

# The Childfree Phenomenon As A Paradox In The Modern Family In Bali

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## **Abstract**

The phenomenon of childfree, the conscious decision of individuals or couples not to have children, has become a social issue reflecting changing values within the modern family. This choice emerged alongside the rise of individualism, gender equality, and freedom to determine one's life direction. However, this decision is often considered a deviation from traditional norms that view the ideal family as a reproductive and progeny-oriented institution. From a sociological perspective, this situation creates a paradox: on the one hand, childfree reflects social progress in the form of individual autonomy and women's freedom over their bodies and social roles; on the other hand, it generates stigma and resistance because it contradicts the conventionally understood function of the family. Through a literature review, this paper analyses childfree as a reflection of the transformation of family values in the modern era, using functionalism, feminism, and individualization approaches to understand the tension between personal freedom and social norms in contemporary family construction. This paper emphasizes the urgency of understanding the changing functions and roles of the modern family, while also presenting a perspective on women's bodily autonomy.

**Keywords:** *childfree, modern family, sociology of the family, social paradox, bodily autonomy.*

## **1. Introduction**

The phenomenon of *childfree* has become a social issue that reflects the changing values in the modern family today by intersecting with family traditions and norms. Historically, the origins of *the childfree movement* can be traced back to the initiative of Shirley Radl and Ellen Peck, who founded the *National Alliance of Optional Parenthood* in Palo Alto, California, in 1972. This organization became a pioneer in opposing the values of pronatalism, which is a view that considers having children as a social obligation. Through his advocacy network, the idea then spread widely and gained recognition in different parts of the world (Agrillo & Nelini in. This Yuli et al., 2025) *childfree choice* emerged along with the life of the process of globalization, urbanization and the entry of the influence of individualist values that strengthened the understanding of the right to autonomy of the individual body in determining the direction of his life. In Indonesia, this phenomenon began to receive attention since the news about influencer Gita Savitri. According to Bening ( in Leliana et al., 2023) in his marriage, the couple Gitasav and Paul Partohap declared themselves as adherents of *the childfree* principle in 2018 based on concerns that they could not be fully responsible and potentially cause suffering for their children in the future. This has succeeded in raising and popularizing the issue of *childfree* to the wider Indonesian public.

The perspective of family sociology sees the institution of the family traditionally seen as the smallest social unit that becomes the foundation for the process of population regeneration and the continuity of the kinship system, which is a function that in Indonesia is increasingly relevant to be studied, considering the strength of family values and the importance of heredity in the culture of society. Based on Burgess and Locke's definition, the family is a group of human beings with the following characteristics: (1) formed through marriage, blood relations, or adoption; (2) forming a household by living together; (3) interact according to their respective roles such as husband-wife, father-mother, and children; and (4) creating, maintaining, preserving, and living a common culture. This definition is broad because it

includes various forms of families, whether formed through marital bonds such as husband and wife, or through blood relations or adoption such as parents, children, and other relatives. So in the context of the childfree phenomenon (in Riarismayanti, 2025), a paradox arises, because in the modern family it actually strengthens the non-reproductive functions of the family and redefines the fundamental meaning of the family itself. Reflecting on Burgess and Locke's statement that the family is an institution responsible for cultural continuity through regeneration, the childfree phenomenon in the modern family obscures this fundamental function. So in the long term, the absence of reproductive roles can disrupt the balance of the social system which has been based on the presence of the next generation.

Deeper, in theory, the family has eight family functions ranging from religious, socio-cultural, love, protection, reproduction, socialization and education, economy, and environmental development. These eight functions are expected to be a guideline for the lives of Indonesian families. In addition, it is a prerequisite, reference, and lifestyle for every family in order to realize a prosperous and quality family. Thus, (Wijayanti & Berdame, 2019) *the child-free* lifestyle has the potential to shift society's interpretation of the concept of the ideal family in Indonesia and ultimately affect the way people see the role of the family in cultural and social contexts. In line with that, the battle between bodily autonomy and freedom has become very real in opposition in the midst of Indonesian society which has strong customs and religious values and also sees in various tribes, the sustainability of offspring is still preserved and not just a tradition, but has been internalized as a sacred religious obligation, so that *the childfree* option is often seen as contrary to the social and spiritual values that are upheld.

From a sociological perspective, this situation creates a paradox in the modern family today. On the one hand, *childfree* shows individual autonomy as well as women's freedom in their social role to not have children, either through biological birth or through the adoption process. As explained by Rizka et al., (in Yessino et al., 2025) this decision refers to things that are taken consciously by individuals without any coercion from other parties. But on the other hand, when this decision is reflected in traditional values such as in the culture in Bali, there seems to be a rejection of *the child-free* way of life because the community strongly adheres to the norms that place heredity as a social, spiritual, and cultural foundation. Thus, although it is an individual right, *childfree choice* is no longer understood simply as an expression of bodily autonomy, but as an inalignment with the family's social responsibility as guardian of regeneration, continuity of values, and cultural heritage.

For example, in the Hindu view, giving birth to children is considered a noble act that furthers family values and strengthens relationships between people (Titib in . This view shows how noble it is to have children in the Hindu view and the function of children in maintaining the spiritual and social balance of the Hindu family. In addition, the caste system that is not unfamiliar to the Balinese people also supports the sustainability of offspring. However, it should be understood that the concept of caste as known to the public today is a form of misunderstanding of the varna teachings that have emerged since the colonial period. According to Hinduism, the term caste is not known, but Hadriani et al., 2024) (Damayanti, 2020) *chess varna*. Furthermore, according to Wiana (in Damayanti, 2020) *varna*, it is the classification of society based on function and profession, while caste refers to stratification based on heredity. Both have different meanings, but the lack of understanding makes people more familiar with the term caste than *varna chess*. The demand to pass on the family line is understood as a social responsibility that supports the temple system, customary obligations, and cultural inheritance. Therefore, further research is needed on how *the childfree* decision, if

normalized, is perceived by the Balinese people as a threat to the preservation of ancestral values and the traditional family order.

The tension present between modern values and customary obligations shows that the family is still the main cultural agent that is difficult to replace by individualistic orientation, thus making *the issue of childfree* even more complex in Balinese society. Supported by religious verses and customary teachings, they synergize to form a social construction that places marriage and having children as an inevitable way of life. Society views that marriage should produce offspring, so a childless family is considered a failure (Iskandar et al., 2019). Through the analysis knife of Robert K. Merton's functional structural theory, *the childfree* phenomenon can be seen as a friction between traditional family functions that emphasize the continuity of offspring as a cultural support, colliding with modern family dynamics that begin to prioritize individual autonomy. Through Merton's functional structural theory, this phenomenon can be analyzed how *childfree* is perceived as dysfunction or even non-function in the social system, but at the same time hints at the process of adaptation to more diverse family forms. Therefore, this study is important to explore how the paradox of the modern family in the presence of an alternative to life as *childfree*.

## 2. Literature Review

There have been many studies that discuss the childfree phenomenon, but there have not been many studies that specifically highlight how the paradox that occurs in modern families in Bali in the context of *childfree* in Balinese society. Among the relevant studies is a study entitled "Stigma of Neysa et al., (2024) *Childfree* Individuals in the Community in the City of Denpasar" which discusses how society interprets and stigmatizes individuals who choose to live *childfree*, especially in the social environment of Denpasar. This research has similarities in seeing *the childfree phenomenon* as a social issue influenced by cultural norms, societal expectations, and strong values regarding the obligation to have children, especially in the Balinese context. However, it has an analytical focus and depth through the perspective of Robert K. Merton's functional structure to examine *childfree* as a phenomenon that contains dimensions of function and dysfunction simultaneously. This research not only sees *childfree* as a source of dysfunction for the traditional Balinese social system, but also explores its hidden function in driving the evolution of social norms and reconstructing the meaning of cultural preservation in the modern era. Thus, this study fills an academic gap by offering a more comprehensive analysis of the structural contradictions that arise when traditional values are confronted with the realities of contemporary society.

Furthermore, the study entitled "The Phenomenon of Choosing to be Riarismayanti (2025) *Childfree: An Analysis through Imam al-Juwayni's Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah*" discusses the decision to *be childfree* from the perspective of Islamic law, especially using the maqāṣid al-sharī'ah framework formulated by Imam al-Juwayni. The study sees that *childfree* decisions can be understood through Islamic principles such as ḥifẓ al-nasl (preservation of offspring), ḥifẓ al-māl (protection of property), and ḥifẓ al-nafs (protection of the soul). The difference lies in the fact that in this study the decision not to have children is acceptable in sharia if it is based on rational and contextual reasons such as extreme economic hardship, psychological trauma, or serious health risks, but it is contrary to the principles of sharia if it is based only on fear of poverty or worldly reasons.

The study looked at cultural and religious context as the main factors in determining whether *or not childfree decisions* are considered morally and spiritually valid. This study is different from this study because it examines the phenomenon of *childfree* through the perspective of

Robert K. Merton's functional structure to analyze the socio-cultural paradoxes that arise from the tension between bodily autonomy and cultural demands in the modern Balinese family. In contrast to previous research that focused on religious justification from an Islamic perspective, this study looks at how *childfree* operates in the traditional Balinese social system as a source of dysfunction that threatens the continuity of cultural practices such as *ngayah* in banjar and ancestral rituals, while having a hidden function in encouraging the evolution of social norms. The focus of this research is to understand how structural contradictions in modern Balinese society create space for negotiation between collective values and individual autonomy, as well as how the functional and dysfunctional consequences of *childfree* choices shape unique socio-cultural dynamics in the local Balinese context.

The last relevant research is entitled "The Safitri et al., (2023) *Childfree Phenomenon* in the Gen-Z Era According to Religious Views". This study uses a literature study method with a normative-religious approach. The main focus of the research is the views of major religions in Indonesia, Islam, Protestant Christianity, Catholicism, and Hinduism on the *childfree* phenomenon, as well as examining how Generation Z understands and responds to the issue. Departing from a religious framework that places marriage and procreation as part of nature and moral obligations, this study concludes that *childfree* is seen as contrary to religious teachings because it is considered to reject the command to continue procreation. In contrast to this research, it is here to fill an academic gap that has not been touched by previous studies, especially regarding the paradox of the modern family in Bali. By applying Robert K. Merton's functional structural perspective in the specific context of Balinese society, this study does not only see *childfree* as a moral problem or social stigma, but as a complex phenomenon that contains paradoxes of function and dysfunction in socio-cultural systems. This approach allows for a more dynamic analysis of how *childfree* can simultaneously threaten the survival of traditional systems while also playing a role in the transformation of social norms towards a more egalitarian family format.

The main contribution of this research lies in its ability to uncover the dialectic between cultural preservation and social change in contemporary Balinese society, especially in the context of the modern family paradox where the values of individual autonomy are confronted with a solid wall of collective norms. This research is significant because there has been no previous study that specifically addresses the paradox of the modern Balinese family in the context of *childfree*, where modernity's demands for gender equality and bodily autonomy must negotiate with patriarchal structures and cultural obligations that have been passed down from generation to generation. By offering an analytical framework that blends an understanding of structural pressures with individual agency, this study provides a deeper and contextual perspective in understanding the phenomenon of *childfree* in one of the cultures in Indonesia.

### 3. Research Methods

Research This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach. According to p. 29), qualitative research aims to understand the meaning given by individuals to a phenomenon through descriptive and narrative data. The descriptive research that the researcher conducted, as explained on page 227) focuses on in-depth observation of the subject and organizes the findings into relevant themes. This approach is appropriately used to examine research on Creswell & Creswell (2023) Creswell & Creswell (2023, *the issue of childfree* in the modern family today in Bali and the social, emotional, and legal implications arising from both. Furthermore, there are two data sources in this study, namely primary and secondary. According to p. 230) the primary data in question was obtained through face-to-face interviews. Primary data was also obtained from informant sources, namely the Balinese Hindu community

who understand Creswell & Creswell (2023, *the issue of childfreedom*). Meanwhile, secondary data is obtained by the author indirectly through public documents such as official reports, journals, audiovisuals, websites, or texts from the media. To understand the phenomenon of *childfree* in the context of the modern Balinese family in depth, this study uses a qualitative approach. This approach was chosen because it is able to capture experiences, meanings, and social dynamics that cannot be explained through numbers alone. Correspondingly, according to p. 282) a case study is a qualitative research design that is used to explore in depth a program, event, activity, process, or individual that is limited by specific time and activity. Information is collected in detail through various data collection procedures over an ongoing period of time. Creswell & Creswell (2023,

Furthermore, the data analysis of this research will be systematically processed to organize and interpret the data so that the researcher gains a deep understanding of the phenomenon being studied. According to pp. 238–239), the analysis process is carried out through several sequential steps. First, the researcher prepares and organizes the data, including transcribing interviews and grouping information sources. Second, the researcher reads all the data to get an overview. Third, the researcher encoded by labeling important parts of the data. Fourth, the code results are developed into the main themes. Fifth, the researcher compiles descriptions or narratives that relate these themes. Furthermore, researchers can conduct further analysis as needed, through a case study approach. In the final stage, the data is presented in the form of a narrative that is reinforced by citations or visualizations to make the findings more meaningful. Thus, the entire data analysis process carried out in this study is directed to read the Creswell & Creswell (2023, *childfree* phenomenon in depth in the context of Balinese culture that continues to undergo a transformation of the family order. Through the Robert K. Merton Functional Structural framework, this study not only maps the perceptions and experiences of the participants, but also analyzes how *childfree* choices create functional and dysfunctional consequences in the Balinese socio-cultural system. This approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of how Balinese people respond to *childfree living choices* as a form of adaptation and a threat to the balance of the social system, where traditional values are confronted with the increasingly complex realities of the modern family. This analysis reveals how a phenomenon that seems to be personal actually has a systemic impact on the sustainability of cultural practices, the regeneration of traditional values, and the transformation of the meaning of family in contemporary Balinese society.

## **4. Results and Discussion**

### **4.1 *Childfree* and the Preservation of Indonesian Family Values**

Each region in Indonesia has a distinctive cultural configuration, where local traditions and wisdom are inherited through intergenerational regeneration mechanisms in traditional families. For example, in Batak, according to Sormin, there are four moral messages and cultural values that are still maintained and respected to this day, one of which is the value of *hagabeon*, which is an important symbol to have descendants in a family. This shows that in Batak society, the continuity of generations and the quality of offspring are considered vital aspects in building a prosperous family and community. In addition, the sustainability of the customary holder is also reflected in the *Semende* custom in the *Tunggu Tubang* system as according to the *Tunggu Tubang* system which stipulates the eldest daughter as the recipient of an estate that cannot be sold. As a strategic role holder, he is in charge of bonding the extended family, representing collective interests, and managing legacy assets. Furthermore, various cultural systems such as the tradition in Java and the matrilineal system in Minangkabau show the same dependence on human regeneration in the traditional family. The survival of these cultural institutions depends heavily on the existence of successors who will

carry on and continue these traditions to the next generation. (Samosir et al., 2025) Velinda et al. (2018)

Based on this, from the perspective of family sociology, the rise of *childfree* has the potential to trigger a shift in cultural reproduction that has been the main support of traditional families in the sustainability of the socio-cultural system. The emergence of the modern family with the childfree phenomenon that no longer views the presence of children as a necessity and more on the autonomy of the individual body, but this presents a new paradigm in the Balinese social structure. So there is a contradiction from the other side, namely cultural logic, that heredity is the axis of family sustainability and the decision not to have children is understood as a direct threat to the stability of the social and spiritual structure of Balinese society. As a result, for Balinese to continue and consider the continuity of tradition to be considered something natural and normal, this value acts as a boundary that determines who is considered to be necessary, determines how a family should be formed, and who is obliged to continue the lineage into a demand that makes *childfree* decisions seen as deviant or threaten the established social order.

From the perspective of feminism, women face layered pressures as guardians of tradition, so *childfree* can emerge as a form of emancipation that is contrary to patriarchal structures and caste systems. Sociologically, this tension can be read as a social dysfunction or rather as a trigger for reform towards the modern family norm. This situation confirms the paradox of the modern family, where the family is maintained as a traditional institution full of collective values, but individuals increasingly demand autonomy, equality, and freedom to make life choices. Thus, the *childfree* choice reveals the contradiction between the demand to preserve ancestors and personal aspirations, as well as opening up a space for cultural dialogue about how tradition and modernity are in the transformation of the modern family in Bali. More deeply, it is important to understand the context of the transformation of the modern family structure that is the background of this research by looking at the definition according to today's family model that tends to emphasize the partnership relationship between husband and wife, where both have equal rights and responsibilities in carrying out domestic and public roles. In the modern family reality, women have played a significant role in various fields such as economics, social, and politics. The increasingly strong involvement of women in the public sphere makes the relationship between husband and wife develop to be more collaborative than hierarchical. (Riarismayanti, 2025)

This dynamic is increasingly relevant in the context of Balinese society, where the transformation of modern family values that is more egalitarian is reflected in the changing lifestyles and mindsets of contemporary Balinese women. This shift in priorities not only transforms the traditional gender role structure, but also disrupts the value of lineage continuity that has relied on women's active contributions to biological and cultural reproduction. In such conditions, *the childfree option* emerged as a form of rejection of the double burden that Balinese women must bear between the demands of modern careers and complex customary obligations as well as a negotiation strategy for traditional expectations that are increasingly inlined with personal aspirations in the contemporary era.

#### ***4.2 Analysis of the Modern Family Paradox in the Childfree Phenomenon Through Functional Structural Theory***

In analyzing this transformation of the modern family, Merton's functional structural theory offers the right perspective for understanding the impact of these changes on social systems. According to Merton, function is the way in which various social or cultural elements carry out their roles in society so as to give rise to the process of adaptation or adjustment in a system.

In other words, each element complements each other so that it can maintain the stability and balance of the system as a whole. In line with this concept, the function of the family as well as the role of reproduction both in a biological sense and in the form of reproduction of values, culture, and customs through intergenerational reproduction can continue to survive. (Nurhakim et al., 2023) In the Balinese context, this function is evident through various rituals, customary obligations, and cultural practices that demand the existence of the next generation. This is also reflected in one of the interviews which stated that

*"I think regardless of the caste that must be lowered for my race, there is an important thing, namely who will continue the sacred duties of the Balinese people. Who will continue the arts in Bali, the training for ogoh-ogoh from childhood and who will do it in the banjar, contribute energy and thoughts for the common good and most basic, who will carry out ceremonies for our ancestors, celebrate Banten, and ensure that this cycle of life and death continues to run in accordance with religion and customs. This is about our sacred obligation to maintain a balance between nature and scale and the relationship between the natural relationship between parents and children"* Ida Bagus Oka, interview November 1, 2025

Based on the data disclosed by the informant, the function of the family in Balinese society plays a role as the main support for the sustainability of the socio-cultural system. As emphasized, the family does not only play a role as a biological unit but also as a cultural institution that ensures the continuity of important rituals such as *ngayah* in banjar, the making of ogoh-ogoh, and the implementation of ancestral ceremonies. The fundamental function of the Balinese family lies in its ability to ensure regeneration both biologically and culturally, including the inheritance of spiritual responsibility to maintain a cosmological balance between the natural and the temporal realms. Thus, the presence of children in Hindu families is essential and irreplaceable, as it becomes a link that connects past traditions, present life, and spiritual continuity in the future.

So the informant did not agree with the concept *of childfree* because it was not in line with the functioning of traditional Balinese family institutions. Although there is a paradox about individual autonomy, we must see that the main function of traditional family norms is precisely to give transcendental meaning to every member of society. Attachment to sacred tasks such as performing *banten* and continuing the lineage is not just a burden, but a social mechanism that ensures the stability of the Balinese people's collective identity. A form of active participation function in maintaining harmony that gives deep meaning to community life.

On the other hand, based on the interview: *"The pressure of Balinese women that I see where they have to bear customary, domestic and economic roles but are also required to be able to give birth to offspring. Even though not necessarily all of us women must give birth, right, especially in Bali it must be a boy, even if he gives birth to a girl is not enough. How about it, giving birth that I understand after this qualification is to return to the woman whether she wants to have children or not..."* -Cokorda Dianda, interview 10 November 2025

The paradox of family function is then seen when informants as women begin to reduce reproductive practices that occur weakening the mechanism of inheriting cultural values that have been taking place through family institutions. In the context of Indonesia's demographics, if this is done massively, there will be a change in the potential reduction of the birth rate to below the *replacement level of fertility*, a condition that can hinder population regeneration and have long-term consequences for social stability and sustainable development. In addition, if these functions are no longer in line with individual experiences and choices, such as

women's childless decisions, then there is tension in the system. In Merton's perspective, this condition reflects how a social element can function to maintain balance, but at the same time create dysfunction when its demands are unable to accommodate more complex social realities. Therefore, the stress experiences expressed by informants are not a purely individual case, but part of a historical pattern of reproductive roles. Furthermore, the second informant also emphasized that social pressure on women who choose not to have children is not only present in the form of abstract norms, but appears directly in daily interactions.

Explained with an interview excerpt, *"Pressure is honestly there, especially after revealing that it exists, especially from external, from family, from the environment in the village. They said, 'Why is that?' 'You don't love your family, don't you want to continue?' More there is pressure. They seem to have not gotten used to it, have not accepted that there are people who decide not to have offspring and indeed their own decision."* - Initial D, interview November 10, 2025.

The informant described how prohibitions and taboos related to *childfree choices* work in real life in family relations in the village as a form of social control that is institutionalized through family norms, parental expectations, and the discourse of the need to have heredity that continues to be reproduced from generation to generation. On the other hand, the community's objection to *childfree options* can also be understood as part of a collective effort to maintain the sustainability of family institutions and the preservation of local culture. In the context of customary villages, reproduction is seen not only as a personal decision, but as a social mechanism that ensures the continuity of lineages, the sustainability of communal duties, and the preservation of rituals that are the foundation of Balinese cultural identity. Therefore, views that reject *childfree* can also be interpreted as a form of protection for the social order that has been maintaining community cohesion. In this framework, the determination of society to maintain reproductive norms is not necessarily a form of oppression, but also a manifestation of collective responsibility to maintain the sustainability of customary values and social harmony that have been inherited across generations.

The results show that reproductive demands are not only related to demographic sustainability, but also closely related to the structural burden that women must bear in the Balinese socio-cultural system. In the context of the modern family that increasingly emphasizes individual choice, bodily autonomy, and gender equality, these traditional demands are beginning to be questioned by some women. Conversely, as more and more women begin to question or reject these demands, including choosing *child-free*, then the social structures that depend on biological reproduction and customary reproduction have the potential to experience imbalances, especially in societies that still maintain traditional family forms as the foundation of cultural sustainability.

Explained with an interview excerpt *"My pressure from being childfree is pressure, moreover, I definitely tell my desire to be childfree to my parents. Especially when my parents had said that, but they replied 'don't say this'. It is considered that talking childfree is something that is not true, a disgrace and a taboo. Tend to refuse, refuse and talk in 'amit-amit', 'don't let my child be like that.'" - Cokorda Dianda, interview November 10, 2025*

These pressures reflect the way society associates women's identity with reproductive success and family responsibilities, so that the choice not to have children is positioned as an "unnatural" or "violating" act of gender norms. In the context of the modern family that increasingly emphasizes individual choice and bodily autonomy, this tension is becoming

increasingly apparent as traditional values regarding reproduction are confronted with a more egalitarian family orientation.

According to Merton's conceptual framework, "the functional unity of an adaptive society is limited as a state in which all parts of the social system cooperate in an adequate degree of internal harmony or consistency, without producing prolonged conflicts that cannot be limited or regulated", the (Jonathan in Adibah, 2017) *phenomenon of childfree* confirms Merton's postulate that "the perfect functional unity of a society is at odds with facts". Thus, in the context of *childfree*, childless life choices are functional at the individual level such as providing personal freedom and financial independence but at the same time dysfunctional at the level of the wider community, especially in a social system that relies on family regeneration for cultural preservation in Bali. In line with Merton's paradigm which asserts that "what is functional for a group may not be functional for the whole". Thus, (Jonathan in Adibah, 2017) *childfree* is not just a personal choice, but a complex social phenomenon that shows a dialectic between function and dysfunction in the social system.

The concept of dysfunction according to Merton refers to the negative consequences that arise from an action or institution on the social system as a whole. In this context, *childfree* choices taken individually, especially if they become a mass trend, can be seen as dysfunction because they threaten culture as the main pillar of Balinese society. More deeply dysfunction is defined as a state in which a structure or institution, although it plays a role in maintaining the stability of one part of the social system, can actually cause undesirable negative consequences for other parts. Therefore, when some women begin to reject the reproductive demands that have played a role in maintaining the sustainability of customs and lineages, one of the cultural elements that supports social stability is no longer running according to the expectations of the community. In this framework, the prohibition or rejection of (Nurhakim et al., 2023) *childfreedom* can be understood as an attempt to maintain the functioning of the system in balance, while the individual's choice not to have children is perceived as a factor that has the potential to disrupt the continuity of the social structure. Thus, *the childfree decision* is not only read as a personal choice, but as a form of deviation that is considered by the community to cause dysfunction for the mechanism of inheritance of values, the role of the family, and cultural preservation, especially in Bali.

The experience shows that the decision not to have children is not only questionable, but also positioned as something dangerous, reprehensible, or violates family values. The rejection that appears in the form of expressions such as "amit-amit" indicates that *childfree* is placed in the realm of things that are not worth talking about, even perceived as a threat to family honor and social stability. Through Merton's lens, this situation shows the potential dysfunction in the social system. By maintaining the function of traditional family institutions to preserve culture, the system can actually create negative consequences in the form of pressure and label deviation for individuals who choose a different way of life.

Meanwhile, the second informant emphasized in this case that: "*Even though I am not seen as like other Balinese women, the autonomy I have over myself is the same as my decision and even if I decide to be childfree it is me who bears, so as long as I can still live this and from my determination too and indeed I must be able because I have my own body autonomy.*" - Initial D, interview November 10, 2025.

The informant's statement affirming his bodily autonomy over *childfree* choice represents a fundamental tension in contemporary Balinese society, which can be read through the lens of

Merton's functional structure. From the point of view of the traditional Balinese social and cultural system, which relies on the continuity of lineages, ceremonies, and the regeneration of ancestral values, the decision not to have children is clearly a dysfunction. This action is perceived negatively because it is considered to disrupt the long-term stability of the social structure by breaking the chain of cultural and religious regeneration, so that the emerging social stigma can be seen as a system defense mechanism to restore the threatened balance. However, on the other hand, in the context of the modern family that emphasizes individual choice and personal freedom, the same choice can be seen as having its own function, namely as a driver of the evolution of social norms towards a more egalitarian and inclusive family format, which no longer solely defines the value of a woman through her reproductive role.

Furthermore, this choice is also essentially a statement of nonfunction, a conscious refusal to exercise the reproductive functions that have been inherent and required by the institution of marriage and the family. Thus, the conflict experienced by informants reflects the paradox of modernity in that when the values of individual autonomy are proclaimed, their most consistent application is actually confronted with the wall of collective norms. Through his statement, he not only affirmed the right to his body, but also indirectly challenged the system to redefine what is considered "contribution" and "reasonableness" in the ever-changing social order.

*A personal decision, when taken massively, will undermine the collective foundations that are the spirit of Bali's existence. If this generation breaks the chain, then the fading of this sacred obligation will essentially mean the fading of our identity as Balinese people" Ida Bagus Oka, interview November 1, 2025*

Based on this statement, a personal decision, when taken massively, will undermine the collective foundation that is the spirit of Bali's existence. It is further emphasized that if this generation breaks the chain, then the fading of this sacred obligation essentially means the fading of our identity as Balinese people. Thus, *the childfree* phenomenon in Bali is not only a matter of individual choice, but also a reflection of social dynamics that renegotiate the relationship between tradition, modernity, and personal freedom. The sociological challenge is not to maintain or reject a particular value system, but rather how to create a space for dialogue that allows the reformulation of family norms and spirituality to remain relevant in an ever-changing society without losing the essence of harmony that is the basis of Balinese's philosophy of life. In this perspective, *childfree* emerges as a complex phenomenon that sits at the intersection of individual autonomy and collective responsibility, as well as a test for the elasticity of the Balinese cultural system in responding to the changing times while maintaining the fundamental values that are the soul of Balinese society.

Judging from the traditional family function, the overemphasis on bodily autonomy and space of resistance can be seen as a threat to the social cohesion that has been maintained for centuries. traditional understanding that the unlimited autonomy of individuals has the potential to cause great dysfunction, that is, the disconnection of the chain of generations that will weaken cultural joints, collapse the kinship system, and ultimately threaten collective identity. Thus, the traditional family offers a deep stability and meaning, which begins to disappear when modern values such as radical autonomy are glorified without considering the long-term consequences for the established social construct.

Based on the interview: *"Economics, there are many things that I want to pursue in terms of economics. My boyfriend and I agreed to be childfree after our studies were over, and then planned to move abroad. For us, living without children is a conscious choice to fully explore*

*one's potential, pursue a career, and a stable economy. We believe that happiness does not have to be tied to having offspring, but to the freedom to determine our own way of life according to the values we believe in"* Initials B, Interview November 12

It can be seen how the logic of the "market model of modernity" that Beck puts forward works in a real context. This statement reflects how the demands of careers, global mobility, and economic stability encourage couples to choose childless, a condition that Beck calls characteristic of the "most ideal market society," which is a form of adaptation to an economic system that requires individuals to be fully available to the market. Individualization in this case is reflected in the priority of self-development, study, and migration plans as well as a consequence of reflective modernization, in which the family as a social institution is redefined, even the potential for gradual disappearance. Thus, the childfree phenomenon in this study not only shows a shift in values at the individual level, but also confirms Beck's thesis on how modernity and market logic can erode the traditional role of the family, replacing it with a more individualized and integrated orientation in the global economic system. (in Charles et al., 2008)

Based on Merton's theory, *the childfree* life choice taken by the couple can be seen as an example of Merton's nonfunction, nonfunction is also born in the context of this modern family paradox, which is a neutral consequence that does not directly strengthen or weaken the social system, but represents a shift in behavior patterns in society. For example, *childfree* couples who allocate children's education funds for travel are a consequence that is not directly related to family or cultural reproductive functions but is the result of this phenomenon, a decrease in the frequency of visits to parents due to the lack of motivation to introduce grandchildren and changes in home buying patterns that tend to be smaller due to not needing children's rooms. While these changes do not directly threaten the sustainability of social systems as much as they do dysfunction, they reflect a transformation of values and priorities in modern society that is beginning to move away from traditional family norms.

## **5. Conclusion**

### **5.1. Conclusion**

The childfree phenomenon in the context of Balinese society creates a complex modern family paradox. On the one hand, modernity offers a space for Balinese women to negotiate their identity and bodily autonomy through childless life choices, while on the other hand, tradition firmly maintains the hegemony of hereditary norms as the foundation of cultural sustainability. This paradox deepens as globalization opens up the discourse of alternative families, but customary structures, patriarchy, and caste systems remain symbolic boundaries that frame reproductive decisions. However, it is important to underline that this dynamic does not necessarily place culture as the wrong party in regulating or interpreting bodily autonomy. Instead, culture works through a logic of values, history, and social relations structures that are designed to maintain the continuity of the community. Thus, the tension that arises is not merely a conflict between the individual and the culture, but a reflection of the process of adaptation of society when faced with new forms of choice in today's modern family that have not been fully accommodated within the existing value framework. This unresolved paradox actually reveals how the Balinese people are in a constant negotiation process between maintaining traditions and responding to the changing times. *Childfree* in this context is not just a rejection of traditional values, but a mirror of how the Balinese family institution is transforming without losing its fundamental cultural roots and understanding the dynamics of changing modern family functions and the context of women's body autonomy in contemporary social discourse.

### 5.2. Problem Limitations

Although this study seeks to present a comprehensive analysis of the phenomenon of *childfree* in Balinese society, there are some limitations that need to be acknowledged. First, the study only included respondents with limited socio-cultural backgrounds, so the findings may not fully represent the diversity of perspectives across the Bali region. Second, the focus of research centered on the Balinese context makes generalizations to communities with similar kinship systems and traditional values limited. Methodological limitations are also worth taking into account. Theoretical limitations appear in the use of Merton's functional structural frameworks which, while relevant, may not fully capture the complexity of the dynamics of power and resistance in contemporary society. This study also has not adequately explored cross-generational perspectives and differences of views based on gender in more depth.

### 5.3. Suggestions

However, this study has some limitations that need to be acknowledged. The geographical and demographic scope of respondents that are limited to the Balinese urban community makes the research findings not necessarily represent similar dynamics in rural areas or communities with different cultural characteristics. The qualitative approach applied, while capable of digging into meaning in depth, limits the generalization of findings on a broader scale. In addition, the focus of the research on the perspective of *the childfree individual* without involving the comprehensive views of parents, traditional leaders, and couples who choose to have children, causes the analysis of relational dynamics to be less optimal. Theoretical limitations are also apparent from the use of Merton's functional structural framework, which has not been fully able to accommodate the complexity of power and agency in contemporary society. Future research needs to broaden the scope of respondents, develop mixed-methods approaches, and include cross-generational and gender perspectives to better understand the transformation of family values in the context of cultural modernization.

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