



Coping with stigma: Factors and experiences influencing millennial individuals' decision to remain child-free

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Abstract

While parenthood norms are associated with satisfaction and a lead of good and fulfilling life, there are still an increasing number of individuals choosing not to have children. This study explored the experiences of childfree millennial individuals and examines the factors that influence their decision not to have children. Voluntary childlessness or “child-free” individuals face a substantial amount of stigma from society. The study explored how these individuals respond to stigmatizing toward the decision to remain child-free. To uncover these insights, the study employed both quantitative and qualitative data to gain a comprehensive understanding of this phenomenon. A total of fifty (50) respondents from Lucena City, Sariaya, and Candelaria, Quezon in the Philippines participated in the survey and ten (10) randomly selected individuals were interviewed to enrich the findings with personal experiences. Quantitative data were analyzed using Weighted Mean, Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), and Factor Analysis, while qualitative responses were thematically analyzed to uncover deeper emotional and social meanings behind their decision making. This study not only sheds light on the multifaceted reasons behind the decision to remain child-free but also emphasizes the need for a more inclusive conversation, awareness, and community programs that respect life path diversity. By addressing these findings, this research can help guide real-world actions by encouraging schools, communities, and mental health professionals to offer better support for people who choose to remain child-free to reduce judgment and stigma surrounding this decision.

Keywords: *child-free, voluntary childlessness, millennials, stigma, life path diversity, mental health*

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1. Introduction

In recent decades, traditional narratives associated with parenthood have evolved, as evidenced by the increasing number of individuals choosing to live childfree. At present, the global population exceeds 8,000,000,000 people (Population Matters, 2024). According to United Nation's World Population Prospects 2024, approximately 54% of the population is female at birth and 46% is male at birth. Based on these figures, and setting aside issues of gender identity and fertility, most individuals possess the biological capacity to reproduce. However, a growing number of people consciously choose to remain childfree. Every individual has the autonomy to decide whether or not to turn parenthood into a reality. Decision-making regarding parenthood is complex and highly significant; upon deeper reflection, it is far from a simple choice.

In the Philippines, cultural values, traditions, and norms remain deeply ingrained (Alampay, 2024). Concepts such as family relationships, family welfare, the importance of fulfilling familial obligations, and parenthood play a central role in societal expectations. Studies from other countries reveal similar patterns, showing that even childfree individuals who report high levels of marital satisfaction, life satisfaction, and psychological well-being, and who are aware of prevailing societal norms, maintain that having children is not an obligation to society or culture (Stahnke et al., 2022). Conversely, individuals who strongly adhere to traditional family values may perceive childlessness as a loss or failure, often accompanied by unhappiness and regret (Chauhan et al., 2021). Nevertheless, as times change, traditions, values, beliefs, and norms continue to evolve.

Society often views childfree individuals negatively, leading them to feel that their choices are invalidated. The decision to remain childfree is frequently stigmatized, resulting in social pressure to justify or change their status. Many experience feelings of exclusion and a lack of belonging, which may cause them to withdraw from social interactions and community activities (Graham et al., 2019).

According to Andri et al. (2020), the ideal age for marriage is between 21 and 25 for women and 25 and 30 for men, as individuals within these age ranges are considered to have reached sufficient physical and psychological maturity to assume household responsibilities. Millennials, defined as individuals born between 1981 and 1996, are currently between 28 and 43 years old. As many have surpassed the culturally perceived ideal age for starting a family, a significant number of millennials are choosing not to have children. This study seeks to

provide a deeper understanding of the narratives, perspectives, and factors influencing their decision to remain childfree. In the Philippine context, this topic remains taboo, particularly among older generations (Enriquez, 2020), and is often met with stigma due to prevailing cultural expectations.

Given the importance of challenging stigma surrounding childfree decisions, examining the factors and experiences that influence millennials' choice to remain childfree is essential. These individuals frequently face societal judgment and discrimination (Añis et al., 2024). This study aims to draw attention to voluntary childlessness and the childfree lifestyle, as increased discourse can help reduce associated stigma. Misconceptions persist that individuals without children do not contribute meaningfully to society; however, research indicates that childfree individuals voluntarily contribute to their communities at levels comparable to those of parents (Pawloski, 2019).

Therefore, this research aims to identify the factors underlying millennials' decisions to remain childfree and to explore how they experience societal stigma. Despite growing awareness, criticisms and misconceptions surrounding childfree choices persist. This study seeks to promote awareness, respect, and acceptance of voluntary childlessness and the childfree lifestyle. Understanding the reasons behind individuals' decisions to remain childfree may assist policymakers in fostering a more inclusive and supportive environment in which all individuals receive respect and support from their communities (Campisi, 2024).

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Role of Demographics to Remain Child-free

Studies collectively reveal that the decision of millennial individuals to remain child-free is shaped by a complex interplay of demographic, psychological, social, and economic factors. Across studies, demographic variables such as age, sex, marital status, and educational attainment emerge as strong predictors of child-free choices. Research indicates that younger generations, particularly millennials, tend to postpone or forgo parenthood due to aspirations for higher education and career advancement (Hoffower, 2021; Murillo, 2021; Luchenski, 2023; Stahl, 2020). Studies also highlight that men are statistically more likely to identify as child-free than women (Watling & Neal, 2023), while women's decisions are often influenced by their desire to focus on personal growth and professional stability (Smith et al., 2020). Demographic trends further demonstrate a generational shift, with marriage and childbearing

increasingly delayed compared to previous decades (Barroso et al., 2020). This suggests that modern socioeconomic contexts and shifting life priorities strongly inform reproductive decision making.

2.2. Factors that Influence Millennials' Choice to Remain Childfree

Health. Health concerns, both physical and mental, are also pivotal in influencing the decision to remain child-free. Literature shows that individuals with existing mental health challenges or hereditary conditions often express reluctance to bear children due to fears of transmitting illnesses or being unable to manage parenting stress (Höglund & Hildingsson, 2022). Moreover, perceptions of motherhood as a lifelong commitment and potential threat to personal autonomy deter many women from pursuing parenthood (Parlak & Tekin, 2020). These findings indicate that health-related apprehensions intertwine with psychological readiness and self-preservation, underscoring the importance of well-being in reproductive choices.

Financial Stability. Multiple studies affirm that economic security, or the lack thereof, significantly shapes millennial attitudes toward parenthood (Añis et al., 2024; Anglo et al., 2023). The high costs associated with raising children, coupled with unstable employment and inflation, lead many individuals to prioritize financial independence over family formation (Wyman, 2024). This pattern is not limited to Western nations; research in Asian contexts such as Indonesia and the Philippines also reveals that financial readiness, access to stable income, and lifestyle aspirations play key roles in opting for a child-free life (Daulay et al., 2023; Anglo et al., 2023). Consequently, the choice to remain child-free is increasingly perceived not as a rejection of family values, but as a rational response to economic constraints and personal goals.

Personal Values and Contentment. Studies reveal that many individuals view parenthood as optional rather than essential to a meaningful life (Hill, 2020). For both men and women, the child-free choice often reflects a desire for autonomy, career fulfillment, and self-actualization (Smith et al., 2020). Others express contentment in living without children, prioritizing emotional peace, self-growth, and freedom over traditional expectations of family life. Research also supports that child-free individuals report high levels of life satisfaction and marital harmony, showing that happiness can be achieved through alternative paths of fulfillment (Erkaya, 2021; Zapanta et al., 2023). In cultures like the Philippines, where

marriage and family are deeply valued, this redefinition of happiness signifies a modern interpretation of success and personal contentment beyond parenthood (Gozum, 2020).

Family Dynamics. In collectivist societies like the Philippines, where family is central to social identity, choosing not to have children is often met with stigma or misunderstanding (Cabonce et al., 2019). Social norms dictate that marriage should naturally lead to childbearing, creating emotional strain for those who deviate from this expectation (Ruegger & Dziengel, 2021). However, research also shows that many child-free individuals maintain strong familial bonds and redefine what family means, finding belonging through relationships and community involvement (Ambrose, 2023). These findings suggest that millennial individuals navigate and cope with familial and cultural pressures by asserting autonomy and reframing fulfillment beyond traditional family roles (Easton & Steyn, 2022).

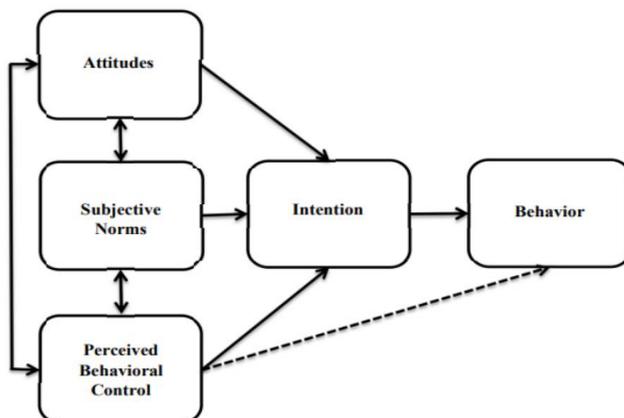
The decision to remain child-free among millennials is a multifaceted phenomenon influenced by demographic, health considerations, financial conditions, personal values and contentment, and family dynamics. Child-free decisions are not merely acts of defiance but conscious choices toward self-determination and well-being. Despite growing acceptance, stigma persists, especially in collectivist societies, underscoring the need for further research into the coping mechanisms and lived experiences of child-free millennials.

2.3. Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) by Icek Ajzen (1991) as illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Diagram of Theory of Planned Behavior



TPB proposes that an individual's decision to engage in a specific behavior can be linked to their intention or beliefs to engage in that behavior. TPB has three primary components:

Attitude toward behavior refers to a person having a favorable or unfavorable evaluation. It encloses a consideration of the possible outcomes associated with the behavior. If an individual believes that the decision to remain child-free will bring them freedom and financial stability, they most likely have a positive attitude toward that choice and decision.

Subjective norms refer to a person's beliefs about the importance of family and peers in a particular behavior or decision that individuals make. If millennial individuals suppose that people around them make their decision positively, it can strengthen their choice to remain child-free.

Perceived behavioral control refers to a person's judgment or perception of their ability to perform the behavior in a particular situation in the future. If an individual perceives and thinks that they cannot fulfill the duties and responsibilities of parenthood and childcare, it may result in the decision and choice to remain child-free.

Recognizing and understanding how these three components can influence decision-making can help explain or spell out why many individuals decide to remain child-free.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study employed a descriptive research design; it does not manipulate any of the variables included, but describes the sample or variables (Siedlecki, 2020). It is utilized to explore and describe the factors and experiences influencing millennial individuals' decision to remain child-free. Along with administering a structured questionnaire, the study gathered both the quantitative and qualitative data that show the participants' values, views, motivations, and lived experiences. This approach allows a comprehensive explanation of the prevailing patterns and perceptions among these millennials who identify as child-free, without altering any variables. In addition, a mixed-methods approach is employed, integrating both quantitative and qualitative data to gain deeper insights into the research problem. The mixed method allows for a more comprehensive understanding that strengthens the overall findings of the study being conducted (Harvard Catalyst, 2021).

3.2. Participants of the Study

The participants of this study were millennial individuals who decided to remain child-free, specifically residing in Lucena City, Sariaya, and Candelaria in the province of Quezon in the Philippines. These locations are chosen for the accessibility of the researchers, regardless of the district or specific barangay where the respondents reside. The participants fell in the millennial age bracket, ranging from 28 to 43 years old at the time of data collection. Respondents of any gender were included in the study, as long as they met the criteria of being millennials who have decided to remain child-free. The demographic characteristics of the 50 participants are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Demographic characteristics

	Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Age	28-32	39	78
	33-37	6	12
	38-43	5	10
Sex	Female	41	82
	Male	9	18
Civil Status	Single	33	66
	In a Relationship	15	30
	Separated	1	2
	Married	1	2
Educational Attainment	College Graduate	28	56
	College Undergraduate	11	22
	High School Graduate	7	14
	High School Undergraduate	4	8
Socioeconomic Status	Low Income Class	29	58
	Lower-Middle Income Class	16	32
	Middle Income Class	5	10

3.3. Instrumentation and Data Gathering Process

The study utilized two types of instruments: a survey questionnaire and an interview guide. A total of 50 purposively selected participants completed the survey, and 10 of these participants were further selected for in-depth interviews. The survey questionnaire consisted of three parts: the demographic profile, the “How Healthy Am I?” self-assessment quiz, and

factors influencing the decision to remain childfree in terms of financial stability, personal values, personal contentment, and family dynamics. These factors were measured using a 4-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (4). On the other hand, the interview guide focused on participants' personal experiences in choosing a childfree lifestyle. All research instruments underwent content validation and were reviewed by a panel of three experts.

Prior to the actual data collection, a letter was written to the respondents, noting the researcher's request for permission to conduct the study and encouraging their participation. Once the research instrument was finalized, the researcher personally approached and distributed questionnaires to the selected respondents, allowing them to complete the forms at their own pace. Clear explanations regarding the study's purpose, procedures, and ethical considerations were provided to ensure informed participation. In addition to face-to-face distribution, an online survey was also conducted to increase accessibility and reach a wider portion of the target population. The online version of the questionnaire included the same instructions and ethical guidelines to maintain consistency and data integrity across both modes of administration.

3.4 Data Analysis

The data gathered in this study were subjected to the following statistical treatment: frequency counts and percentages, analysis of variance (ANOVA) and Factor Analysis. Meanwhile, a thematic analysis, enabling the identification of recurring patterns, themes, and insights, was used in analyzing the interview results.

3.5 Research Ethics

In this study, informed consent was obtained from all the participants. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study being conducted, its procedures, and any potential risks or benefits. Consent forms are clear, written in accessible language, and include information about confidentiality and data usage.

4. Findings and Discussion

Table 2 presents participants' self-reported physical health status, chronic physical health concerns, and frequency of health checkups. These findings suggest that most

millennials in the sample view themselves as generally healthy, with only a few managing specific health concerns, and a moderate level of engagement in routine health monitoring.

Table 2

Self-reported physical health status, chronic physical health concern, and checkup frequency

Measure	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Physical Health Status	Excellent	9	18
	Good	33	66
	Fair	8	16
Chronic Physical Health Concern	None	43	86
	Prefer Not to Say	4	8
	Hypertension and Obesity	1	2
	Obesity	1	2
	UTI and Ulcer	1	2
Checkup Frequency	Only when unwell	24	48
	Annually	11	22
Does not Visit Regularly		10	20
Have not Visit Since Last Year		5	10

Table 3

Results of “How Healthy Am I?” quiz

	Frequency	Percentage
Perfectly healthy	14	28
Normal	30	60
Not Really Healthy	6	12

Table 3 shows the distribution of participants’ results from the “How Healthy Am I?” self-assessment quiz. The majority 60% or 30 out of 50 respondents, scored within the normal range, indicating overall good health based on the criteria of the quiz. Meanwhile, 28% or 14 out of 50 respondents scored within the perfectly healthy range. Notably, 12% or 6 out of 50 respondents were classified in the concerning range, which may indicate potential health risks. These findings suggest that while most respondents perceive themselves as generally healthy, a portion of the sample may benefit from targeted health improvements or support.

Table 4

Self-reported mental health status, mental health diagnosis, and engagement in therapy, counseling and other mental health services

Measure	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Mental Health Status	Excellent	5	10.20
	Good	31	63.30
	Fair	12	24.50
	Poor	1	2
Mental Health Diagnosis	None	49	98
	PTSD and Bipolar	1	2
Engagement in Mental Health Services	No	41	82
	Yes	9	18

Table 4 presents participants' self-reported mental health status, mental health diagnosis, and engagement in therapy, counseling, or other mental health services. A majority 63.30% or 31 out of 50 respondents described their mental health as good, while 2% or 1 out of 50 respondents as poor. Regarding formal diagnoses, 98% or 49 out of 50 respondents reported no mental health diagnosis, whereas 2% or 1 out of 50 respondents identified with PTSD and Bipolar Disorder. When asked about participation in therapy, counseling, or other mental health services, 82% or 41 out of 50 respondents indicated they do not engage in any mental health services, while the 18% or 9 out of 50 respondents remaining reported that they had. These results indicate that while most respondents perceive their mental health positively, a portion of the population has experienced psychological challenges, with a minority actively seeking professional support.

Table 5

Results of "Your Mental Health Today" quiz

	Frequency	Percentage
Coping well	16	32
Coping	26	52
Somewhat struggling	8	16

As shown in Table 5, most respondents reported positive mental health, with only a minority showing signs of psychological strain and limited engagement in professional support. This supports existing research indicating that while millennials often appear resilient,

many experience hidden psychological stress and may avoid formal help due to stigma or cost (Jackson, 2018). Mental health concerns have also been linked to reproductive decision-making, with some choosing to remain childfree to prioritize emotional well-being (Park, 2022).

Table 6

Factors influencing millennial individuals' decision to remain child-free in terms of financial stability

Indicators	WM	Interpretation
I believe I am financially stable	2.400	Disagree
I believe being financially stable is important in my decision to stay childfree.	3.680	Strongly Agree
I frequently worry about my financial situation.	3.420	Strongly Agree
I am satisfied with my current financial habits and do not plan significant changes.	1.980	Disagree
I feel financially secure and rarely experience stress about money.	1.720	Strongly Disagree
I prioritize saving or investing my money.	3.220	Agree
I consider my financial status unstable to support my own finances.	3.260	Strongly Agree
I am satisfied with my current level of financial security.	1.980	Disagree
I prefer to allocate my financial resources toward personal goals rather than child-rearing expenses.	3.400	Strongly Agree
I feel confident in my ability to save for major life events such as buying a house or supporting a family.	1.540	Strongly Disagree
Overall Weighted Mean	3.268	Strongly Agree

Table 6 summarizes the factors influencing millennial individuals' decision to remain child-free in terms of financial stability. The overall weighted mean is 3.268 indicates that respondents strongly agree that financial stability plays an important role in their decision to remain childfree. Añis et al. (2024) found that having children is not fundamentally wrong, but it can be time- and money-consuming. Additionally, financial issues such as the recession have caused millennials to suffer from financial difficulties. Millennials also consider their ability to become a good provider for their future kids, and it is better not to have kids if they cannot afford to fulfill their parental responsibilities.

Table 7 summarizes the factors influencing millennial individuals' decision to remain child-free in terms of personal values. The computed overall weighted mean is 3.28, which is verbally interpreted as "Strongly Agree". This implies that respondents strongly agree that

their personal values significantly influence their decision to remain childfree. Westover (2025) emphasizes the importance of aligning life choices with personal values. Many individuals experience relief and empowerment when they make decisions like remaining child-free that resonate with their core values, despite external pressures. According to this study, individuals who prioritize these kinds of values often find the courage and strength to make life choices that align with their personal beliefs, even when they differ from cultural expectations.

Table 7

Factors influencing millennial individuals' decision to remain child-free in terms of personal values

Indicators	WM	Interpretation
I value my personal freedom more than societal expectations to have children.	3.5200	Strongly Agree
I do not feel that I need to be a parent to contribute to society.	3.3800	Strongly Agree
My personal development is a key factor in my decision to remain child-free.	3.3600	Strongly Agree
I feel pressured to have kids despite my preferences.	1.7000	Strongly Disagree
Having children doesn't match my values.	3.2400	Agree
I think that remaining child-free will lead to regret later in life.	1.6000	Strongly Disagree
I believe my goals don't require having children.	3.5200	Strongly Agree
My family expects me to have children.	2.6200	Agree
I have experienced reactions from others regarding my child-free decision.	2.9800	Agree
I do not visualize myself as a parent.	3.3600	Strongly Agree
Overall Weighted Mean	3.28	Strongly Agree

Table 8 presents the participants' self-assessment of factors influencing their decision to remain childfree in terms of personal contentment. The computed overall weighted mean of 3.36, which is verbally interpreted as Strongly Agree, indicates a high level of agreement among respondents. This finding suggests that participants experience a strong sense of self-satisfaction, personal purpose, and emotional fulfillment independent of societal expectations to become parents. For these individuals, personal contentment appears to be derived from self-defined goals and life choices rather than from traditional parental roles.

This result aligns with broader generational trends observed among Filipino millennials. According to Escosio (2025), Arkipelago Analytics disclosed that 64% of Filipino millennials prioritize "being successful" as their primary life goal, surpassing the 50% who

place the greatest importance on having “a happy relationship.” This shift highlights a redefinition of fulfillment, wherein personal achievement, autonomy, and financial stability are increasingly regarded as essential foundations of a satisfying life, rather than supplementary outcomes of conventional family structures.

Table 8

Factors influencing millennial individuals’ decision to remain child-free in terms of personal contentment

Indicators	WM	Interpretation
I am confident that I can live a fulfilling and a meaningful life without children.	3.5200	Strongly Agree
I feel that I’m living a fulfilling life even if I’m not a parent.	3.500	Strongly Agree
I feel content with my lifestyle even if others expect me to have children.	3.3600	Strongly Agree
I am happy with the opportunities I have even though I have no children.	3.5400	Strongly Agree
I feel satisfied with my life regardless of others’ judgment.	3.2600	Strongly Agree
I am satisfied and happy with my current lifestyle.	3.1200	Agree
I feel that other people view my decision to remain child-free as “selfish”.	3.2400	Agree
I am happy focusing only on my personal goals.	3.2800	Strongly Agree
I do not regret my decision to remain child-free.	3.4200	Strongly Agree
I am not longing to have children of my own.	3.3600	Strongly Agree
Overall Weighted Mean	3.36	Strongly Agree

Moreover, the strong agreement reflected in the data underscores the growing acceptance of alternative life paths among millennials, where well-being is measured through personal growth, emotional balance, and life satisfaction rather than conformity to cultural expectations surrounding parenthood. The findings suggest that for many individuals, remaining childfree is not a consequence of dissatisfaction or deficit, but a deliberate and contented life choice rooted in self-awareness and personal values.

Table 9 summarizes the factors influencing millennial individuals’ decision to remain childfree in terms of family dynamics. The statement “I feel comfortable discussing my childfree decision with my family” ranked first, with a weighted mean of 3.38, verbally interpreted as Strongly Agree. This finding indicates that the respondents generally maintain open communication and healthy relationships with their families despite their decision to remain childfree. It suggests that family acceptance and emotional support play a significant role in enabling individuals to confidently express and sustain their childfree choices.

Table 9*Factors influencing millennial individuals' decision to remain child-free in terms of family dynamics*

Indicators	WM	Interpretation
My family acknowledges and respects my decision to remain child-free.	3.0000	Agree
I feel misunderstood by some of my relatives for choosing not to have children.	3.1000	Agree
My family sometimes makes negative comments about having a child-free lifestyle.	3.1800	Agree
My family encourages me to prioritize my own goals rather than having children.	3.0200	Agree
I feel pressured by my family to have children.	3.2800	Strongly Agree
My relationship with my family has not been affected by my decision to remain child-free.	3.2200	Agree
I feel my family expects me to change my mind about having children.	3.1600	Agree
My family is open-minded about a child-free lifestyle.	2.5600	Agree
I feel comfortable discussing my child-free decision with my family.	3.3800	Strongly Agree
My family relationship remains good despite my choice to be child-free.	3.3000	Strongly Agree
Overall Weighted Mean	3.12	Agree

This result supports the assertion of Balangiao and Mendoza (2024), who emphasizes that as societal values evolve, some families become more flexible and increasingly prioritize individual happiness and personal autonomy over strict adherence to traditional family roles. The strong agreement among respondents reflects a shift in family dynamics wherein mutual respect and understanding outweigh conventional expectations regarding parenthood. Consequently, supportive family environments may help mitigate social pressure and stigma, allowing millennial individuals to make life choices aligned with their personal values without compromising familial relationships.

The results of the interview showed 13 identified item-level responses grouped into four main themes: family dynamics, financial stability, personal values, and personal contentment. The family dynamics emerged as the most dominant factor, reflecting both support and pressure in the familial setting that shapes the life choices of these millennial individuals. Financial stability also appeared significant, with many of the respondents citing financial insecurity. Thus, investing and saving became one of their priorities, which led them to opt out of parenthood. Personal values emphasized autonomy and resistance to conform to societal expectations about parenthood. Lastly, personal contentment revealed the emotional satisfaction of these millennial individuals regarding their chosen life path, despite potential or

existing stigma. These analyses show that the decision to remain child-free is shaped by a complex interaction of emotional, social, and economic considerations.

Table 10

Emerging themes on millennials' personal experiences in choosing a child-free lifestyle

Theme	Sub-Theme	Statement
Desire for Personal Freedom and Self-Fulfillment	Autonomy, career, travel and personal growth	"May freedom ako, mas nakaka-focus ako sa career at sa sarili." (I have freedom; I am abler to focus on my career and on myself.) Respondent #1
		"Mas may oras ako sa sarili ko, sa hobbies ko, tsaka sa trabaho ko." (I have more time for myself, my hobbies, and my work.) Respondent #2
		"Malaya kami. Nakakapag-travel, mas flexible ang time, tapos mas focus kami sa personal at career goals." (We are free. We can travel, have more flexible time, and are more focused on our personal and career goals.) Respondent #4
		"Gusto kong ma-achieve yung mga goals ko." (I want to achieve my goals.) Respondent #6
		"Gusto ko ng flexible life." (I want a flexible life.) Respondent #8
Perceived Incompatibility with Parenting Responsibilities	Emotional and mental unpreparedness; disinterest in parenting	"I have a lot of priorities pa sa buhay." (I still have many priorities in life.) Respondent #9
		"Ayoko talaga ng mabigat na responsibilidad." (I really do not want a heavy responsibility.) Respondent #1
		"Hindi ko talaga ma-imagine ang sarili kong may anak." (I really cannot imagine myself having a child.) Respondent #2
		"Malaking responsibilidad talaga at hindi ko nakikita ang sarili ko bilang isang father figure." (It is truly a big responsibility, and I do not see myself as a father figure.) Respondent #3
		"Di ko kasi talaga ma-envision yung sarili ko as mom." (I really cannot envision myself as a mother.) Respondent #4
		"Hindi ako emotionally prepared sa lifelong responsibility." (I am not emotionally prepared for a lifelong responsibility.) Respondent #5
		"Feeling ko kasi hindi ko kaya magampanan ang pagiging nanay." (I feel that I would not be able to fulfill the role of being a mother.) Respondent #6
		"Hindi ko pa rin talaga ma-visualize na gugustuhin ko mag-anak." (I still cannot visualize myself wanting to have a child.) Respondent #9

Theme	Sub-Theme	Statement
		“Sa mga magulang ko, nakita ko kasi silang pagod na pagod tapos wala halos oras sa sarili.” (From my parents, I saw how extremely exhausted they were and how they had almost no time for themselves.) Respondent #1
Influence of Observed Family Experiences	Witnessing family stress, hardship, or toxic dynamics	“Nakikita ko po ang hirap ng kapatid ko bilang single parent.” (I see the hardships my sibling faces as a single parent.) Respondent #6 “Lumaki ako sa environment na laging may gulo.” (I grew up in an environment that was constantly filled with conflict.) Respondent #7
		“Sayang naman at selfish daw.” (They say it is a waste and that it is selfish.) Respondent #1 “Selfish.” Respondent #3
Social Stigma and Pressure	Negative comments and judgment	“Sayang ang lahi.” (They say it is a waste of one’s lineage.) Respondent #4 “Sayang naman.” (They say it is such a waste.) Respondent #8 “Sayang naman.” (They say it is such a waste.) Respondent #9
		“Parang napapaisip ako minsan, pero kahit paulit-ulit ko siyang isipin, lagi din naman akong bumabalik sa conclusion ko na tama ‘yung naging choice ko para sa sarili ko.” (Sometimes I find myself thinking about it, but no matter how many times I reflect on it, I always return to the conclusion that I made the right choice for myself.) Respondent #1 “Di ko din naman maiwasan na mapaisip. Pero hindi naman ako nagsisisi.” (I cannot really avoid thinking about it sometimes, but I do not regret my decision.) Respondent #2
Peace, Curiosity, and ‘What-Ifs’	General satisfaction with some reflective thoughts	“Minsan talagang dumadating din ako diyan eh. Minsan kasi parang nape-pressure din ako.” (There are times when I do reach that point, especially when I feel pressured.) Respondent #3 “Napapaisip din kami sa future. Pero every time na pinag-uusapan namin ito, pareho pa rin kaming firm sa decision namin.” (We also think about the future, but every time we talk about it, we both remain firm in our decision.) Respondent #4 “Masaya naman ako, pero minsan napapaisip ako kung anong feeling maging magulang.” (I am happy, but sometimes I wonder what it feels like to be a parent.) Respondent #5 “Minsan may ‘what if’ na dumadaan sa isip. Pero okay naman ako ngayon.” (Sometimes a “what if” crosses my mind, but I am okay with my life now.) Respondent #6 “Nakakapaisip din talaga, pero wala eh ayoko talaga.” (It really makes me think at times, but in the end, I truly do not want it.) Respondent #9

Theme	Sub-Theme	Statement
		“Mapapaisip ka na lang din talaga minsan. But I stick with my decision. Hindi ko pinagsisihan.” (You really do find yourself thinking about it sometimes, but I stick with my decision. I do not regret it.) Respondent #10
		“Umaasa pa rin yung magulang ko na baka magbago pa isip ko.” (My parents still hope that I might change my mind.) Respondent #3
Family Dynamics	Acceptance vs. Pressure within the Family	“Hindi lahat eh. Yung mama ko parang ayaw maniwala.” (Not all of them do; my mother seems unwilling to believe it.) Respondent #7
		“Naiintindihan nila pero feeling ko they’re expecting na magbabago pa ang desisyon ko.” (They understand, but I feel that they are still expecting my decision to change.) Respondent #9
		“Naiintindihan nila yung choice ko, pero feel ko na nag-e-expect pa sa akin yung mga magulang ko na bibigyan ko silang apo.” (They understand my choice, but I feel that my parents are still expecting me to give them grandchildren.) Respondent #10

From the data gathered, the personal experiences of these child-free individuals reveal a subtle understanding regarding their decision. The responses of the respondents expressed a strong sense of personal contentment, freedom, and emotional satisfaction with their decision. Shared stories reflect self-autonomy and feelings of fulfillment from the responses derived from prioritizing their own well-being, career, and lifestyle preference. In terms of familial setting, while there is acceptance and sometimes support, pressure to conform to traditional expectations of parenthood cannot be avoided. Witnessed family members' stress and hardship towards child rearing also contribute to their decision. According to a study, voluntarily child-free individuals often experience moral disapproval, even when their decision is thoughtful and self-directed, society conforms to traditions (Ashburn-Nardo, 2017). Despite the societal stigma and family pressure being experienced, these millennial individuals showed resilience in maintaining their decision. Furthermore, as emotional and mental unpreparedness are present in the responses linked to parenting responsibilities that these individuals are not ready for as they are concerned over financial struggle or burdens child rearing holds. Lastly, admitted curiosity and reflective thoughts are inevitable but upholding their decision gives general satisfaction. Collectively, these experiences highlight how deeply personal and complex it is to decide to remain child-free. The findings suggest a need for understanding of diverse life choices and a need for societal acceptance to reduce stigma.

5. Conclusion

Among millennials, the decision to remain child-free is shaped by a rich and multifaceted interplay of demographics, personal factors, and societal factors. The study findings revealed that gender, education, and socioeconomic background are closely tied to this lifestyle choice. The key influences of the decision to remain child-free include financial stability, personal values, personal contentment, and family dynamics. While health concerns were less significant overall, they mattered to some. Family dynamics emerged as the most influential factor, followed by financial, and personal contentment. Despite the societal stigma, many millennials see their child-free decision as deliberate and fulfilling, highlighting the need for greater societal acceptance to nontraditional life paths.

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Institutional Review Board Statement

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