

## Social Construction of Students Regarding the Childfree Phenomenon and the Concept of the Ideal Family in Indonesia

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### ABSTRACT

The phenomenon of childfree living is becoming increasingly prevalent among young people who are still in a phase of self-exploration and have not yet fully decided on their stance regarding the meaning of having children and preparing to build a family. This research aims to analyze this phenomenon from the perspective of university students who are future family creators. The study seeks to explore their views on the childfree phenomenon and their responses to the concept of the ideal family they envision for the future. The research employs a qualitative phenomenological approach. The findings indicate that students share similar interpretations regarding the childfree phenomenon and the concept of the ideal family in Indonesia. The childfree phenomenon introduces a new perspective that family is not solely about offspring but emphasizes quality. However, there are differences in how they respond to the existence of the childfree trend, which affects their concept of the ideal family. Some view childfree as a positive phenomenon that reflects a selective and relative choice about having children. Conversely, others see it as a negative viewpoint, as they consider it a rejection of the benefits of having children, which they believe can still be pursued.

**Keywords :** *childfree, family, ideal family concept, university students*

### INTRODUCTION

The concept of the ideal family in Indonesia is deeply rooted in the country's cultural and religious traditions (Wahyu, 2023; Kusmana, 2022). Studies have shown that the ideal family structure in Indonesia often characterized by traditional gender roles, where women are expected to fulfill the roles of mothers and wives, while men are the primary breadwinners (Pratikto et al., 2020). This concept of the ideal family is further reinforced by the Indonesian government's policies and educational system, which emphasize the importance of character education and the development of "Student Profiles" that align with the values of Pancasila (Hasanah et al., 2022; Susilo et al., 2022).

However, the social construction of students regarding the childfree phenomenon in Indonesia appears to be more complex. While the traditional concept of the ideal family is still prevalent, there is also evidence of a growing awareness and acceptance of alternative family structure, including the choice to remain childfree (Wahyu, 2023). This shift can be attributed to factors such as the increasing societal attitudes towards gender roles, and the influence of globalization (Dhanial, 2022).

The references also suggest that the social construction of students regarding the childfree phenomenon may be influenced by their educational experiences and the social support they receive from their families, peers, and teachers (Saputro et al., 2023; Hasanah et al., 2019). Studies have shown that the development of self-identity, including the decision to have or not have children, is closely tied to the family's influence and the individual's social relationships (Hasanah et al., 2019; Sukowati et al., 2023).

In Indonesia, the childfree phenomenon is becoming more prevalent among younger generations who are still in the exploratory phase of self-discovery and are yet to solidify their stance on having children or building a family. The limited understanding that young people

have regarding this phenomenon makes them vulnerable to the influence of the growing childfree trend. However, university students, as part of the intellectual youth, play a key role in providing education and mitigating the potential negative impacts of this trend. To do so, students must personally develop a deep and critical understanding of the childfree phenomenon, including its definition, underlying reasons, influencing factors, and overall impacts. This comprehensive understanding among students contributes to shaping the future paradigm of the ideal family in Indonesia.

Students are often seen as "agents of change" due to their critical thinking, which is based on knowledge and a deep comprehension of social issues. They tend to be the group most open to change and diverse perspectives, as they are in academic environments that facilitate discussion and critical thought. Furthermore, students are at an age where decisions about marriage and life stages become particularly significant. Therefore, the choice to be childfree may also become a consideration for students as they plan their futures. Awareness of the responsibility involved in making decisions about whether or not to have children is an essential part of their decision-making maturity. As the next generation of leaders, students have a substantial role in shaping society's views on issues like the childfree phenomenon and promoting a balanced and sustainable understanding of these life choices.

According to research by Ramadhani and Tsabitah (2022), students share a common understanding of the concept of living without children, or being childfree, but their responses to this phenomenon vary. Some view it as a positive expression of personal choice and autonomy, while others see it as a negative rejection of the "blessing" of having children. Aditia and Imran (2024) explain that social media, as an integral part of modern life, plays a significant role in shaping identity construction. This influence contributes to the diverse interpretations students develop regarding the childfree phenomenon, as they construct their own meanings based on individual ideas and perspectives (Fauziah, 2023). Some students take a dominant stance, driven by factors such as collective movements, personal experiences, and patriarchal upbringing. Others adopt a negotiation stance, shaped by their educational background, while some take an opposing position, influenced by their social circles.

The social construction of students' understanding and interpretation of the childfree phenomenon can also affect how they envision the concept of an ideal family for Indonesia in the future. The ideal family in this context encompasses several aspects deemed important within Indonesian social and cultural norms. First, the nuclear family is regarded as the foundational unit of the family structure. Second, there is a clear division of roles and functions within the family, where each member has responsibilities and contributions aligned with their roles. Third, the ideal family also involves the development of kinship relationships with extended family and the broader community. Finally, the ideal Indonesian family is characterized by harmony, love, and affection, serving as the foundation for collective growth and well-being. According to Hardiyansyah (2024), communities that integrate gender and child perspectives into governance, development, and empowerment processes in a planned, comprehensive, and sustainable manner are considered inclusive and supportive of women and children. Therefore, students' understanding of the childfree phenomenon may influence how they pursue the concept of an ideal family that aligns with the values and norms recognized by Indonesian society.

Many previous studies have explored students' views, perceptions, or understanding of the childfree phenomenon. However, research specifically focused on how students comprehend and interpret the childfree phenomenon, and how it shapes their understanding of the ideal family concept, remains limited. This study employs qualitative phenomenological research methods and Peter L. Berger's social construction theory. Thus, the researchers are interested in investigating this topic, as being childfree is a relatively new phenomenon that may be subject to social pressure and societal expectations, potentially leading to stigma,

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discrimination, and social tension. The role of students in discussing the childfree phenomenon has the potential to shape public views and policies in the future, fostering a more informed and inclusive society.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The research conducted by Yunita Devika Damayanti, Afifah Anggie Refiana, and Muhammad Fardan Aghotsi Nuary, titled *Fenomena Childfree di Twitter pada Generasi Millenial*, shares similar subjects and research focus with the study by Tanya Koropecykj-Cox, Zeynep Copur, Victor Romano, and Susan Cody Rydzewski, titled *“University Students’ Perceptions of Parents and Childless or Childfree Couples”*. Both studies discuss the views of the millennial generation on the childfree phenomenon and the understanding of social changes in perceptions of marriage. However, the study by Tanya Koropecykj-Cox, Zeynep Copur, Victor Romano, and Susan Cody Rydzewski has a more specific research subject—university students as part of the millennial generation—while the research by Yunita Devika Damayanti, Afifah Anggie Refiana, and Muhammad Fardan Aghotsi Nuary focuses on the millennial generation in general.

Discussing the childfree concept naturally relates to the idea of the ideal family being constructed. This raises the question of how university students conceptualize the ideal family for the future. The study by Chotibul Umam and Yustika Irfani Lindawati, titled *“Persepsi Keluarga Ideal pada Penonton Drama Korea Reply 1988 (Perceptions of the Ideal Family among Viewers of the Korean Drama Reply 1988)”*, reveals that informants’ perceptions of the ideal family are shaped by their personal values, beliefs, and aspirations, influenced by their exposure to the drama Reply 1988. A second study by Hafidzotun Nisa, titled *“The Concept of the Ideal Family in the Quran”*, focuses on the relevance of Hamka’s and Quraish Shihab’s interpretations in understanding the concept of the ideal family by analyzing specific Quranic verses such as QS. ar-Rum: 21, QS. At-Tahrim: 6, and QS. al-Furqan: 74.

In this study, the researchers focus on exploring the understanding, views, and opinions of university students in interpreting the childfree phenomenon through the social constructs they have formed, which will subsequently influence how they construct the concept of the ideal family they want to build. The research subjects are university students, who socially construct the childfree phenomenon and the ideal family concept in Indonesia. The research focus is framed by two key questions: 1) How do university students construct the childfree phenomenon socially? and 2) How do university students socially construct the ideal family concept after the emergence of the childfree phenomenon? The aim is to examine university students’ perspectives and attitudes, which may differ when analyzing the childfree phenomenon. This research also evaluates students’ views on family, the roles of parents, and children in the context of the childfree phenomenon.

## METHOD

This study employs a qualitative method with a phenomenological approach, emphasizing the interpretation of each opinion provided by the informants to discover, understand, explain, and describe their views regarding the childfree phenomenon and the concept of the ideal family in Indonesia. The selection of university students as informants is based on the consideration that they are young intellectuals with the ability to analyze social phenomena grounded in scientific knowledge, are open to new ideas, and are at an age where they are mature enough to enter married and family life. Informants in this study were selected from students of Universitas Sebelas Maret, with perspectives supported by the Ministry of Equality of the UNS Student Executive Board (BEM UNS) 2024. The selection criteria for

informants include active students aged 21-25 who are interested in the issues of childfree and family. A total of eight informants were selected according to the predetermined criteria.

Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews conducted directly with the informants to obtain detailed information about their views on the childfree phenomenon and their perspectives on forming the concept of the ideal family in Indonesia. Before the interview sessions, the researcher explained the purpose and objectives of the interviews to the informants and requested permission to record the sessions. The interview questions were open-ended and followed several aspects relevant to the research objectives. The interview results were recorded and transcribed for further study and analysis. Additionally, the researcher also collected field data and relevant journal articles on the research topic, which were then integrated with the interview transcripts to strengthen the data obtained.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The childfree phenomenon reflects a shift in the concept of the ideal family in Indonesia, where, for those who still consider having children a necessity, this decision is viewed as problematic. The concept of the ideal family in Indonesia is often closely tied to the expectation of having children to continue the family lineage and maintain continuity. However, with changes in social, economic, and cultural dynamics, more couples are choosing to focus on their careers or personal freedom rather than bearing the responsibility of parenthood. This raises questions about how the concept of the ideal family is changing in Indonesia. Does the ideal family still have to adhere to traditional norms, or is diversity in family forms recognized and accepted as part of societal development?

Students, as intellectuals and agents of change, view the childfree phenomenon as a new perspective that enriches the understanding of the formation of an ideal family in Indonesia. They recognize that the ideal family, which was previously centered on conventional family structures, does not necessarily have to involve having children. Instead, it should focus on the quality of relationships, social responsibility, and collective well-being. This opens up the understanding that there are various forms of ideal families in Indonesia, including childfree families, single-child families, nuclear families consisting of childless couples, or communities formed based on emotional bonds rather than blood relations. However, the childfree phenomenon is considered to violate the norms and traditions in Indonesia, leading to discussions and considerations among students about how they will shape their future lives. The decision to go childfree must be based on critical understanding and sound judgment to avoid creating new conflicts or negative stigma within society. With the knowledge they possess, students have the critical ability to construct the childfree phenomenon in accordance with social norms, values, and culture.

### Students' Social Construction of the Childfree Phenomenon

Every society has its own interpretation of this phenomenon, and students also have their own understanding, supported by knowledge and openness to new phenomena. In an era of increasingly advanced technology and easy access to information from anywhere, it becomes easier for students to delve deeper into the childfree phenomenon. Some informants interpret the childfree phenomenon as the decision of a married couple not to have children, either biologically or through adoption, due to certain reasons or factors.

*"In my opinion, the childfree phenomenon refers to a married couple who decide not to have children due to certain factors. This decision is indeed the result of mutual agreement between both parties, without being pressured by anyone outside their relationship."*

Each student has their own understanding and perception of the childfree phenomenon, which is influenced by how their environment shapes the meaning of children within a family. The decision to be childfree is not always made by married couples; some couples choose to be childfree temporarily, for about 10 to 20 years, until they are ready and capable of having a financially sufficient family. This temporary decision to live without children is made to prepare for a family life that is emotionally and physically ready, as well as to ensure that everything is fully prepared before having children and taking on full responsibility as parents.

In contrast, one informant with the initials RA stated that the childfree phenomenon is a personal belief or understanding to liberate oneself from the burden of parental and family responsibilities. They choose to be childfree because they want to reduce expectations that do not align with their personal values.

*"I define the childfree phenomenon as how someone holds a belief or understanding that they want to liberate themselves, as being childfree is considered a way of life that is not burdensome and can be adopted by anyone. They wish to free themselves, and therefore, having children is not seen as an obligation in their life."*

Viewing the decision to remain childfree is inseparable from the reasons and factors that support why someone chooses not to have children. In today's world, everything is expensive and not easily accessible. Several factors or reasons for deciding to be childfree are typically driven by social, economic, environmental, and health factors. Those who choose childfree often place greater emphasis on fulfilling their personal needs and desires, such as career development, self-exploration, and the freedom to pursue interests and talents without the limitations that may come with parental responsibilities. As mentioned by informant AS, the decision to be childfree is made by individuals who may not want to be hindered and prefer to live freely without the responsibility of raising children.

*"In my opinion, the childfree phenomenon is only applicable to people who want to live their lives normally, without any hindrances, and even living just as a couple is not a problem."*

For some students, the childfree phenomenon remains an objective issue. This phenomenon can be seen and judged depending on the circumstances. For example, in Indonesia, it might be beneficial to reduce overpopulation, while in countries like Japan or Korea, it could further lower birth rates. However, caution is still needed because if this phenomenon continues among the younger generation for a long time, it may lead to a lack of future successors in Indonesia. Therefore, the views and attitudes of students toward the childfree phenomenon are crucial, as they will shape the future direction of the nation. Most students choose to respect the childfree phenomenon based on well-thought-out decisions, rather than merely personal needs.

The social environment plays an important role in the spread of a phenomenon in society, whether positive or negative. Often, these phenomena spread and evolve through social interactions between individuals in a community. The social environment includes various factors such as family, peers, neighbors, educational institutions, workplaces, and other social institutions. One way the social environment influences the spread of a phenomenon is through the process of socialization, where individuals learn socially accepted behaviors through interactions with others (Waluya, 2007). Additionally, the environment also affects the spread of phenomena through communication among individuals within the community, such as conversations, discussions, and the exchange of information, which can

accelerate the spread of ideas, concepts, and trends.

The social environment plays a significant role in shaping students' understanding and interpretation of the childfree phenomenon through their interactions with society, which holds diverse views and responses. These interactions are valuable in strengthening arguments and learning about a phenomenon and concept in a comprehensive manner by considering various perspectives. The existence of individuals or couples who choose a childfree lifestyle can influence how students construct their understanding of the childfree phenomenon, both positively and negatively. The research findings show that four informants were not notably affected by the presence of individuals who choose a childfree lifestyle, supported by the early instillation of beliefs and traditions that have already been deeply ingrained in their thinking.

*"It doesn't affect me. I've been consistent from the start that my ideal family consists of a father, mother, and children. Naturally, the number of children would be two, because Indonesia has the family planning (KB) program, and socially, of course, it's harmonious, with good communication and mutual support."*

*"It goes back to respecting everyone's choices. So, it doesn't affect me, and I have no issue whether they choose to be childfree or not. This interaction is just an open space for discussion for me."*

In understanding the phenomenon of being childfree among students, a diverse social environment plays a role in shaping their social constructs. Social interactions become a significant substance in unraveling the meaning and understanding the choices behind the desire to live without children. Students, with their intellectual abilities, can examine this phenomenon more deeply, responding to the differences that may arise in their environment. Various social environments, from campus to family and community, provide students with an understanding of this phenomenon. From their social surroundings, students bring this sensitive and critical topic into their discussions, considering the social, economic, and cultural aspects of the childfree phenomenon.

Culture and tradition can guide society to act according to what has been taught and passed down through generations. This serves to prevent society from behaving or adopting new ideas that deviate from the foundational values of established culture and tradition. In this research, culture and tradition play a role in reinforcing students' understanding of being childfree and restricting their comprehension so as not to stray from tradition, guiding students in making decisions and preventing them from arbitrarily altering the traditional family structure passed down through generations.

*"According to me, this culture plays a significant role because from culture and tradition, we understand the role of children and the importance of children in the family. Many people still hold onto culture and tradition before making decisions."*

As previously mentioned, culture serves as one of the pillars in helping students build a social construct around the childfree phenomenon and how they perceive the role of children in a family. Culture and tradition can influence students' perspectives on the childfree phenomenon, either in a positive or negative direction.

*"I see that culture clearly influences my perspective because in Indonesia, the*

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*saying 'the more children, the more fortune' is still prevalent. However, that thinking has shifted to 'the more children, the more debts,' so it affects how I view having children. It's not just about blindly following a cultural meaning that may be incorrect"*

In the context of the childfree phenomenon, the role of culture and social constructs in students' lives becomes a crucial aspect that illustrates how they understand and navigate this issue in accordance with existing cultural norms. Culture and tradition function as a guide for students to comprehend a phenomenon and ensure it aligns with long-standing values upheld in society. However, over time, as conditions evolve, certain cultural practices become less relevant to modern circumstances. Students, as critical agents of change, need to accommodate new paradigms and approach phenomena like childfree with a more open and inclusive understanding. They bear the responsibility to explore the evolving social dynamics and critically reflect on the cultural implications underlying them. By maintaining positive and relevant cultural values while also embracing the changes that occur, students can contribute to creating an inclusive environment and strengthening social harmony in society.

#### **Students' Social Construction of the Ideal Family Concept in Indonesia**

Based on the findings from the research informants, the concept of an ideal family in Indonesia, as understood by them, consists of a father, mother, and two children (referring to the Family Planning concept—"two children are better") living together in a harmonious household. This family is expected to achieve common life goals and meet the needs of each family member. Socially, an ideal family should be able to meet the needs of all its members, have clear role and function distribution without gender discrimination, and provide mutual support, respect, and acceptance.

*"As I see it, an ideal family consists of a father, mother, and children (essentially the nuclear family). In this family, they must complement each other—children should accept their parents, and parents should accept their children as they are. A family that can support, accept, and respect each member in any form."*

Students are capable of developing a more critical and in-depth interpretation, based on their experiences and knowledge, in shaping the concept of the ideal family they wish to build. Today, the characteristics of the ideal family in Indonesia are seen as no longer relevant to current societal conditions and are fraught with risks, as well as failing to provide proper justice to each family member (Sadli S., 2010). From the research results, it can be concluded that students are able to formulate the characteristics of the ideal family they aspire to: a harmonious and loving family, with clearly defined roles and functions without rigid gender divisions. The family should meet the needs of all its members and provide everyone with opportunities to grow.

The research shows that students can distinguish and separate what constitutes an ideal family that aligns with modern life. Not all traditions need to be maintained, especially if they endanger or jeopardize the sustainability of life. The key difference between the traditional ideal family concept and the one students aim to build lies in the creation of a harmonious family with an ideal number of children, born only when the family is ready. This highlights the importance of critical decision-making before having children.

According to Asmaret in the journal *"A Study of Gender from an Islamic Perspective"*\* (2018), gender differences that lead to gender roles do not inherently create problems; what needs to be challenged is the injustice stemming from men and women through a long socio-cultural process. This also applies to the formation of roles within the family, which has given rise to patriarchal family structures. Acknowledging this issue has made

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students more open and aware of the dangers and side effects of perpetuating patriarchal culture. Now, both men and women can fulfill their roles and responsibilities without being intimidated by gender norms. In this context, roles and functions in the family are no longer confined to women handling domestic tasks and men earning money. Both can contribute to daily life while still respecting individual dignity and personal responsibilities.

*“100% true that the division of roles based on gender is no longer relevant today. Household chores or earning money can be done by both men and women, without focusing on one specific gender.”*

The ideal family is a concept with individual meaning because it is shaped by diverse environments, experiences, and knowledge. Currently, the concept of the ideal family has shifted from focusing on the number of family members to emphasizing the quality of relationships and the overall well-being of the family. Rather than prioritizing quantity, the goal is to build a quality family where each individual feels valued and empowered. The importance of gender equality is increasingly highlighted in the ideal family concept, rejecting patriarchal dominance and providing space for every family member to contribute without being restricted by gender stereotypes.

Social norms play an important role in shaping and regulating the concept of the ideal family in Indonesia, especially given the country's rich and diverse culture. These norms help maintain stability by determining behaviors considered appropriate or desirable in forming a family. Moreover, understanding and adhering to these norms help prevent social conflicts and role imbalances within families. In the context of the childfree movement and its relation to the ideal family, norms still hold significant influence, particularly when it comes to deciding whether to have children or not. When someone decides not to have children, it often raises questions within their family and community, as it may be perceived as going against these norms.

One informant noted that norms help them understand what kind of ideal family should be established in Indonesia, and the strong adherence to norms surrounding children and families makes it difficult for people to freely change the ideal family structure. Norms also serve as a reference for future parents and families when making life decisions, alongside cultural elements that regulate behavior and decisions in society. Another informant mentioned that norms guide thoughts about who will carry on our legacy and continue what we have built in life.

Thus, the social construction of the ideal family concept in Indonesia is heavily influenced by norms rooted in culture and tradition. These norms encompass aspects such as loyalty, openness, and love. Traditions like respecting parents and adhering to authority also play key roles in shaping the image of an ideal family. The ideal family in Indonesia's social construction is often associated with harmony and unity, where family members support and protect each other. These norms provide the foundation for societal expectations about how a family should interact and function in Indonesia and serve as guidelines for individuals in forming and maintaining their family relationships.

The childfree phenomenon has yet to be fully accepted by many. It remains somewhat ambiguous—either seen as a breakthrough leading to positive change or as something that worsens the situation. Looking at the relationship between the childfree movement and the ideal family in Indonesia, the movement does not align with the traditional concept of an ideal family. Although some argue that a family's happiness does not depend on having children, in reality, the ideal family concept in Indonesia is still tied to the presence of children. The childfree phenomenon may eliminate certain roles and functions within the family, as couples who do not have children will not experience the roles and responsibilities of parenthood.

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Their focus would be primarily on personal matters and fulfilling the needs of the couple alone. The ideal family is often viewed as consisting of parents and children as its main pillars, but the childfree movement challenges this norm (Faridah, 2021). The decision not to have children may be seen as avoiding societal expectations regarding parental roles, but it can also be interpreted as a mature and conscious choice regarding the responsibilities involved in raising children. The childfree phenomenon highlights individual identity formation and life choices, serving as a point of reflection for those considering having children, triggering deeper contemplation about physical, mental, emotional, and financial readiness before entering a life phase that involves starting a family.

The ideal family is not monolithic, and there is no one-size-fits-all approach. As social and cultural changes continue, more individuals are questioning traditional norms and discovering an ideal family structure that better aligns with their personal needs and values. The ideal family is not solely about having children but also about fostering healthy, harmonious, and supportive relationships between spouses. In this context, the childfree phenomenon challenges conventional views of the ideal family and broadens the discussion on the diverse forms of family that can be accepted and valued in society. While still facing stigma and challenges, this phenomenon can serve as a catalyst for re-examining the true meaning of the ideal family concept and how it can adapt to the ever-evolving social and cultural realities.

### **Social Construction of Students in the Childfree Phenomenon and the Concept of Ideal Family in Indonesia**

With the emergence of the childfree phenomenon, students can consider establishing a more optimal concept of an ideal family, aimed at enhancing self-understanding and overall preparedness (Ramadhani & Tsabitah, 2022). The conception of an ideal family does not solely depend on the perfection of role structures among members and the presence of children. Therefore, it is important not to associate childfree with a threat or a negative phenomenon, but rather as a neutral condition. The childfree phenomenon provides a significant opportunity for careful reflection on the fundamental principles of parenthood and the dynamics of the desired family, as well as preparing oneself thoroughly before deciding to form a family. This preparation includes readiness from both the husband and wife, which should be actively pursued from the beginning, not just at the marriage stage.

The childfree phenomenon influences students' views on the importance of thoughtful considerations before deciding to have children. Students recognize that having children is not merely a matter of personal desire but also involves considering the impacts on family life, career, and social responsibilities. Consequently, students become more open to new ideas about the ideal family that encompass not only traditional concepts but also modern aspects such as balancing career and family, as well as awareness of environmental responsibilities.

Although students exhibit openness to the childfree phenomenon and family concepts, this does not mean they easily follow the trend. On the contrary, they maintain strong opinions and understandings related to the childfree phenomenon. Their openness is reinforced by the knowledge they acquire during their learning process, which aids them in thinking critically and analytically about the phenomenon. Students take a more complex approach to understanding the implications of the childfree phenomenon and the concept of the ideal family, considering various factors such as cultural values, traditions, and their impact on personal life and society as a whole.

*"I can say that the childfree phenomenon is not relevant if practiced on a massive scale, because fundamentally, my knowledge in the field of history explains that early humans became extinct, leading to the emergence of other early humans. Let's just speculate: imagine if a country has a majority of its citizens deciding*

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*to go childfree, then when they reach the age of 65-75, there will be no one to carry on their legacy, and they will become the inhabitants of that country. It will certainly be inhabited by another country, and this could lead to the extinction of a race in its original area.”*

Students play a crucial role as agents of change and moral architects in society, particularly concerning the childfree phenomenon and contemporary concepts of the ideal family. As facilitators, they can start by setting a good example for themselves, engaging with family members, providing educational activities in their communities, and creating an inclusive environment for individuals who choose the childfree path. With a comprehensive and socially constructive approach, students can help build a more inclusive, tolerant, and empathetic society that respects diverse individual life choices.

*“In my opinion, being childfree is not a threat because, in Indonesia, the culture of having children is deeply rooted compared to those who are childfree. Even if someone chooses to be childfree, I think it's a good choice because it can minimize overpopulation, and as long as it doesn't cause conflict in their social environment and they can still be beneficial to society, it's not a problem.”*

The social construction among students regarding the childfree phenomenon and the concept of the ideal family in Indonesia fosters an understanding that every individual has the freedom to choose their own path in life, and we can respect those choices as long as the reasons behind them are clear and based on certain factors. Students are increasingly becoming aware of the meaning of children, recognizing that having children should not be taken lightly as it requires strong and critical consideration. Although every individual has the right to build their ideal family according to their desires, families with children still remain the primary choice for Indonesian society.

The social construction involving students in the childfree phenomenon and the concept of the ideal family in Indonesia significantly impacts their ability to plan for their future in family formation. Through a deep understanding of this phenomenon, students become capable of designing their ideal family according to their plans and comprehending how to prepare for it thoroughly. The childfree phenomenon also acts as a trigger for students to enhance their readiness before deciding to start a family and have children. Thus, through this social construction, students are not only more prepared physically and emotionally to face their future roles as parents, but they also become more skilled in planning and designing a family that aligns with their aspirations and values.

*“I think I have to be ready, both economically, socially, and mentally. I also need to find a partner who is ready; it's impossible for me to be ready while my partner is not. Up until now, I still want to have children, a maximum of two, because I focus on continuing a quality lineage. I also want to instill characteristics of a harmonious family, with clear role and function distribution, open communication, shared goals, and prosperity.”*

*“My plan for the future is to have one or two children, with a significant age gap of 5-7 years. I'm the type who believes everything should be well-planned, so I want everything to be scheduled properly according to the right timing. I hope that when I start a family, everything can be planned carefully and effectively.”*

## Discussion

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The process of social construction opens up space for diverse perspectives and new understandings for students in comprehending a phenomenon. It does not confine itself to a single viewpoint but enables consideration of all possibilities that arise in society. The social construction process consists of three stages, ultimately resulting in a more critical and in-depth understanding of a phenomenon. These stages are externalization, objectivation, and internalization, which help illustrate that social reality is not something fixed or separate from humans, but rather the result of human interaction within society.

The externalization stage involves students expressing their values, norms, and beliefs through actions and interactions with others. Next, objectivation represents the outcomes of externalization accepted by students as part of the external world beyond themselves. Finally, internalization occurs when students begin to accept and internalize the social realities constructed by society.

Social Construction Theory views the childfree phenomenon and the concept of the ideal family in Indonesia through these three stages: externalization, objectivation, and internalization. The externalization stage, or awareness phase, sees students recognizing the emergence of the childfree phenomenon as a new concept in forming the ideal family. In the objectivation stage, students accept the childfree phenomenon, providing a new perspective that an ideal family is not solely defined by lineage but also by the overall quality of family life. Meanwhile, the internalization stage represents the phase in which students absorb knowledge and apply it in constructing their ideal family in accordance with their respective visions.

At the onset of adaptation, students understand the meaning of the childfree phenomenon as a means of self-expression and comprehension through social interaction. Through this process, they analyze the phenomenon in their surroundings, reinforcing their understanding by considering the reasons, consequences, and efforts to avoid conflict. This social construction is built through the social environment, which encompasses culture and norms, forming the foundation of Indonesian society's views on certain ideas. These environments, cultures, and norms enrich and broaden students' perspectives by considering various viewpoints without being influenced by subjective individual opinions, thereby creating a more neutral attitude.

The social construction process related to the concept of the ideal family also shapes attitudes and knowledge about the role of children in families, emphasizing that having children is not an obligation but rather a decision that requires careful consideration. Thus, through understanding the childfree phenomenon, students can change their approach to contemplating the desire to have children by stressing the importance of thorough preparation in achieving the concept of an ideal family. The childfree phenomenon significantly influences perceptions of the ideal family, including questions about how husbands and wives navigate family life without children.

Students are able to understand and appreciate the existence of the childfree phenomenon in society, considering the consequences of such choices to avoid generating negative stigma within the community. Although the majority of students' social environments still reject the childfree phenomenon and uphold the idea of having at least one child in the family, students can view the factors influencing someone's choice to be childfree from various perspectives. They acknowledge the importance of norms and values in shaping their understanding of the meaning of children in families, as well as the pros and cons of families without children, to maintain social order and prevent conflict. While culture and tradition are significant and remain relevant in building understanding, some aspects may no longer align with contemporary times, making it crucial to update views and attitudes toward the childfree phenomenon in accordance with evolving social contexts and values.

In its implications for life, not all students will apply this concept. How they interpret

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the childfree phenomenon influences their attitudes towards it, determining whether they choose to support, reject, or adopt a wise stance of respecting this choice. In essence, students are more open to the childfree phenomenon and can better understand the reasons someone may decide to choose a family life without children, yet the childfree phenomenon will still be challenging to implement within Indonesian society.

Students' understanding of the childfree phenomenon contributes to shaping the image of the ideal family in Indonesia in the future. Through three stages of social construction, students realize that the ideal family is not always related to having descendants; rather, it emphasizes quality and freedom. However, the implementation of the childfree phenomenon cannot yet be fully integrated into the concept of an ideal family in Indonesia that is formed without children, as the ideal family with children will always be preferred by them. Students define the ideal family as a family unit consisting of a father, mother, and children, formed within a small family context with a strong commitment from each family member. They can analyze the characteristics of a harmonious ideal family, characterized by love, clear roles and functions, and opportunities for growth. It is also essential to emphasize that role distribution within an ideal family should not be constrained by gender.

Through the childfree phenomenon, students develop a deeper understanding of the role of children in a family, recognizing that having children is not a necessity but rather a shared responsibility in forming the ideal family. They realize that the essence of the ideal family prioritizes quality over quantity of children or viewing children as a long-term investment, while also ensuring the well-being of all family members. They interpret the role of children more profoundly, seeing them as individuals who should be brought into the world according to one's capacity and with careful preparation, given the significant responsibilities that come with parenthood. In the concept of an ideal family, children are not just seen as additions, but as valuable individuals who require full attention and support. Therefore, the ideal family is one that not only ensures the optimal growth and development of children but also nurtures their talents and fosters a harmonious life based on principles of equality.

Thus, students are changing how they consider the desire to have children, emphasizing the importance of thorough preparation from all aspects. Although norms and values play an important role in preventing conflicts, the decision to be childfree is respected as a personal choice for many individuals. The childfree choice significantly influences the ideal family, prompting questions about how a husband and wife can lead a family life without children, which encourages students to appreciate strong reasons behind such decisions. For students, they are able to design their future family plans in line with their aspirations and desires.

## CONCLUSION

The childfree phenomenon is a social phenomenon that describes the decision made by individuals or couples not to have children, whether biologically or through adoption. This decision is based on various considerations, including social factors, career aspirations, financial conditions, environmental concerns, and personal principles. Some people choose to be childfree as a way to free themselves from what they perceive as the heavy responsibilities of parenthood, especially those who feel they cannot meet these demands adequately. On the other hand, some view this decision as a mature preparation step before entering parenthood, spending time preparing the necessary conditions before raising children.

The social construction of the childfree phenomenon among students reflects an appreciation for individual freedom in making life choices. However, responses to this phenomenon vary among students, influenced by cultural, traditional, and social norms in their respective environments. Some students openly embrace the childfree phenomenon, seeing it as an expression of freedom of choice and respecting the underlying reasons. Conversely,

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others feel anxious and reject this phenomenon, perceiving it as contrary to the natural role of women and a rejection of the destiny ordained by God.

In the context of the ideal family concept in Indonesia, students face challenges in formulating definitions that align with modern societal values and needs. They recognize the need to adapt social constructions of family to accommodate changes in social structures and dynamics. Students pay particular attention to efforts to eliminate patriarchal forms within families, which have long dictated roles and relationships among family members. They propose a new understanding of family well-being and harmony that involves the participation of all members without restricting roles based on gender. Additionally, students consider the readiness and preparation needed before deciding to have children, taking into account the balance between career and family life, as well as the importance of ensuring family well-being and harmony as top priorities.

Thus, even though the childfree phenomenon may not completely align with the traditional image of the ideal family, students view it as an opportunity to thoughtfully plan for their future families, emphasizing the understanding that happiness within a family is not always related to the presence of children but rather to balance, involvement, and harmony in family relationships.

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