Tendido, 2021).

IV. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study aims to explore the lived experiences of married Filipino millennials who choose to remain childfree. Specifically, it seeks to identify their primary motivations for this decision, examine the unique challenges they encounter, and understand how societal norms and perceptions influence their childfree lifestyle within the Philippine cultural context.

V. METHODS

Research approach

This study employed a qualitative research approach. This approach was chosen to deeply explore the "lived experiences" of married Filipino millennials who have chosen to remain childfree. As employed in this study, a qualitative approach involves an in-depth exploration of human experiences, perspectives, and behaviours within their natural settings (Creswell, 2013). Unlike quantitative research that focuses on numerical data and statistical analysis, qualitative research aims to understand the "why" and "how" behind phenomena, gathering rich, descriptive data through methods like interviews, observations, or focus groups (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This methodology is critically important to the study because it allows for a nuanced understanding of their complex and deeply personal motivations, challenges, and lived realities, which cannot be adequately captured through numerical measurements. It enables researchers to delve into the subjective meanings individuals attach to their child-free choices, uncover underlying cultural pressures, and explore the intricate social dynamics at play. Ultimately, a qualitative approach provides a comprehensive and empathetic portrayal of these individuals' experiences, offering insights vital for a holistic understanding of this emerging demographic in a pro-natalist society.

Research paradigm

The research explicitly employed an interpretivist paradigm. This qualitative approach is fundamental to comprehending subjective human experiences. Interpretivism assumes that reality is subjective, multiple, and socially constructed, meaning that an individual's reality can only be understood through their unique experience, which is shaped by their historical and social perspective. It focuses on understanding individuals' subjective meanings, beliefs, motivations, and reasoning within their social context, rather than seeking a single objective truth (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The interpretivist paradigm is crucial for this study as it centers on understanding individuals' subjective meanings and lived experiences within their unique social and cultural contexts. In the Philippines, where deeply ingrained pro-

natalist norms exist, this approach allows for a profound exploration of why Filipino Millennials consciously choose a child-free lifestyle, moving beyond mere description to uncover their motivations and reasoning.

Research design

This study utilised a phenomenological research design, a qualitative approach centered on understanding and describing the common meaning of a phenomenon as individuals encounter it. This design facilitates an in-depth investigation into the participants' subjective meanings, motivations, and perceptions, aiming to capture the essence of their realities without imposing pre-conceived notions (Creswell, 2013). For this study, a phenomenological design is crucial because it directly aligns with exploring the complex narratives of married Filipino millennials who have consciously chosen to remain childfree. This approach enables researchers to gain deep, nuanced insights into the participants' motivations, the societal and cultural influences they navigate, and their unique strategies for managing pressures related to their childfree path. By concentrating on subjective accounts, this design strengthens the section by providing a rich and profound understanding of a deeply personal and context-dependent phenomenon, which would be inaccessible through other research methodologies.

Data collection instruments

Individual semi-structured interviews

This study used semi-structured individual interviews, a qualitative data collection method that combines a set of predetermined questions with the flexibility to explore emerging themes or delve deeper into participants' responses (Howitt & Shelton, 2017). This approach was employed in the study to allow for an in-depth investigation into the subjective meanings and motivations of the participants, ensuring coverage of key themes while adapting to individual narratives. The interview guide featured three main questions, each accompanied by three to five sub-questions, designed to explore participants' motivations for choosing a childfree lifestyle, the influence of societal, cultural, and personal factors on their decision, and their coping mechanisms for societal pressure. Given the exploratory nature of the study and the desire to uncover nuanced insights, all questions used in the interviews were open-ended. This direct engagement allowed the collection of rich, detailed narratives critical for a phenomenological understanding. All interviews were recorded with participant consent.

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

Following the individual interviews, this study used FGDs to triangulate findings. FGDs are a qualitative method gathering small groups for interactive discussions on a specific topic (Krueger & Casey, 2015). The participants comprised six (equally split male and female), though eight were initially targeted. This size is recommended for balancing diverse perspectives with comfortable sharing, as larger groups can inhibit open communication. The FGD was conducted via Zoom to triangulate and validate findings from individual interviews. Sessions began with the researcher reintroducing the study and establishing ground rules. Participants also engaged in introductions. This approach fostered a socially oriented environment, enabling collective validation and deeper exploration of themes while efficiently gathering additional data. The discussion took place on March 30, 2025, in which the researcher presented the themes derived from individual interviews. Participants were then asked to rank these themes based on relevance and share their opinions, providing a collective validation and deeper insight into the emergent findings.

Participants

The participants in this study were 13 married Filipino millennials who consciously decided to remain childfree. While the exact number of participants for the individual interviews is detailed in the biographies of participants (Table 1), the focus group discussion involved six participants, equally split between males and females. Participants were selected based on their adherence to the definition of being childfree and their marital status within the millennial age range.

Research site

The research site for this study was the Philippines, with the general population consisting of married Filipino Millennials. The study was conducted through online interviews, a method that allowed the inclusion of participants residing in various regions across the country and overcame geographical constraints. Participants were from diverse locations, including Baguio City, Butuan City, Benguet, La Union, Cavite, and Bulacan. This approach ensured that the study captured a broader range of lived experiences and perspectives from different parts of the Philippines, strengthening the contextual understanding of the childfree phenomenon within the archipelago.

Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis was systematically applied to identify and report patterns (themes) within the qualitative data. This rigorous process began with the researcher meticulously coding each interview transcript, a crucial step that involved identifying key concepts, recurring phrases, and significant statements directly relevant to the research questions. Following this initial coding phase, these granular codes were organised into broader, more abstract themes, reflecting underlying patterns and meanings (Braun & Clark, 2013). Several iterative cycles of reviewing and refining these themes were conducted, ensuring they were well-defined, distinct, accurate, and comprehensively aligned with the nuances in the raw data.

Once themes were established from individual interviews, they were presented and discussed during the Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). This served a dual purpose: it allowed participants to validate the emergent themes from their collective lived experiences and provided nuanced perspectives that further enriched the interpretation. This use of FGDs acted as a robust form of methodological triangulation, a crucial strategy in bolstering the credibility and trustworthiness of the results by cross-referencing findings from different data collection methods.

Beyond triangulation, trustworthiness was also ensured through the meticulous development of the interview guide, which underwent a stringent validation process by a panel of experts. This expert review included evaluating the guide using a Content Validity Ratio, confirming that all questions were relevant, clear, and valid for thoroughly exploring the study's objectives. To actively avoid bias in interpreting and presenting results, the researcher maintained a reflexive journal throughout the data analysis process, documenting personal assumptions and potential influences. Furthermore, to protect participant confidentiality and encourage authentic responses, pseudonyms were consistently used during transcription and in all research outputs, and a comprehensive informed consent form clearly outlined participants' rights and the voluntary nature of their involvement, fostering a trusting and open environment.

Ethical considerations

Before initiating data collection, the University of the Cordilleras Ethics Committee secured ethical approval for the study, ensuring all research procedures met established ethical standards. Informed consent was meticulously obtained from every participant. It involved thoroughly briefing them on the study's purpose, their right to voluntary participation, and their unrestricted ability to withdraw at any point without facing any negative repercussions. Strict confidentiality was maintained throughout the research process to safeguard participant privacy and trust. All shared information was utilised solely for academic research purposes. Furthermore, pseudonyms were consistently employed during transcription and in all research outputs to protect participant identities, ensuring that no personal identifiers were ever revealed. The study rigorously adhered to all ethical guidelines for research involving human participants, with a paramount focus on prioritising their well-being and rights at every stage of the research process. All collected data will be securely retained for five years for academic and documentation purposes. Following this retention period, all physical copies of the data will be securely destroyed through shredding, and all digital files will be permanently

deleted, ensuring that no personal identifiers remain.

VI. RESULTS

Biographic results

Table 1. Biographic results of the Participants

Participants	Gender	Age	Years of Marriage	Occupation
*Participant A	Female	31	2 years	Engineer
*Participant B	Male	30	2 years	Call Center
Participant C	Male	31	3 years	Instructor
Participant D	Female	32	3 years	Virtual Assistant
Participant E	Male	40	3 years	Artistic Director
*Participant F	Male	33	4 years	Health Programme Officer
Participant G	Female	37	3 years	Virtual Assistant
Participant H	Female	29	1 month	Human Resource Advisor
*Participant I	Female	30	4 years	Virtual Assistant
*Participant J	Female	30	1 year	Social Media Marketer
Participant K	Female	30	9 years	Teacher
*Participant L	Male	31	3 years	Farmer
Participant M	Female	29	1 year	Virtual Assistant

**Participated in the focus group discussion*

Lived experiences of married Filipino millennials who have chosen a childfree lifestyle: Motivations for childfree living

Participants' decisions to remain childfree stemmed from personal and practical considerations. Career aspirations were prominent, with individuals prioritising professional growth and development. As one participant expressed

"My career is just taking off, and I cannot imagine pausing that for a baby right now. It is my priority." (Participant A).

Financial considerations also played a significant role, as participants expressed concerns about the escalating costs associated with raising children.

"We looked at the expenses, and honestly, we just do not think we can comfortably afford to raise a child how we would want to" (Participant M).

The desire for personal freedom and autonomy was another strong motivator, enabling them to pursue personal interests, travel, and maintain a lifestyle unconstrained by parental responsibilities. For some, there was simply a lack of innate desire or perceived suitability for parenthood, as one participant noted,

"I honestly just do not have that innate desire to be a mother" (Participant K).

Navigating societal pressure

Childfree married Filipino millennials frequently encountered significant societal pressure to conform to pro-natalist norms. This manifested as expectations rooted in traditional roles and gender norms, where motherhood is often conflated with womanhood, leading to immense pressure, particularly on female participants.

"At every family gathering, I was always asked, 'When are you giving us a grandchild?' It is exhausting" (Participant B).

Participants faced direct social pressure from family, friends, and community members who questioned their decision, often expressing sentiments related to the "biological clock" and a perceived "societal timeline" for having children. This often led to feelings of judgment and stigma, with childfree individuals being labeled as selfish or irresponsible for deviating from conventional expectations.

"Some people just assume we were selfish. It is frustrating to defend your life choices constantly," (Participant M).

Strategies for setting boundaries

Participants developed various strategies for setting boundaries to manage external pressures and unsolicited opinions. These included practicing clear communication and assertiveness in articulating their choice to others.

"We have learned to be very direct but polite. We just say, 'That was not something we were planning for our lives'" (Participant C).

Some opted for more passive approaches, such as ignoring unsolicited opinions.

In contrast, others adopted an unconflictual approach or

employed avoidance tactics to minimise interactions that might lead to criticism or judgment. One participant said,

"Sometimes, you just have to smile and nod. It was not worth the argument" (Participant G).

Planning for a childfree future

Looking ahead, participants demonstrated proactive engagement in planning for their future without children. This involved meticulous considerations for financial security and overall preparedness for old age.

"We were investing heavily in our retirement and making sure we have a solid financial plan, so we do not become a burden" (Participant K).

A key aspect of their future planning revolved around building and maintaining robust support networks and social connections, acknowledging the importance of non-traditional support systems in the absence of offspring.

"Our friends are our family. We plan to grow old together and support each other," (Participant Z).

This highlighted their thoughtful approach to ensuring well-being and community in their later years.

VII. DISCUSSION

This study explored the lived experiences of married Filipino millennials who have chosen a childfree lifestyle, shedding light on their motivations, societal pressures, coping strategies, and future planning. The findings resonate with existing literature on voluntary childlessness while offering unique insights into the Philippine cultural context, further enriching the discourse through Anti-natalism and Social Identity Theory lenses.

The motivations for child-free living identified in this study, namely, career aspirations, financial considerations, the desire for personal freedom and autonomy, and health concerns or a perceived unsuitability for parenthood, align with broader global trends (El Issa, 2024; Ramadan et al., 2023; Nugroho, 2023). The emphasis on career and personal freedom reflects a growing individualisation and a departure from traditional life scripts, particularly among millennials who prioritise self-fulfillment and professional advancement (Nimah & Tahir, 2024). From an Anti-natalist perspective, these motivations can be implicitly linked to the desire to avoid potential suffering or burdens associated with parenthood, whether financial, emotional, or physical (Benatar, 2006, as cited in Brown, 2020). By choosing not to procreate, participants are, in a sense, optimising their existing lives and well-being, aligning with the Anti-natalist argument that resources should be directed towards enhancing the lives of those already living (Räsänen & Häyry, 2023). The frank acknowledgment of not feeling "cut out for parenting" also resonates with a responsible, albeit implicit, Anti-natalist stance of avoiding potential harm to a child through inadequate parenting.

The experience of navigating societal pressure is a central theme, highlighting the persistent pro-natalist norms, particularly in the Philippines. Blackstone and Stewart (2012) noted that voluntary childlessness was historically characterised as social deviance, and despite a global trend towards normalisation (Zapanta et al., 2023; Savage, 2023), this study confirms that such stigma persists. In the Philippine context, the pressure is amplified by deeply ingrained cultural values that equate family and procreation with success and fulfillment (Malasig, 2023). The conflation of motherhood with womanhood, as described by Relon (2018) and reinforced by scientific disciplines (Doyle et al., 2013), creates immense pressure on female participants. This societal expectation, that a meaningful life is achieved solely through parenthood (Claney, 2024), leads to childfree individuals being labeled as "selfish" or "incomplete," mirroring findings from Stahnke et al. (2020) and Chehreh et al. (2021).

These experiences can be profoundly understood through Social Identity Theory. The dominant pro-natalist society forms a powerful "in-group" that defines "normal" and "successful" life paths. By deviating from this norm, childfree individuals become an "out-group,"

subjected to social comparison and often negative stereotyping (McLeod, 2023). The constant questioning and judgment ("When are you giving us a grandchild?") serve as mechanisms by which the in-group attempts to reinforce its identity and pressure conformity. The participants' exhaustion and frustration underscore the psychological toll of being perceived as deviating from the collective social identity. The generational shift observed (Anis et al., 2024), where millennials increasingly challenge traditional expectations (Tendido, 2021), indicates a potential redefinition of social identity within this demographic. However, the friction with older, more traditional in-groups remains evident.

Developing strategies for setting boundaries demonstrates the participants' active agency in managing these social pressures. Clear communication and assertiveness reflect a conscious effort to define and protect their identity against external imposition, a key aspect of individual agency within the framework of Social Identity Theory. By articulating their choice firmly, they assert their self-concept and resist the pressure to internalise the dominant group's norms (McLeod, 2023). Conversely, adopting passive responses or avoidance tactics highlights the practical challenges of confrontation in a collectivist society where maintaining harmony is often valued. While seemingly less assertive, these strategies are still forms of boundary setting, allowing participants to navigate social interactions while preserving their mental well-being.

Finally, planning for a childfree future reveals a pragmatic and proactive approach to life without children. Participants' meticulous financial planning and commitment to building robust support networks align with the need for childfree couples to actively create their sense of community and security, as highlighted by Salgado and Magalhães (2024). This forward-looking orientation reflects a thoughtful consideration of long-term well-being, demonstrating that a childfree life is not merely an absence of children but a deliberate construction of a fulfilling existence. The emphasis on "chosen family" and non-traditional support systems further illustrates the evolving definition of family, moving beyond biological ties to strong social connections. This concept challenges traditional Filipino family structures (Cabonce et al., 2019). This proactive planning can also be seen as a manifestation of self-efficacy, a core concept in Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 2001), where individuals believe in their ability to shape their future and overcome potential challenges without relying on traditional family support.

While this study provides valuable qualitative insights into the lived experiences of married Filipino millennials choosing a childfree lifestyle, it is not without limitations. The sample size, typical of qualitative phenomenological studies, limits the generalisability of the findings. Future research could employ quantitative methods with larger, more diverse samples to explore the prevalence and statistical correlations of these motivations and experiences across different demographics in the Philippines. Comparative studies examining childfree experiences across various regions or socioeconomic strata within the Philippines would also offer richer insights. Furthermore, longitudinal studies could track childfree couples' long-term adjustments and life satisfaction over time.

VIII. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, the following conclusions are drawn regarding the lived experiences of married Filipino millennials who have chosen to remain childfree:

A complex interplay of financial concerns, career aspirations, distinct lifestyle preferences, and formative childhood experiences primarily shapes Filipino millennials' decision to remain childfree. These factors collectively reinforce their deliberate desire to live intentionally without children. Also, the childfree choice among Filipino millennials serves as a clear indication of how deeply ingrained societal expectations and traditional cultural gender norms are actively challenged. This generation prioritises personal autonomy and pursuing self-defined life paths over conventional reproductive roles. Moreover, childfree

Filipino millennials effectively cope with the persistent societal pressure by firmly standing by their personal decision, maintaining open and supportive communication with their partners, and actively seeking and finding validation and support through communities composed of like-minded individuals.

IX. RECOMMENDATIONS

Building on this study's findings, public health professionals and reproductive health advocates should develop and implement inclusive family planning initiatives that validate childfree choices as legitimate reproductive paths, moving beyond a solely pro-natalist focus. This approach will also contribute to more accurate demographic forecasting and ensure resource allocation aligns with evolving population trends and diverse life choices. Simultaneously, economic planners and policymakers are encouraged to consider the implications of the growing childfree trend on long-term economic projections. Understanding how these choices impact consumer behaviours, spending patterns, savings, and investments is crucial for adapting economic strategies and developing policies that account for diverse family structures and their economic contributions, ultimately ensuring societal well-being and stability. Furthermore, community leaders and organisations should strive to foster more socially inclusive environments that embrace and support diverse family structures, including childfree individuals and couples. Developing initiatives that promote understanding and acceptance of various life paths can help reduce stigma and create a more welcoming social landscape, addressing the unique social needs of all community members. This foundational qualitative exploration also prompts future researchers to conduct quantitative studies to assess the prevalence and statistical significance of childfree motivations and challenges across larger, more diverse Filipino populations. Longitudinal studies would be beneficial to track the long-term life satisfaction, well-being, and social integration of childfree individuals. In contrast, comparative studies across different regions or socioeconomic groups within the Philippines, and cross-cultural comparisons with other collectivist societies, would further enrich the academic discourse.

X. CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There are no conflicts of interest in this article.

XI. DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data are available upon request.

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