

Happily Married in the Absence of a Child: Marital Satisfaction of Voluntary and Involuntary Childless Individuals

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Abstract: The absence of a child due to involuntary reasons can create tension between wife and husband. In contrast, the decision to be voluntary childless might not cause tension but could burden couples with social expectations. In line with the vulnerability-stress-adaptation model, both processes can cause stress that hinders marital satisfaction. This research aims to test the differences in marital satisfaction between involuntary and voluntary childless groups. Using quantitative data collected via an online survey from 108 involuntary childless and 112 voluntary childless participants, mean differences for both groups were tested with the Mann-Whitney method. The result obtained from the marital distress cut-off score based on the *Couple Satisfaction Index (CSI)* showed that the marital satisfaction for both involuntary and voluntary childless was relatively high, and there were no differences between the two groups. This research suggested that participants in both groups (voluntary and involuntary childless) experienced relatively high marital satisfaction despite the stress that they experienced. Further study regarding the adaptive process or dyadic coping in childless couples is needed to understand how couples buffer the negative impact of stress on marital satisfaction.


1 INTRODUCTION

"When will you get married?" is a common question frequently asked to a young adult in Indonesia. In Indonesia, when someone enters adulthood, they are expected to form an intimate relationship and marry their partner. After a person gets married, another question will follow: "When will you have kids?". Indeed, most couples will long for the presence of children to complement their marriage. Moreover, society seems to demand a presence of a child in the newly formed family. However, expectations of having children do not always go as expected, despite various efforts made by the couple. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that around 50-80 million married couples (1 in 7 couples) have infertility problems. In Indonesia, infertility occurs in more than 20% of the population, 40% in women, 40% in men, and 20% in both. As a consequence, the family cannot have a child (Gina & Ircham, 2017).

On the contrary, some couples willingly decided to postpone pregnancy because they have many considerations related to children. Data on Fertile Age Couples (PUS) showed that many do not have children among individuals in the age range of 20-35 years old (Wahyuni & Mahmudah, 2017). In addition, according to the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection data, from 2018 to 2025, there will be a decrease in the number of children population as a result of decreased Total Fertility Rate in Indonesia (Windiarso et al., 2019). Based on those data, it can be assumed that adults in Indonesia are not in a hurry to have children.

We surveyed reasons and stressors related to childless conditions to 32 married individuals without children, both voluntary and involuntary. Based on the survey, 31.2% of participants voluntarily postpone having a child. The reasons given were various, such as "wanting to enjoy time with the partner", "preparing financially and mentally",

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"delaying due to the COVID-19 condition", and "feeling that children were not a priority in married life". This condition puts pressure on the couple, as illustrated by the mini-survey. The most frequently mentioned pressures were "questions from extended family" and "social pressure". Meanwhile, 68.8% of couples wanted and were trying to have children. Participants reported that some of the efforts were "actively engaging in sexual activities without using contraception" and "consulting with doctors".

Children are one of the essential factors in the family because when forming a family, ideally, the partner will desire the child's presence to complement the family. Children could bring partners closer together, and some couples reported greater closeness due to having children (Twenge, Campbell, & Foster, 2003). However, not all married couples can have children immediately. Couples who intend to have children but are unable due to experiencing fertility problems are called *involuntary childless* (Malik, 2021). Previous empirical data shows that more than 11% of women with infertility problems will have lower self-confidence (Azizi, 2018). The decrease of self-confidence is due to the role expectation for adult women to be a mother. As a pronatalist country, married couples who do not have children after years of marriage will be considered imperfect marriages (Patnani, Takwin, & Mansoer, 2020). As a result, several couples in Indonesia have made various efforts to have children. Planning and trying to have children can create tension in the marriage relationship, reducing satisfaction in life (Onat & Beji, 2012).

Meanwhile, at the partner level, infertility causes high tension and a tendency to blame each other (Patnani et al., 2020). This disharmony can lead to new conflicts that encourage couples to take divorce as a way out to overcome guilt and failure (Onat & Beji, 2012). This finding is in line with several views regarding marital satisfaction, which stated that planning children could play an important role in marital satisfaction (Bradbury, Fincham, & Beach, 2000).

Although it is stated that children are an essential factor in relationships, some couples deliberately delay having children. Couples who voluntarily do not intend to have children even though they are of childbearing age and condition are *voluntary childless* (Malik, 2021). The reasons given vary widely. Stegen, Switsers, & Donder, (2021) summarize some of the reasons couples delay having children. First, a person may prefer to focus on career rather than family, so the spouse does agree not to have children. Second, a person may have a skeptical view of their social environment and choose not to have children. Third,

some couples have external circumstances (such as financial conditions) that cause permanent delays in having children. When a couple does not plan to have children, the marriage satisfaction obtained will be different from involuntary childless couples because the meaning of their married life will be more positive (Maliki, 2019).

Marital satisfaction is an individual global evaluation of marital relationships (Hinde, 1997). In line with this definition, Rogge & Fincham (2010) define marital satisfaction as a couple's subjective evaluation of the romantic relationship. A higher level of marital satisfaction is associated with lower instability and divorce in a relationship (Falconier, Jackson, Hilpert, & Bodenmann, 2015). Thus, marital satisfaction is essential for couples to feel in maintaining couples' harmony. In order to achieve marital satisfaction, there are aspects of married life that must be fulfilled include independent life, attention and affection from partners, and the presence of children (Mardiyan & Kustanti, 2016). These aspects are a picture of the married life that the couple wants to achieve. Previous research on marital satisfaction of childless couples has focused more on couples who are involuntarily childless. The results obtained by previous research are that the absence of children is one of the factors that affect marital satisfaction (Mardiyan & Kustanti, 2016). However, there are not necessarily the same results for couples who do choose not to have children. Therefore, this study describes marital satisfaction in couples who are childless, *voluntary*, or *involuntary*.

Marital satisfaction does not occur spontaneously; it requires the efforts of both partners. If both parties have no effort, marital satisfaction can be unstable and at significant risk (Azizi, 2018). According to Azizi (2018), marital satisfaction is a personal experience that can only be assessed from self-pleasure due to the marriage relationship. Marital satisfaction is also related to other people's expectations, as it is considered necessary by the social environment to have a successful marriage. Various studies show different definitions of marital satisfaction. Marital satisfaction can also be defined as the extent to which married couples feel fulfilled in their relationship (Rice, Stinnett, Stinnett, & DeGenova, 2017).

According to Rogge & Fincham (2010), marital satisfaction is a subjective evaluation of the couple's current romantic relationship. In line with this, Funk and Rogge (2007) define marriage satisfaction as an individual's subjective assessment of their marriage. In addition, marital satisfaction can also be defined as an overall assessment of the current partner's

romantic relationship and is influenced by many specific factors (Azizi, 2018). The definition of marriage satisfaction that will be used in this study is based on Funk & Rogge (2007), marital satisfaction is an individual assessment of their marriage which is subjective. Both parties need to feel happiness and satisfaction by respecting each other to achieve a harmonious marriage (Mardiyan & Kustanti, 2016).

Factors that can be used to measure marital satisfaction include communication, recreational activities, religious orientation, problem-solving, financial management, sexual orientation, family and friends, children and parenting, personality problems, as well as equality of roles (Fowers & Olson, 1993). However, this study reviews the factors that influence marriage satisfaction based on the vulnerability-stress-adaptation model (VSA).

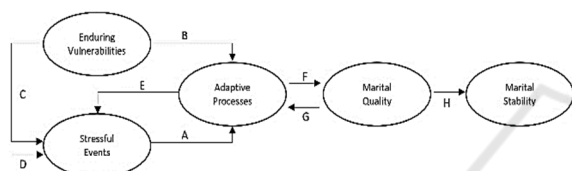


Figure 1: Vulnerability-Stress-Adaptation (VSA) Model.

The Vulnerability-Stress-Adaptation (VSA) model provides a framework for explaining how marriage changes over time (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). According to the VSA model in Figure 1, individuals carry pre-existing vulnerabilities into their marriage (i.e., personality) or experience factors (i.e., parental divorce). In addition, marriage is also affected by stressful events (i.e., financial, chronic illness, and the presence of children). In the end, the couple will try to adapt to the partner in response to stress and is conceptualized as an exchange of positive or negative behavior (Langer, Lawrence, & Barry, 2008).

The first factor is vulnerability. Vulnerability is a stable characteristic that every couple brings into marriage (Aditya & Magno, 2011). Vulnerability includes a person's character, personality, family background, level of education. Voluntarily childless couples do not intend to have children (Peterson, 2015), while involuntarily childless have the intention and desire to have children but cannot due to a specific condition (Van Balen & Trimbos-Kemper, 1995). The differences in motivation usually come from a person's background, such as family background, educational background, and personality (Veevers, 1979). These differences in motivation resulting in different views on the *stressful events* felt by the partner. Involuntarily childless couples experience a higher level of depression, lower

happiness, and life satisfaction than the voluntarily childless couples (Jeffries & Konnert, 2002). In addition, many couples tend to impose behavioral characteristics on their partners, so this personality can become a stressor in their marital relationship (Sayehmiri, Kareem, Abdi, Dalvand, & Gheshlagh, 2020). One personality trait that has a significant influence on marital relationships is neuroticism (Piedmont, 1998). Neuroticism refers to a person's tendency to feel anxiety, making a person easily feel stressed in challenging situations.

Unfulfilled expectations can harm the partner and can be seen as a stressful event. Stressful events are developmental transitions, situations, events, and chronic states experienced by both parties that make the partner depressed (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). In this study, these stress factors will be focused on factors of children's absence, whether voluntary or not. Couples who experience infertility include experiencing emptiness, fatigue, frustration, anxiety, lower personal well-being, lower happiness, and life satisfaction and are considered bad luck (Patnani et al., 2020). Conflicts like this can cause tension in the couple. When the expectation of having children is not fulfilled in involuntarily childless couples, there will be high tension and a tendency to blame each other (Patnani et al., 2020). Meanwhile, for voluntarily childless couples, women can get an opposing view from society, such as selfishness, lead an unsatisfactory life, unhappy marriages, less happiness in general, irresponsibility, and disorders (Kelly, 2009). In the VSA model, the experience of childlessness (both voluntary and involuntary) can be seen as stressors because that situation can make both partners feel stressed.

This stressful situation will encourage the couple to solve the problems at hand. This push will make the pair enter into the third factor of the VSA model, namely the adaptation process. The adaptation process is a way for couples to treat and respond to each other to resolve the problems in marriage (Aditya & Magno, 2011). Involuntary childless couples will try to compromise the unfulfilled expectations and find a way out of comments from their society and their thoughts to avoid conflicts in the household. Meanwhile, voluntary childless couples will try to find a way out of the negative comments received from their society. Therefore, the researcher assumes low marriage satisfaction occurs in involuntarily childless couples because their problems come from the external environment and the couple themselves due to unfulfilled expectations. On the other hand, voluntarily childless couples suffer from negative comments from their

environment, but couples have the same motivation not to have children. The difference in stress levels felt by the two groups led the researchers to assume a higher marriage satisfaction occurred in voluntarily childless couples.

This study will describe stressors caused by a child's absence and relationship quality, measured using the couple satisfaction index (CSI-16). The absence of a child can be a stressor for couples because, in Indonesia, the presence of children is an ideal picture of a family. Moreover, marital satisfaction is an essential predictor of a person's well-being and health. High marital satisfaction can positively impact marital stability and subjective well-being (Margelisch, Schneewind, Violette, & Perrig-Chiello, 2017). Conversely, low marital satisfaction can harm subjective well-being (Proulx, Helms, & Buehler, 2007). Therefore, for childless couples, stress and marital satisfaction can impact individuals' and couples' lives.

Several previous studies, including both sexes, have shown that the psychological response to infertility is different for men and women (Schanz et al., 2005). The stigma formed by the social environment in unborn couples often affects a person's mental health, especially women (Tanaka & Johnson, 2014). Meanwhile, men appear to experience less psychological stress than women (Schanz et al., 2005). Previous empirical studies have shown that childless individuals will have more time for themselves (Nomaguchi & Milkie, 2003). Moreover, Nachtigall, Becker, and Wozny (1992) concluded that failure to fulfill maternal roles negatively affects women's perceptions of themselves and thus experiences emptiness. Frustration and anxiety can also be experienced by individuals who have not had children because the social pressures exhibit negative stigma, such as being selfish or not trying hard enough to have children (Patnani et al., 2020). In addition, individuals who do not have children are often considered to have deviated from the normative way of life and become a cause of stress relevant to identity (Tanaka & Johnson, 2014).

A partner's experience without childcare can have both positive and negative effects. The absence of children can support couples to have more time together and do activities that most parents cannot do (Patnani et al., 2020). Financially, couples also do not have the responsibility to meet children's needs. Thus they can save more and use the finance for their own needs, resulting in more satisfaction with their financial condition (Patnani et al., 2020). In couples who experience infertility, this problem can cause new conflicts and tension because children's planning

can play an important role in marriage satisfaction (King, 2016).

In the literature, researchers generally distinguish between "*voluntarily*" and "*involuntarily*" childless. This difference is based on the couple's motivation not to have children (Veevers, 1979). In addition, this difference is often used to distinguish between biological reasons and other reasons for not having children (Kreyenfeld & Konietzka, 2016). Women who voluntarily do not have children are called voluntarily childless. Peterson (2015) defines voluntary childless as someone without biological children who does not expect anything in the future and intends or chooses not to have children. In defining voluntarily childless in someone, (Veevers, 1979) states that several things need to be considered. First, the partner's intentions for the future must be ascertained. Even though the couple has not had children at a particular time, this may only be temporary for some people. Some couples usually postpone the arrival of children until the time they feel is appropriate, rather than permanently childless. The second thing to note is commitment. Couples need to identify a commitment to the intention not to have children, whether that commitment is high or low. The choice and commitment of partners to voluntarily not have children is often seen as deviant and experiences adverse reactions from people who do not see them as "normal" (Thole, 2018). Voluntarily childless individuals often accept this adverse reaction, especially for women. (Kelly, 2009) provides several negative views that voluntarily childless women experienced: being selfish, living an unsatisfactory life, unhappy marriages, generally less happy, irresponsible, and abnormalities.

In contrast to voluntarily childless, when a partner has the intention to have children but is unable due to certain conditions, such as infertility, the partner is called involuntarily childless (Van Balen & Trimbos-Kemper, 1995). Infertility is a condition where there is no conception after having repeated sexual intercourse for 12 months or more and without using protective equipment (Jeffries & Konnert, 2002). In Indonesia, it is estimated that the number of couples with infertility problems ranges from 10-15% of the total average population (Patnani et al., 2020). Cultural norms still require women to become mothers, as people in Indonesia perceived having children as a social identity (Hidayah, 2007). The social impact experienced by involuntary childless is usually worse than voluntary childless because of pressure from the community, especially in pronatalist countries, which strongly encourage birth (Patnani et al., 2020). Difficulty having children

creates new conflicts that make couples blame each other for the failures they face (Onat & Beji, 2012). This kind of conflict makes involuntary childless couples tend to have lower marital satisfaction.

This study aims to test marital satisfaction differences in the voluntary and involuntary childless couples in Indonesia, in their fertile age (20-35 years old), and have been married for at least one year. In order to screen voluntary and involuntary childless, we asked their intention to have children. Participants who were not intended to have children were considered voluntarily, and participants who intended to have children were considered involuntary childless. In addition, this study also aims to describe stressors experienced by both childless groups.

2 METHODS

This study uses a quantitative descriptive approach and uses the Mann-Whitney test to test marital satisfaction mean differences between the two groups (voluntary and involuntary childless). This study was conducted as a part of an undergraduate thesis and have approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Department of Psychology, University of Bina Nusantara. Participants were asked to fill a written informed consent before filling the survey.

2.1 Participants

In this study, 220 participants were divided into 108 participants in the *involuntary childless* group and 112 participants in the *voluntary childless* group. Further description of participant's demographics and characteristics are described in the result section.

2.2 Materials

The instrument used to measure marital satisfaction is the *Couple Satisfaction Index* (CSI-16) developed by (Funk & Rogge, 2007) and have adapted to Bahasa Indonesia (Putri, 2019). CSI (16) consists of 16 items and uses a Likert scale to answer the questions given. The total score is used for further analysis. In (Putri, 2019), CSI (16) was valid and reliable with the coefficient alpha value of 0.898.

2.3 Procedures

This research was conducted by distributing questionnaires online using *Google Form* and getting a total of 220 participants who matched the

characteristics of the study. Questionnaires were distributed from mid-December 2020 to early January 2021. The results obtained from the questionnaire were then processed using the Mann-Whitney test using the SPSS application to calculate the *mean* and mode of marriage satisfaction for two groups of child absence, namely *voluntarily childless* and *involuntary childless*.

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Result

Based on data collection, demographic figures were obtained for the two groups. In the involuntary childless group (Table 1), most participants were women (77.8%) and have been married for less than Most participants are domiciled in Jabodetabek (58.3%), while the rest come from outside Jabodetabek with various cities in Indonesia. The participants' education is quite diverse, ranging from high school to master's degree, but 79.6% have University (S1) backgrounds. Some participants have had experiences of pregnancy (18.5%).

Table 1: Involuntary childless demographic.

Characteristics	n	Percentage (%)
Intention to have a child		
Yes	108	100%
Total	108	100%
Gender		
Men	24	22.2%
Women	84	77.8%
Total	108	100.0%
Marriage age		
1-5 years	103	95.3%
>6 years	5	4.7%
Total	108	100%
Domiciled		
Jabodetabek	63	58.3%
Outside Jabodetabek	45	41.7%
Total	108	100%
Education		
High school	6	5.6%
Diploma	3	2.8%
S1	86	79.6%
S2	13	12.0%
Total	108	100%
Experiences of pregnancy		
Yes	20	18.5%
No	88	81.5%
Total	108	100%

The condition of not having children involuntarily turned out to impact the partner. As many as 73.2% of participants felt stressed about this condition (Table 2). The reasons for the pressure felt were varied, but the majority came from within the participants. As many as 50% of participants felt stressed and had reduced self-confidence.

Table 2: Involuntary childless stress level and stressors.

Stress and Stressors	n	Percentage (%)
Stress level		
Not stressed at all	11	10.2%
A bit stressed	18	16.7%
Stressed	46	42.6%
Very stressed	33	30.6%
Total	108	100%
Stressors		
General stress	29	26.9%
Pressure from parents/family	18	16.7%
Other social pressure	15	13.9%
Decreased self-confident	25	23.1%
Both pressure from family and social	3	2.8%
No stressors	13	12.0%
Others	5	4.6%
Total	108	100%

As for the voluntary childless group (Table 3), there were 67 participants (59.8%) who had no intention of having children and 45 (40.2%) participants who still did not know whether they wanted to have children or not. The participants in the voluntary childless group majority were women (91%). Most participants in this group have been married for 1-5 years (91.9%), residing in Greater Jakarta (55.4%), and have undergraduate education (58.9%). Moreover, all participants in the voluntary childless did not have pregnancy experience.

Unlike the involuntary childless group, the voluntary childless group condition of not having children did not affect the level of stress felt by the participants (Table 4). The majority of the sources of pressure that were felt came from parents/family and their social environment (75%).

Table 3: Voluntary childless demographic.

Characteristics	n	Percentage (%)
Intention to have a child		
No	67	59.8%
Haven't decided	45	40.2%
Total	112	100%
Gender		
Men	10	9%
Women	102	91%
Total	112	100.0%
Marriage age		
1-5 years	103	91.9%
>6 years	9	8.1%
Total	112	100%
Domiciled		
Jabodetabek	62	55.4%
Outside Jabodetabek	50	44.6%
Total	112	100%
Education		
Middle school	1	0.9%
High school	4	3.6%
Diploma	9	8.0%
S1	66	58.9%
S2	31	27.7%
S3	1	0.9%
Total	112	100%
Experiences of pregnancy		
Yes	12	10.7%
No	100	89.3%
Total	112	100.0%

Table 4: Voluntary childless stress level and stressors.

Stress and Stressors	n	Percentage (%)
Stress Level		
Not stressed at all	33	29.5%
A bit stressed	50	44.6%
Stressed	26	23.2%
Very stressed	3	2.7%
Total	112	100%
Stressors		
General stress	3	2.7%
Pressure from parents/family	45	40.2%
Other social pressure	39	34.8%
No stressors	19	17.0%
Others	6	5.4%
Total	112	100%

Researchers then conducted a normality test for Lilliefors (Kolmogorov Smirnov) because the data used was > 50 respondents, and the value indicates that the data is not normally distributed. Thus, the hypothesis is performed using non-parametric statistical tests. A Mann-Whitney test indicated that marital satisfaction was greater for the voluntary childless group (Mean = 78.77) than for the involuntary childless group (Mean = 77.03). However, the differences was not significant, U = 5253.500 (p = 0.092).

Table 5: Marital satisfaction mean.

	n	Mean
Involuntary Childless	108	77.03
Voluntary Childless	112	78.77
Total	220	77.91

Table 6: Marital satisfaction distress cut score.

		Distress cut score	n	Persentase (%)
Marital satisfaction	Involuntary	<51.5	7	6.4%
		>51.5	101	93.6%
	Voluntary	<51.5	8	7.2%
		>51.5	104	92.8%

Based on CSI 16, the distress cut score of marital satisfaction is 51.5, which means that if the resulting value is above 51.5, then participants have high marital satisfaction. In the involuntary childless group, the mean results of marriage satisfaction from participants are 77.03, and in the voluntary childless group, the mean result of marital satisfaction was 78.77. Thus, it can be concluded that the two groups have relatively high marriage satisfaction.

3.2 Discussion

This study tests marital satisfaction differences between voluntary and involuntary childless couples in Indonesia in their fertile age (20-35 years old). The Mann-Whitney test showed no difference in marital satisfaction in the involuntary childless and voluntary childless groups. Moreover, descriptive statistical analysis results showed that the mean value of marital satisfaction in the involuntary childless and voluntary childless groups was above the distress cut score of 51.5. In the involuntary childless group, the mean score was 77.03, and in the voluntary childless group, the mean score was 78.77, and the overall group average score was 77.91. These findings suggest that marital satisfaction in the involuntary childless and voluntary childless groups is relatively high.

Indeed, no research directly compares the marriage satisfaction of involuntary childless and voluntary childless in Indonesia. However, (Patnani et al., 2020) research illustrates that couples involuntary childless have experiences that vary from positive to negative. The positive experiences felt by couples in the involuntary childless group include more time spent with partners than couples who already have children so that they have the opportunity to build more relationships with their partners (Patnani et al., 2020). In involuntary childless couples, they experience negative feelings such as sadness, disappointment, failure, feelings of guilt, and lack of confidence (Patnani et al., 2020). According to Gold (2013) and Tanaka & Johnson, (2014) research, this worse experience will be felt by an involuntary childless couple who live in pro-natal states. In line with the results of these two studies, this study showed that 73.2% of participants in the group involuntary childless felt depressed and very depressed with the childless condition. The forms of pressure that are felt include stress and lack of self-confidence. Thus, the pressure felt by involuntary childless couples makes most participants feel stressed and less confident.

Unlike involuntary childless couples, couples in the voluntary childless group perceived that majority of the pressure that the participants' pressure came from their family and social environment. Similarly, (Matthews & Desjardins, 2016) found that the social pressure of pronatalists makes the voluntary childless couple feel frustrated and disappointed by the judgments given by family, friends, health professionals on their decision not to become parents. However, the data in this study showed that only 25.9% of the participants indicated that they felt stressed and very stressed over the choice of not having children. This number was far less than the involuntary childless group because there were 73.2% who felt stressed and very stressed with the condition of not having children. The description of the stress level felt by the two groups made the researchers assume that the marital satisfaction in the involuntary childless group would be lower than the voluntary childless group because the involuntary childless couples had a higher level of stress.

Stressful experience is one of the factors of the VSA model (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). The stress felt by involuntary childless couples is different from that felt by voluntary childless couples. In involuntary childless, they feel that this condition represents a kind of failure (Lampman & Dowling-Guyer, 1995) because of an unfulfilled self-expectation that can make couples feel depressed. In contrast, the

voluntary childless group's choice not to have children is often seen as deviant and experiences adverse reactions from people who do not see them as "normal" (Thole, 2018). Similarly, this study found that pressure felt by this group resulted from external factors. Thus, being in the childless marriage voluntary leads to stressful experiences because of how their external factor reacted. In other words, voluntary childless group experience external stress (Randall & Bodenmann, 2017).

When couples feel a stressful situation, this will encourage couples to solve the problems they face. The drive to solve these problems is the third factor of VSA, namely the adaptation process (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). One of the adaptation processes that a couple can do is dyadic coping. Dyadic coping is a multidimensional construct, including communication and solving problems together, giving and getting emotional support, and dealing with changes and difficulties more as a couple than two individuals (Gana, Saada, Broc, Koleck, & Untas, 2017). According to Chaves, Canavarro, and Moura-Ramos (2019), how couples perceive stress signals shown by other partners (stress communication), partner reactions, and how to deal with them together can affect dyadic coping. Therefore, it is possible that dyadic coping can help couples cope with stressful conditions faced by their partners.

The dyadic coping process can explain why there is no difference in marital satisfaction in the involuntary childless and voluntary childless groups. Researchers assume that participants in this study have adapted to stressful conditions that arise in relationships. Thus, although participants in the involuntary childless group had higher stress levels than the voluntary childless group, they still had a relatively high level of marital satisfaction. Likewise, regardless of their stressful conditions, the voluntary childless group also still has high marital satisfaction.

4 CONCLUSIONS

This study found no significant difference in marital satisfaction of involuntary and voluntary childless individuals. Moreover, both groups have relatively high marital satisfaction, despite the stressors they experienced. This study also found that both groups have different stressors. The involuntary childless experienced more stress from outside their relationship (i.e., pressure from parents/family) than general stress. However, most participants of this study are women, and the result can not be

generalized to a larger male population. Thus, further research could include a more balanced gender (i.e., a similar number of men and women) so that participants are not dominated by one gender or are more focused on one gender only.

Further research is also suggested to add other variables such as dyadic coping to understand how couples cope with external stress related to the childless condition. Moreover, further research can measure social desirability to control bias in the results of marital satisfaction. In addition, further research can also use measuring tools that support the complete VSA model, such as personality measures (i.e., big five inventory), stress (i.e., perceived stress scale), and dyadic coping (i.e., dyadic coping inventory).

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