

MILLENNIAL GENERATION WOMEN'S PERCEPTION TOWARDS CHILDREN'S ATTENDANCE: A PRELIMINARY STUDY

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Abstract

The presence of children is interpreted as the hope of the family, the successor of offspring, and the bearer of happiness and blessings. But along with the times, many married couples choose not to have children, this is certainly contrary to the construction of Indonesian society related to the concept of the ideal family. This can be seen from the decline in Total Fertility Rate in Indonesia. This study used descriptive quantitative methods with purposive sampling techniques based on criteria, namely women aged 27-35 years who belonged to the millennial generation, a total of 50 respondents. Primary data sources through online penelitan. This study uses Schmitt & Schmitt's theory of direct and constructive perception to see the influence of internal and external factors in the formation of perception. The results show that individual internal and external factors influence millennial women's perceptions of the presence of children in marriage. Then, the millennial generation, which prioritizes maturity, stability and readiness from various factors, interprets the presence of children in the family as not a necessity and does not make children the only source of happiness even though it is undeniable that children become a complement to the family. Further studies are needed to obtain more comprehensive data. In addition, premarital education and counseling programs, gender equality campaigns, community support and social networks can be used as recommendations.

Keywords:

perception, millennial, child, marriage

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is known as a country with a pronatalist policy, reflected in general views such as "many children, many blessings," as well as the assumption that children are a blessing and bring happiness, and a marriage is considered perfect if it has offspring. This culture is widely developed in Indonesia, especially among rural communities on the island of Java (Hairunisa, 2021). Therefore, married couples often face pressure from society if they do not have children. However, along with the times, more and more married couples in Indonesia are choosing not to have children. This decision is often seen as contradicting the social construction of the concept of an ideal family in Indonesia. However, negative views towards couples who do not have children are starting to shift, driven by the growing evidence that childless couples can still be happy in their marriages (Nuriah, 2023). This change in perception is interesting to study, especially regarding the shift in the views of millennial women in interpreting the presence of children in the family.

Currently, Gen Z and the Millennial Generation are the dominant generations in Indonesia. This can be seen from the results of the 2020 population census which stated that the proportion of the millennial generation was 25.87% of the total population in Indonesia (Central Statistics Agency, 2020). The millennial generation is a generation born in 1981-1996. They grew up in an era of developing information and communication technology, so they are already familiar with smartphones, gadgets, social media accounts connected to the internet. Thus forming the character of a creative and innovative generation in utilizing technology. Known as an ambitious, confident generation, not anti-

criticism and a strong entrepreneurial spirit, but the millennial generation is also said to tend to be consumptive (Hardika et al., 2018).

The Central Statistics Agency (BPS) through its report entitled Profile of the Indonesian Millennial Generation 2018 explains that the millennial generation is very selective in determining a partner and prioritizes financial balance before getting married, let alone deciding to have children. The millennial generation prioritizes maturity, stability and readiness from various factors. The difference is very clear in millennial women (Budiati et al., 2018). Millennial women tend to be free and open in making their decisions. But still consider the advice of their closest family. With these characteristics, it is very clear that to have children in marriage, the millennial generation considers many things, not only financial stability but also mental stability. Experiences experienced by themselves or seeing other people's experiences that are not always good, are also their considerations (Arif, 2021).

According to BPS data, the birth rate or TFR in Indonesia has continued to decline from 1990 to 2022 by 30.64%. The declining trend in the Total Fertility Rate is a global phenomenon that has occurred in the last two decades (DATAin, 2023). The declining trend in TFR is not only in Indonesia, but in almost all countries. The declining trend in TFR also indicates an increasing percentage of women who are delaying having children and even choosing to be childfree (without children) (Neal & Neal, 2021). Financial factors are said to be the main cause of the population crisis in Asia.

The Childfree phenomenon is increasingly widespread along with the women's body politics movement which interprets that

women's bodies belong to women themselves so that women have full decision-making over anything that affects their bodies without coercion from others (my body my rules). The childfree phenomenon among the millennial generation cannot be separated from the shift in society's perspective on marriage, previously marriage was considered institutional while currently marriage is an individual nature (Wijaya, 2022). This shift in perspective indirectly affects society's perspective regarding the presence of children in the family. When marriage is institutional, having children is a must because there are social expectations and demands, while when marriage has an individual nature, the presence of children is not a must in marriage, but makes the fulfillment of affective needs and individual progress with a partner the main goal (Pangestu & Jenuri, 2023). Many factors underlie this shift in perception, whether this perception is only motivated by internal conditions or even this perception is formed because of the large flow of information received.

Media representations significantly influence many aspects of life, including decisions about parenthood. Media depictions of pregnancy, childbirth, and parenting can shape social norms, expectations, and individual choices. One key area of influence is the way in which childbirth is portrayed in the media, particularly through reality television and other visual media. These depictions often emphasize a medicalized view of childbirth, with a focus on dramatic scenarios and intensive medical interventions. This can lead to biased perceptions of how childbirth should occur, encouraging a more medicalized approach to the birth process and influencing parental decisions about the birth process (Luce et al. 2016).

In addition, representations of gender roles and expectations in the media play a significant role in shaping decisions about parenthood. Gender stereotypes perpetuated by the media can reinforce traditional roles for mothers and fathers, influencing how individuals perceive their readiness and suitability for parenthood. These stereotypes can also influence expectations about caregiving responsibilities and the division of labor within the family, which in turn can influence decisions about whether or when to have children (Santonniccolo et al, 2023). Furthermore, the growing influence of social media and online communities has also changed the way people view parenthood. Influencers and bloggers, particularly those focused on family and parenting content, can shape perceptions about parenting norms, including the ideal timing of having children, challenges in parenting, and social expectations associated with being a good parent (Scharrer et al. 2024).

Media representations, both through traditional and digital platforms, play a significant role in influencing individuals' decisions about parenthood by shaping their perceptions of childbirth, reinforcing gender roles, and presenting an idealized version of parenting.

Then Mingkase & Rohmaniyah (2022) in their study on gender construction in childfree problems on social media Twitter showed that gender construction is influenced by cultural, religious and medical factors, contributing to the stigmatization of childfree individuals, especially women.

In exploring the factors that form this perception, this study uses the Theory of Perception proposed by Schmitt and Schmitt (1996) in Yunita (2017), this theory explains that perception is a determinant of the actions

of a person or group of people when interacting with things outside themselves. There are 2 main theories that study how to understand a perception, namely the theory of constructive perception and direct perception. The theory of constructive perception states that humans construct perceptions by actively determining stimuli and combining sensations and theories. In this theory, perception does not only come from direct information but also from information embedded in the individual's memory, so that the information in memory will help individuals interpret the information that has just been obtained (Solso, R. L., Maclin, O. H., & Maclin, 2008a). This is related to the formulation of the problem of how family and environment influence the perception of millennial women regarding the presence of children. Meanwhile, the direct perception theory explains that information in the stimulus is an important element in perception, because it is assumed that the environment contains enough information that can be used to interpret something (Solso, R. L., Maclin, O. H., & Maclin, 2008b). There are 2 factors that influence the formation of perception according to Thoha (2003), namely internal and external factors, internal factors involve feelings, attitudes and individual personality, attention, motivation, desires and hopes, physical condition and values adopted while external factors include family background, information obtained and knowledge around.

Against the backdrop of this phenomenon, researchers consider this study interesting and important to study considering that the issue of childfree will greatly affect the social functioning of the millennial generation as a whole person in carrying out their role as parents who must carry out their obligations in raising children. Millennial women were

chosen because of their ambitious characteristics, always considering many things and growing up in the era of information technology development. Preliminary research was conducted to study and analyze the perceptions of millennial women in the childfree phenomenon formed through two-dimensional grouping, namely internal and external dimensions. In addition, the influence of social media on the formation of perceptions and attitudes of millennial women towards the presence of children is a concern in this study. This research issue is something that has novelty with several rational reasons, namely the use of descriptive quantitative methods with purposive sampling techniques in the millennial generation and also the theory used is not widely used in similar studies in Indonesia

METHOD

This study uses a quantitative descriptive research method, which according to Arikunto (2006) is a method that aims to create a picture or description of a situation objectively using numbers, starting from data collection, interpretation of the data and its appearance and results. This study uses data collection techniques through questionnaires, observations and interviews. Respondents were selected using a purposive sampling technique, where the selection of respondents is based on predetermined criteria and objectives. Respondents selected purposively were women aged 27-35 years who represented the characteristics of generation Z and the millennial generation. Data collection was carried out online using the Google Form questionnaire, which consisted of 21 statements and was a set of questionnaires that had gone through validity and reliability tests.

These statements are the results of the elaboration of two main indicators, namely internal and external indicators (can be seen in table 1). While the data collection technique through interviews was carried out on 3 female informants who were included in the characteristics in this study.

Table 1. *Research Questionnaire*

No	Indicator	Subindicator	Item Number	Amount
1.	Internal Dimensi ons	Personal experiences, values, emotional physical roles, certain personalities, physical conditions, and economic conditions.	10,11,12,13,14,15,16,17	8
2.	External Dimensi ons	Social environment and social media	18,19,20	3
3.	Open question s Pertanya an terbuka	Millennial generation women's perceptions of the presence of children in the family	21	1

The assessment was conducted using a Likert scale, as an instrument to measure the collected data. Perception assessment using a Likert scale consists of Strongly Agree (SS), Agree (S), Same (SSJ), Disagree (TS) and Strongly Disagree (STS) with scores of 5,4,3,2,1.

RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The sample used in this study was 50 respondents, with an age range of 27-35 years as much as 88% and 31-35 years as much as 12%. The last education of the respondents was dominated by S1 as much as 44% and SMA/SMK as much as 42% while for the marital status of the respondents were

dominated by those who were married as much as 56% as follows table 2 demographic data of respondents:

Table 2. *Demographic data*

No.	Item	Kategori	Persentase
1.	Age	27 years – 30 years	88%
		31 years – 35 years	12%
2.	Marital status	Not married	44%
		Married	56%
3.	Number of children	No children	52%
		Have children	48%
4.	Last education	S2	6%
		S1	44%
		D4	4%
		High School/Vocational High School	42%
		Junior High School	6%

Perception is a process that occurs within an individual when responding to their environment through a process of thinking and feeling which then becomes the basis for considering their behavior. Perception can also be interpreted as a person's perspective on something that is influenced by the personality and characteristics of the individual in their environment (Panggabean et al., 2024). According to Schmitt & Schmitt, there are 2 main theories that discuss how to understand how a perception is formed, namely direct perception and constructive perception. Direct perception assumes that the environment contains enough information that can be used to interpret something, while constructive perception assumes that perception does not only come from direct information but also from information embedded in the individual's memory, so that the information in memory will help individuals interpret the information that has just been obtained.

So to understand how women's perceptions can be formed, researchers divide two dimensions that influence perception, namely internal and external dimensions. Internal dimensions are factors that exist within the individual, including personal experiences, values that are held firmly, physical and emotional, and economic conditions. While external dimensions are factors that are outside the individual such as the socio-cultural environment, social media and demands or expectations of family members. In line with the opinion of Schmitt & Schmitt who explain two main theories of perception, namely direct perception which assumes that information from the environment is sufficient to interpret something and constructive perception which assumes that information embedded in the individual's memory also plays a role in interpreting something.

Table 3. *Quantitative Data on the Internal Dimension of Millennial Generation's Perception of the Presence of Children*

Internal Dimensions						
No.	Item	SS	S	SJS	TS	STS
1.	Influence of personal experience	24%	68%	6%	2%	
2.	Influence of life values	26%	70%	2%	2%	
3.	Influence of physical and emotional roles	44%	48%	4%	2%	2%
4.	Influence of economic conditions	50%	34%	6%	8%	2%
5.	Respondents' understanding of the benefits and challenges of marriage	26%	70%	4%		
6.	Respondents' understanding of long-term consequences	18%	74%	4%	4%	

7.	Certain aspects of personality	26%	64%	6%	4%
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Based on the results of the study, in the internal dimension, 68% of respondents agreed that personal experiences influenced women's perceptions of the presence of children in marriage, this is in line with Teresa's research (2014) that traumatic experiences experienced during childhood will affect women's self-confidence after adulthood, they will feel worried that they will not be able to be good parents for their children in the future, and vice versa, positive personal experiences will build women's self-confidence to become good mothers for their children. This is also in line with the results of the study, as many as 44% of respondents answered strongly agree and 48% of respondents answered agree that physical and emotional conditions influence women's perceptions of the presence of children in marriage. Because according to millennial women, a healthy and stable mentality will support children's growth and development (Nuroh & Sulhan, 2022)

Then, as many as 34% of respondents answered agree and 50% answered strongly agree that economic conditions influence the perceptions of millennial women regarding the presence of children in marriage, this is in line with research by Haganta et al (2022) that financial maturity is a very important factor to consider when wanting to have children. This is contradictory to the phrase we often hear "many children, much fortune". Meanwhile, according to the millennial generation, material fortune must be prepared carefully from the beginning. Strengthened by the results of interviews with LN informants who stated:

"The presence of children becomes an additional responsibility in the household. It is important to have mature readiness to decide

to have children. If you do not have mental, physical, economic, and other readiness, it is better to consider it."

Respondents' answers provide the view that the presence of children increases responsibilities in the household and emphasizes the importance of thorough preparation before deciding to have children. A deep understanding of the great responsibility that comes with having children and the importance of preparation in various aspects. This emphasizes that the decision to have children must be taken with careful consideration and full awareness of the consequences and responsibilities that accompany it. Socio-cultural values, social environment, the influence of friends, family or colleagues at work are external dimensions. In addition, the influence of social media also needs to be considered in this study. Table 4 below explains the external dimensions in question.

Table 4. *Quantitative Data on the External Dimension of Millennial Generation's Perception of the Presence of Children*

External Dimensions						
No	Item	SS	S	SJS	TS	STS
1.	The influence of socio-cultural values in the environment on respondents' perceptions	22%	60%	6%	10%	2%
2.	The influence of the social environment, such as friends, family, or co-workers in influencing perceptions	18%	48%	10%	22%	2%
3.	The influence of demands or expectations from family members on the formation of perceptions	24%	52%	6%	16%	2%

4.	The influence of social media	16%	58%	10%	16%
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Based on the results of the study on the external dimension, as many as 22% of respondents answered strongly agree and 60% of respondents answered strongly agree that socio-cultural values in the environment influence the perception of respondents, this is in line with the results of the study by Mashabi et al (2017) that views on the meaning of the presence of children are closely related to the family's perspective on children which will also affect family patterns in carrying out their functions. Koentjaraningrat (1993) explains that the cultural value system consists of conceptions that live in the minds of individuals regarding everything that has value in life and functions as the highest guideline for individuals in behaving.

Then in the next item, as many as 58% of respondents answered that they agreed that social media influences the perception of millennial women regarding the presence of children in marriage. This is in line with research by Garaeva et al (2022) that media representation plays an important role in shaping public perception regarding family dynamics and gender roles so that it becomes a consideration for making rational decisions to become parents in real life.

Based on the research results, the presence of children in marriage according to millennial women is a complement to happiness, a bringer of blessings and grace, but there is a shift in perception that the presence of children in marriage is no longer a necessity and considers children as the only source of happiness. Millennial women consider that children are a big responsibility so that financial, physical and mental readiness are needed. Furthermore, informants NR and ST explained their

perceptions regarding the presence of children in marriage:

"I think it's a choice for each person, a child is a lifelong responsibility and it takes physical, mental and financial readiness to raise a child, it's not easy because it grows"

"It takes mature preparation when having a child, so the presence of a child is not a must if we are not ready"

Informants argued that having children requires thorough preparation, and therefore the presence of children does not need to be considered a necessity if someone is not ready. Having children is a big decision that requires careful consideration of various aspects of readiness. This also underlines the importance of readiness and awareness before deciding to have children, for the good of the parents and the child to be born.

CONCLUSION

women highly value independence and self-development. They tend to want to ensure that they have achieved their personal goals before taking on the responsibilities of parenthood. The results of the study from 50 respondents concluded that perception is a process that occurs within an individual when responding to their environment through the process of thinking and feeling which then becomes the basis for considering their behavior. The results of the study showed that in the external dimension, namely information obtained directly from social media and the environment and the internal dimension, namely personal experience, emotional physical abilities, values that are held firmly and financial conditions, both influence the formation of millennial women's perceptions of the presence of children in marriage. Technology and social media influence millennial women's

perceptions of the presence of children. Exposure to various views and experiences of others through social media can shape their opinions about when and how to have children. Then, there is a shift in perception related to this, for the millennial generation, having children is not something that must be rushed without careful consideration, financial and mental readiness are the main priorities that they prepare before having children. They also assume that children are not the only source of happiness even though it cannot be denied that the presence of children complements the family.

Discussing the issue of child free is an interesting thing, especially if supported by data from a study result. This study is a preliminary study where the results obtained will be the benchmark for further research. Specifically, the issue of the perception of millennial generation women towards the presence of children in marital relationships is recommended to conduct further research. In addition, several recommendations that can be submitted from the results of this initial study include the need for pre-marital education and counseling programs, gender equality campaigns, and community support and social networks especially for millennial generation women.

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