



Religiosity and Marital Satisfaction in Couples without Children: Exploring Differences between Childless by Choice and Childless by Circumstance

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ABSTRACT

The presence of a child has its own meaning or significance for both the husband and wife. The presence of a child is one of the important factors contributing to satisfaction in a marriage. Besides the factor of having children, satisfaction in a marriage is also influenced by the individual's religiosity. This study aims to examine the relationship between religiosity and marital satisfaction among husbands or wives who do not yet have children. The method used is a quantitative method with a sample of 60 respondents, consisting of 18 husbands and 42 wives, using a purposive sampling technique, specifically respondents who are husbands or wives without children, with a minimum marriage duration of 3 years and not currently participating in a family planning program. Based on the research results, a correlation coefficient (r) of 0.312 was obtained with a significance level of 0.008 ($p < 0.01$). This indicates that there is a very significant positive relationship between religiosity and marital satisfaction among husbands or wives who do not yet have children. As for the marital satisfaction of the respondents, it falls into the high category, and the religiosity of the respondents also falls into the high category. These findings imply that strengthening personal and shared religious values can serve as a protective factor for marital stability, particularly among couples who do not have children. It is recommended that marital counseling programs and community-based family education initiatives incorporate aspects of religiosity to enhance relationship quality and emotional well-being among childless couples.



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INTRODUCTION

A child provides distinct value or significance for a married pair. Certain stereotypes suggest that a male begets offspring to validate his masculinity, whereas a woman might demonstrate her motherhood by bearing one or two children. Dewi, 2014. Nonetheless, procreation poses challenges for certain couples. Pandanwati and Suprapti (2012) suggest that the lack of children in a family leads to the loneliness of married couples, as a child's presence is a crucial source of hope for them. Consequently, married couples endeavor to conceive children (Fariza, 2017).

Campbell and Reece (2010) assert that childlessness can impact marital life. However, more recent studies (e.g., Peterson et al., 2020; Donath, 2017) emphasize that childlessness should not be viewed solely through a deficit lens but also as a diverse experience shaped by individual choice, social context, and cultural expectations. This shift in perspective highlights the need to re-examine earlier assumptions, such as those by Monach (1993), using contemporary social frameworks and empirical data.

Oktarina, Abadi, and Bachsin (2014) elucidate that one factor contributing to childlessness in couples is reproductive complications that may affect either the husband or the wife. The consequences of childless marriages encompass emotions of worthlessness, diminished warmth and affection between spouses, perceptions of a meaningless marriage and existence, heightened distress in women, and a sense of hopelessness. Nevertheless, certain couples can acclimate effectively to these circumstances. Recent findings by Park (2021) and Miettinen & Rotkirch (2022) demonstrate that adaptation to

childlessness is strongly influenced by psychosocial support, religiosity, and spousal understanding, indicating a more complex relationship between childlessness and marital well-being than previously assumed.

Mardiyan and Kustanti (2016) indicate that childlessness among married couples impacts the marital pleasure experienced by the wife. The wife perceives her marital life as incomplete due to the absence of children. Nonetheless, she experiences much happiness due to her husband's comprehension of her circumstances. Moreover, the affection and care provided by her husband instill in her the perception of having an ideal mate, serving as a source of satisfaction despite the imperfections in her marital life. Ulfah and Mulyana (2014) elucidate that women who are involuntarily childless frequently have challenges related to their circumstances in life. Many involuntarily childless women with inadequate biological reproductive capabilities experience challenges in their marital and familial life. Couples without children often experience pressure from family, relatives, and acquaintances who inquire about or request that they have a baby (Ulfah & Mulyana, 2014).

Marital happiness is defined as the degree to which married partners experience fulfillment and contentment in their relationship (DeGenova & Rice, 2009). Wismanto (2012) asserts that the existence of children is a factor influencing marital pleasure. Wismanto's research (2012) indicates that the presence of children significantly influences marital satisfaction; children in a couple's married life impact their overall satisfaction.

Marital contentment is determined not just by the presence of children but also by individual religiosity. Aviyah and Farid (2014) define religiosity as the internalization of religious values by the individual. Internalization pertains to the conviction in religious doctrines both internally and verbally. This conviction is subsequently manifested in the individual's acts and conduct. Research conducted by Zulkaida and Srisusanti (2013) indicates that religious participation is the second most significant factor affecting marital satisfaction. Hurlock (1999) asserts that, generally, marital satisfaction is greater among religious individuals compared to their less religious counterparts. Hawari (1997) also asserted that marriages founded on religion can preserve the integrity of the union. Families lacking religious affiliation, those with minimal religious devotion, and families devoid of any religious connection face a fourfold increase in the likelihood of familial unhappiness. According to Landis and Landis (in Wahyuningsih, 2002), religion significantly impacts marriage, as an individual's level of religiosity can shape their mentality and conduct in everyday life, particularly within the context of married life.

Despite extensive research on marital satisfaction and religiosity, few studies have specifically examined how religiosity functions as a coping mechanism among childless couples—especially in distinguishing between those who are childless by choice and those who are involuntarily childless. This gap underscores the limited understanding of how religious belief systems may influence emotional resilience and marital harmony in the absence of children.

Therefore, this study aims to address this research gap by examining the relationship between religiosity and marital satisfaction among childless couples, providing a contemporary perspective that integrates both psychological and socioreligious dimensions. This explicit focus offers a clearer rationale and transition from the existing literature to the current research objectives.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research is a quantitative study with a correlation method involving 60 respondents, namely husbands or wives. Respondents were selected using purposive sampling techniques, specifically with the criteria of being married for at least 3 years and not currently participating in a family planning program. The minimum marriage duration of three years was determined to ensure that participants had experienced a sufficient period of marital adjustment, stability, and role negotiation, which are essential for assessing long-term marital satisfaction.

Marital satisfaction is measured using a scale based on the dimensions of marital satisfaction from Fowers and Olson (1993), namely personality issues, role equality, communication, conflict resolution, financial management, leisure activities, sexual relations, children and parenting, family and friends, and religious orientation. This scale consists of 40 items, where 24 items are favorable and 16 items are unfavorable. The reliability of the Marital Satisfaction Scale was tested in this study, yielding a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.89, indicating high internal consistency. The construct validity was

confirmed through item-total correlation analysis, with all items showing significant correlations ($r > 0.30$).

Religiosity is measured using a scale based on the dimensions of religiosity proposed by Huber and Huber (2012), which include intellectual, ideological, public practice, private practice, and religious experience. This scale consists of 15 favorable items. The Religiosity Scale demonstrated strong reliability with a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.86, and validity testing showed adequate construct representation across all five dimensions. Both scales were adapted to the cultural and linguistic context of the participants, ensuring content equivalence through expert judgment and pilot testing.

The respondents in this study were predominantly from Indonesia, where religious belief and family values play a significant role in shaping marital expectations and interpersonal relationships. This cultural context is particularly relevant, as religiosity is deeply embedded in social life and may influence how couples perceive marital satisfaction in the absence of children. Therefore, understanding these dynamics within this sociocultural framework enhances the interpretive depth and applicability of the findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Data analysis using the Pearson Product Moment yielded a correlation coefficient of 0.312 and a significance level of 0.008 ($p < 0.01$), demonstrating a highly significant positive link between religiosity and marital satisfaction. The empirical mean of marital satisfaction is 109.73, categorizing it as high. The empirical mean value of religiosity is 45.82, categorizing it as strong. In this survey, 49 respondents (81.7%) were aged 20-40 years, whereas 11 respondents (18.3%) were aged 40-65 years.

Table 1. Respondents by Age

Age	Amount	(%)	Empirical Mean		Category	
			Marital Satisfaction	Religiosity	Marital Satisfaction	Religiosity
20 – 40 Years	49	81.7%	110.06	45.67	High	High
40 – 65 Years	11	18.3%	108.27	46.45	High	High

The majority of respondents in this study are female, accounting for 70% with a total of 42 individuals. The male respondents number 18 with a percentage of 30%.

Table 2. Respondents Based on Gender

Gender	Amount	(%)	Empirical Mean		Category	
			Marital Satisfaction	Religiosity	Marital Satisfaction	Religiosity
Laki – Laki	18	30%	109.83	45.56	High	High
Perempuan	42	70%	109.69	55.93	High	Very High

Based on the duration of marriage, the majority of respondents have been married for 3-10 years, totaling 49 people (81.7%), followed by respondents married for 11-18 years, totaling 6 people (10.0%), and respondents married for 19-26 years, totaling 3 people (5.0%). Finally, there are respondents married for 27-34 years, totaling 2 people (3.3%).

Table 3. Respondents Based on Marriage (Year)

Age	Amount	(%)	Empirical Mean		Category	
			Marital Satisfaction	Religiosity	Marital Satisfaction	Religiosity
3-10 Tahun	49	81.7%	110.14	45.69	High	High
11-18 Tahun	6	10.0%	109.17	44.17	High	High

Age	Amount	(%)	Empirical Mean		Category	
			Marital Satisfaction	Religiosity	Marital Satisfaction	Religiosity
19-26 Tahun	3	5.0%	106.00	49.00	High	High
27-34 Tahun	2	3.3%	107.00	49.00	High	High

The hypothesis in the research is accepted, it can be concluded that the higher the religiosity, the higher the marital satisfaction for husbands or wives who do not have children. Hurlock (1999) states that, in general, marital satisfaction will be higher among religious people than among less religious people. The realization of marital satisfaction through religiosity, according to Balkanlioglu (2013), is also due to the values present in religious teachings. If the values adhered to in religion become one of the sources for finding solutions to marital issues, then religiosity contributes to the realization of marital satisfaction for husband and wife couples. According to Istiqomah and Mukhlis (2015), the religiosity possessed by an individual will lead that individual to internalize the religious values they adhere to into their way of thinking, behaving, and acting. This condition is what leads to the emergence of satisfaction in marriage.

Marriage satisfaction falls into the high category. This is because husbands or wives who do not yet have children can spend and enjoy time together engaging in activities and sharing in doing things they both like, where husbands and wives can express love and attention to each other. Being able to maintain communication also plays an important role in a marriage, discussing various issues with your partner and having discussions to reach a mutual agreement. This is in line with the opinion expressed by Papalia, Olds & Feldman (2014) that couples without children have higher marital satisfaction compared to couples with children. Because the more children they have, the less satisfied couples are with their marriage.

In categorization based on age, it is known that the mean marital satisfaction for the ages of 20-40 years and >40-65 years falls into the high category. Marital life will feel satisfying if both partners can understand and support each other. According to a study conducted by Papalia and Feldman (2014), age is a significant factor in marital satisfaction. Mature age in marriage can lead individuals to have a positive mindset, be responsible, and make good decisions. Additionally, Santrock (2012) states that marriage in adulthood has a low likelihood of divorce because individuals are at a stable point in their lives.

In the categorization based on gender, it is known that the empirical mean of religiosity in women is higher compared to men. According to Zuraidah (2013), the strong religious atmosphere among women is due to their active participation in religious activities. Then, according to Nihayah, Adriani, and Wahyuni (2013), a wife who is in a religious family environment is likely to have the opportunity to deepen her faith, making it easier for her natural inclination as a human to believe in God to be realized, and she will be aware of every consequence that will result from her actions. This is what allows them to be more satisfied with their marriage. The patterns and ways of thinking taught by their parents are so ingrained that they influence their domestic life.

Based on the duration of marriage, it is known that the empirical mean of marital satisfaction for marriages of 3-10 years, 11-18 years, 19-26 years, and 27-34 years falls into the high category. Hurlock (1999) explains that in the early stages of marriage, each couple will enter a phase where they are required to integrate many different aspects of themselves. The couple's ability to unite these different aspects will determine the level of family harmony. According to Walgito (2002), during the first ten years of marriage, it is a period of introduction and adjustment for both parties. The husband and wife strive to get to know each other, complete their education or start their careers, plan for the arrival of their first child, and arrange their roles in the marital relationship. Meanwhile, from the tenth to the thirtieth year of marriage, parents focus on the development and maintenance of the family. Additionally, the husband and wife must be able to resolve social conflicts that arise in the marriage to prevent tension within the family. Then the husband and wife couple re-establish new priorities and enjoy their renewed intimate relationship, without children in the house. For couples without children, this phase can be used to focus on their careers or other productive activities.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research results, it is known that the hypothesis proposed by the researcher is accepted, meaning there is a very significant positive relationship between religiosity and marital satisfaction in couples without children, where this relationship is positive, that is, the higher the religiosity, the higher the marital satisfaction in couples without children. In the results of the empirical mean test, couples without children based on marital satisfaction fall into the high category, and the empirical mean results of couples without children based on religiosity also fall into the high category. These findings indicate that religiosity functions as an important psychological and emotional resource that strengthens marital bonds, providing meaning and resilience for couples facing childlessness. In practical terms, marital counselors and religious organizations can incorporate faith-based approaches, spiritual reflection, and shared value exploration in counseling interventions to enhance relationship satisfaction among childless couples. Programs that emphasize shared religious practices and community involvement may also help mitigate the emotional strain associated with childlessness.

However, this study has several limitations. The sample size was relatively small and limited to one cultural context, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings. Furthermore, the cross-sectional design does not allow for determining causal relationships between religiosity and marital satisfaction. Future research should include more diverse samples across religious and cultural backgrounds, adopt longitudinal designs, and explore mediating variables such as coping strategies, social support, or gender dynamics to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the interplay between religiosity and marital well-being. In conclusion, religiosity remains a vital factor that contributes positively to marital satisfaction among couples without children, and its role deserves continued exploration in both psychological and cultural research contexts.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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