



Psychological Wellbeing of Childless Father

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ABSTRACT

This research explores the psychological wellbeing of childless fathers as they navigate the challenges associated with childlessness, including the stigma, shame, pressure, and guilt of not becoming a parent. The focus is on the perceptions, struggles, and coping strategies of these fathers. While existing research has addressed childlessness, it predominantly centres on women, resulting in a significant gap in understanding the experiences of childless fathers. Eight Malay childless fathers were interviewed using a semi-structured format. Data analysis identified three key themes: the meaning of being a childless father and exploring alternative pathways, the challenges they face, and the coping mechanisms they employ. The fathers experienced stigma, discrimination, and both emotional and practical consequences. However, the coping strategies they utilised, framed by Seligman's PERMA+ Model, contributed positively to their wellbeing. This study provides valuable insights into the experiences of childless fathers and highlights various approaches to addressing this issue. Additionally, the implications of the research and future recommendations are discussed.

Keywords: childless fathers, coping strategies, stigma, psychological wellbeing

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1 INTRODUCTION

Childlessness is the absence of children in a person's life, which can be voluntary or involuntary (Gouni et al., 2022). Voluntary childlessness occurs when parents or couples consciously agree not to have children. In contrast, involuntary childlessness occurs when partners desire to have children but are unable to bear one due to an unknown or unexplained medical situation, which will be the focus of this research.

The desire to have children is common among married couples, as children are often seen as essential for a complete and fulfilling marriage. They are viewed as a continuation of the family and a remedy for the loneliness that couples may experience. In Malaysia's collectivist culture, the extended family is considered the core social unit (Sumari et al., 2019). From a young age, children are taught values such as cooperation, helpfulness, obedience, and the importance of close family relationships, which are instilled through daily routines and rituals. Since the actions of one family member affect the entire family, children are expected to uphold family values and traditions. They also play a crucial role in preserving cultural practices and ensuring the continuation of the family lineage, acting as key vessels for these traditions. Furthermore, the concept of filial piety influences the desire to have children; children are expected to perform good deeds for their parents as a reflection of gratitude for the emotional and physical support provided (Tan et al., 2019). Additionally, some Islamic views regard having children as a blessing and a source of happiness for parents (Kristina, 2021). Thus, children are seen as vital carriers of beliefs and cultural practices, ensuring their transmission to future generations.

However, unfortunately, some married couples were unable to bear children due to some clear or even unexplained medical conditions. Most past studies have highlighted infertility issues as one of the factors of married couples being childless (Bhaskar et al., 2018; Gouni et al., 2022; Payne, 2019). Infertility issues are also believed to be caused by the abnormal regulation of feminine hormones (Mackenzies, 2020). Besides, the decision of some women or couples to delay or postpone their childbearing may also contribute to infertility issues as it may reduce the suitability to reproduce (Stegen et al., 2020). Moreover, infertility issues in urban working women are also believed to be caused by the stress of achieving the work's goals or targets and expectations.

Being childless may force married couples to face a few challenges, including stigmatisation, discrimination, and emotional consequences. After learning about fertility issues, married couples may face symptoms like sadness, anxiety, low self-esteem, sexual impotence, and marriage maladjustment (Bhaskar et al., 2018). This also may create tension or pressure in the environment between the married couples, especially the one diagnosed as infertile. Delaying childbearing may also develop feelings of guilt, emptiness, futility, and mourning (Bhaskar et al., 2018). The married couple may also face social perceptions and stigmatisation from their surroundings, such as being childless, which was seen as a shame for married women in traditional Chinese ideals (Chou & Chi, 2004). This also will create insecurity for the women or wives due to the probability of their in-laws permitting and wanting their husbands to marry other women as the solution to the issue. Scott (2020) also mentioned that men or fathers are responsible for carrying the family name, and being childless poses a threat to the family lineage. Childless men are also considered not manly as they cannot become fathers, and it affects masculinity. In India, men are often not

considered truly masculine if they cannot have children, particularly sons. They believed being childless would prevent men from attaining 'manliness' (Pujari & Unisa, 2014).

To compare and contrast the past findings on how the childlessness issue affects childless women or mothers and childless men or fathers, the findings pointed out that childless women seemed to be more negatively affected by the stigmas, public perceptions and expectations of being childless compared to childless men which may be caused by the factor of different built of perceptions and interpretation between men and women. However, Reining (2017) noted in her study on Voluntary Childlessness: Stigma and Societal Pressures on Men and Women that the paucity of information on childless men might impact this conclusion. The possibility of the finding being turned over may be provided by this current research, in which the study will explore in-depth information on the experiences of childless fathers or men of being childless. Besides, both existing research on childless men by Scott (2020) and Pujari and Unisa (2014) oversees the general situation or wellbeing of childless fathers or men going through the childlessness issue instead of specifically focusing on involuntary childlessness. The current research aims to delve into more information on the experiences of involuntary childlessness faced by childless fathers or men, which is expected to offer new insight or findings compared to past research, which only focuses on the childlessness issue in general.

Apart from that, childless couples in Asian countries are not excluded from facing challenges such as stigmatisation and discrimination from society. In Javanese cultures, childlessness is seen as a potential source of family problems as women with many children are envied, and barren women are pitied (Winarnita, 2017). Women in Vietnamese culture are also expected to bear children and maintain the family structure for the following generations, and being childless made them considered as not fulfilling their ideal female roles. Besides that, based on the study by Appleton (2021), which was done by interviewing and receiving feedback on experiences of being childless from some Asian women, including Malaysia. The finding shows that the participant from Malaysia expressed that she was expected to produce an heir to her husband, and she kept facing sensitive questions from people around during ceremonies or celebrations. She also claimed that she was relieved for past years that there was no visitation during Eid due to the Movement Control Order (MCO) as she will not receive any sensitive questions regarding bearing children anymore.

Furthermore, in maintaining psychological resilience, childless couples may learn and employ the best coping mechanisms in facing childless issues. Past research suggested that some of the common coping mechanisms used by childless couples were escapism and optimism (Tudy & Gauran-Tudy, 2020). Escapism is where childless couples tend to avoid talking about the issue or engaging in related discussions. They also keep themselves busy with work to distance themselves from the negative feelings associated with the childlessness issue. Alternatively, optimism is where participants choose to stay positive and keep their faith. They believe that the childlessness issue will not prevent them from achieving happiness.

In the current research, the researchers uncover more effective coping strategies adopted by childless fathers to maintain their resilience while going through the issue. Seligman's PERMA+ Model will be applied to explain the wellbeing of childless fathers in the current study. Seligman initially selected five components for his model: positive emotions, engagement, relationships,

meaning, and accomplishment. Optimism has recently been added as a sixth element, believing it naturally motivates and enhances wellbeing (Madeson, 2017). Additionally, PERMA is a more accurate predictor of psychological discomfort than earlier assessments of distress. In other words, proactively addressing the elements of PERMA improves aspects of wellbeing and reduces psychological suffering.

While many studies have concentrated on childless women, the psychological wellbeing of childless fathers, especially those experiencing involuntary childlessness, has been largely overlooked, particularly in Malaysia. Research has shown that childlessness affects women often through societal pressures and expectations related to motherhood, leading to feelings of inadequacy and social stigma. In contrast, men may experience childlessness differently, grappling with issues related to masculinity, identity, and societal perceptions of success, which can manifest as emotional distress and isolation. Involuntary childlessness can lead to specific psychological challenges for men, yet this aspect remains underexplored.

This study aims to investigate the experiences and psychological wellbeing of involuntarily childless fathers, addressing the gap in understanding how this condition affects their mental health and emotional lives. By focusing on this demographic, the research seeks to provide insights that can better inform mental health professionals and support services tailored to the needs of these fathers. Ultimately, this study aspires to fill a critical knowledge gap, contributing valuable findings to enhance the understanding and support of childless fathers in Malaysia.

2 METHOD

2.1 Research Design

This research employed a qualitative approach to explore ideas, opinions, and experiences by gathering and analysing non-numerical data such as text, video, and audio. Qualitative research aims to understand how individuals perceive their surroundings (Bhandari, 2022), allowing for a nuanced understanding of participants' emotional and psychological landscapes. The study utilised semi-structured interviews, incorporating open-ended questions to enable the researchers to gather in-depth information and insights from the interviewees (Ruslin et al., 2022). This method allowed participants to share their narratives while ensuring that key themes related to involuntary childlessness were addressed. The flexible nature of this approach facilitated deeper exploration of unexpected topics, making it particularly suitable for capturing the unique challenges faced by childless fathers.

2.2 Sampling Procedure

The current research employed purposive sampling, whereby the researchers selected participants based on specific interests, qualifications, or typicality (Wilson, 2024). To recruit eligible participants, the researchers designed posters outlining the criteria for participation. Candidates needed to meet the following inclusion criteria: (a) be a Malay married man who has been childless for at least four years, (b) be willing to sign an informed consent form, ensuring voluntary

participation with the option to withdraw at any time if uncomfortable, (c) fall within the age range of 25 to 70 years, (d) be an employed Malay married man, and (e) possess at least a Malaysian Certificate of Education. Before participation, the researchers ensured that each potential participant met the inclusion criteria, paying particular attention to involuntary childlessness. To facilitate communication and announcements, the researchers utilised social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram, and Facebook to reach out to potential participants.

2.3 Participants

Sample sizes in qualitative studies are typically smaller than in quantitative studies, often involving fewer than 20 participants. This approach allows researchers to develop closer relationships with respondents, enhancing the validity of detailed, in-depth research (Crouch & McKenzie, 2006). In this study, eight Malay childless fathers were interviewed as participants. This number falls within the recommended range for achieving saturation, as Hennick and Kaiser (2022) noted, and is manageable within the research timeline. The participants' demographic information is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Participants' demographic information.

Name	Age	Education level	Occupation	Period of being a Childless Father	Staying with
Mr Malik	40	Diploma	Own a business	13 years	In-laws
Mr Shahril	42	Diploma	Own a business	16 years	Alone (with wife)
Mr Shaiful	33	Bachelor	Own a business	7 years	Alone (with wife)
Mr Zakaria	55	Diploma	Own a business	17 years	Alone (with wife) + a sister-in-law
Mr Taufiq	39	Diploma	Operation Assistant	10 years	In-laws
Mr Azri	43	PhD	Lecturer	9 years	Alone (with wife)
Mr Haikal	34	Master	Pharmacist	9 years	Alone (with wife)
Mr Kamarul	36	Bachelor	TNB technician	8 years	Alone (with wife)

*Pseudonyms have been used to refer to all participants to ensure confidentiality.

2.4 Instrumentation

In this study, semi-structured interviews were used for data collection. Interview guidelines were provided to participants to help them prepare and ensure the interviews ran smoothly. The interview guidelines include the following parts:

- Section 1: Demographic factors
- Section 2: The meaning of being a father without a child
- Section 3: Challenges as a childless father

- Section 4: Coping mechanisms used in maintaining wellbeing
- Section 5: Future considerations

Table 2. Interview guidelines.

Part	Section	Question
Part A	Demographics Factors	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Where do you currently live? 2. Are you staying with your family or just you and your wife? 3. What do you do for a living? 4. Is your wife working too? 5. Is having no children common in your family and wife?
Part B	The meaning of being a father without a child	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How long have you been married? 2. What is the meaning of having no children to you? 3. How do your colleagues react to your conditions? 4. What alternatives did you and your wife undergo? How much did you spend? 5. Any perceptions or reactions from the family? And society?
Part C	Challenges as a childless father	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What kind of struggle do you and your wife face from being childless? 2. What challenges do you face as a husband in a marriage without a child? 3. How does childlessness affect you physically and emotionally?
Part D	Coping mechanisms	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How do you cope with the challenges? 2. Do any issues arise at the workplace? Being discriminated against just because you are child-free? If so, how do you handle that? 3. Is it difficult for you to relate to others or form friendships with others because you are childless? 4. Do you ever feel lonely because you do not have children? If so, how do you deal with that?
Part E	Future considerations	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Have you ever discussed with your wife what to do next? Where to go from here?

2.5 Procedure

The first step in data collection involved identifying eligible participants. The researchers sought individuals who met all the specified criteria through the previously mentioned platforms. Participants were provided with an information sheet, an informed consent form, and the guided interview questions. Once the informed consent forms were signed, semi-structured interviews

were conducted one-on-one with the participants. These interviews took place either in person or virtually via Google Meet. All interviews were recorded to aid the researchers in accurately transcribing the sessions. The recorded interviews were valuable for ensuring a comprehensive and precise transcription of the discussions.

2.6 Data Analysis

This study used thematic analysis to analyse the data, following the framework outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). This approach aimed to uncover themes that reflect the overall trends in participants' responses to the research objectives and questions. The recorded interviews were transcribed, repeatedly reviewed, and examined using thematic analysis until data saturation was achieved. The thematic analysis consisted of six key steps: (1) familiarisation with the data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) developing themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the final report. Themes and subthemes were selected based on the frequency of recurrence and their relevance to the research objectives and questions. This systematic approach comprehensively understood the participants' experiences and insights.

3 RESULTS

The data analysis revealed three primary themes and six subthemes. These themes encompass the meaning of being a childless father, the challenges faced by childless fathers, and the coping mechanisms utilised by them.

Table 3. Themes, subthemes and categories.

Themes	Subthemes	Categories
The Meaning of Being a Childless Father	Being Childless	A test A gift An opportunity Concept of <i>rezeki</i> (sustenance)
	Opt for the Alternatives	Fertility test Traditional alternatives Consultation with the specialist
The Challenges Faced by Childless Fathers	Stigmatisation and Discrimination	By relatives In the family By the friends By the public
	Emotional Consequences	Sadness Loneliness Jealousy Offended
	Practical Consequences	Supporting their wives Self and family wellbeing

Coping Mechanisms

PERMA+ Model of Wellbeing

Positive emotions
Engagement
Relationship
Meaning
Accomplishment
(+) Optimism

3.1 Theme 1: The Meaning of Being a Childless Father

3.1.1 Being Childless

A test. The participants interpreted their experiences of being childless fathers as a test given by God.

“... for me, it is a test sent by God to my wife and me, a test to measure our patience and belief in Him.” (Mr Malik)

A gift. Some participants also considered the experiences as a gift from God.

“... I would say that it is a gift from God which enables me to grow and become stronger than before.” (Mr Haikal)

An opportunity. The participants also stated that their experiences as childless fathers granted them the opportunity to grow and transform into better people.

“...a chance for me to develop and grow into someone better than before, stronger and rational... we should see the brighter part of the issue... I can spend more time with my wife and improve our bonds. I also learnt to appreciate what I already have” (Mr Kamarul)

Concept of rezeki. Apart from that, the participants also related the issue of childlessness to the concept of *rezeki* (sustenance), which they believe is destined by God for us.

“... if it is not our sustenance yet to have a child, or destined to have a child later than others, we should accept it. We should redha with God’s planning...” (Mr Kamarul)

3.1.2 Opt for the Alternatives

Based on the data analysis, most participants claimed that they went to conduct fertility tests after a few years of being unable to conceive a child. The action of opting for fertility tests and other alternatives in bearing a child adds up to their memorable experiences in going through the childlessness issue. Their effort, experiences and struggles to bear a child also contribute to their ways of defining being childless. According to the interviews, most of them were diagnosed as

normal in the fertility tests. Some of them also mentioned that their wives had been pregnant before but miscarried. Due to that they opt for alternatives that are suitable and satisfy their desire.

Fertility test. Being unable to bear a child after a few years of marriage, most of the participants took the fertility test with their wives.

“... We took fertility test and both of us are in normal condition. There is no problem arising in the results of the test.” (Mr Taufiq)

“We tried it once, and it shows that both of us are normal...” (Mr Zakaria)

Traditional alternatives. Some participants also tried the traditional method such as massaging and consuming traditional health products or jamu.

“We tried massaging and consuming traditional supplements.” (Mr Shahril)

“... We go for massages that are recommended by our family.” (Mr Haikal)

Consultation with the specialist. A few participants also stated that they met specialists to seek advice such as for their dietary and medical check-ups.

“... we did medical check-ups once a year to maintain a healthy body...” (Mr Shaiful)

“We also meet food specialists to consult on our diet as we believe it may be one of the factors that restrain us from bearing a child.” (Mr Kamarul)

3.2 Theme 2: The Challenges Faced by the Childless Fathers

3.2.1 Stigmatisation and Discrimination

By relatives. Most participants claimed they received negative comments and sensitive questions from their relatives, whom they rarely met. Most of the negative comments or sensitive questions they faced were about when they would have a child and being accused of delaying the bearing children process.

“... however, the relatives that we rarely meet are the ones that always put pressure on us or trigger stress on the issue. They tended to ask sensitive questions whenever we were at a family gathering for any celebration such as the Hari Raya celebration.” (Mr Haikal)

In the family. A few of the participants stated that they also received or faced negative reactions from their families, and the family reactions were based on too much worry. Some participants also mentioned that they faced difficult situations with their in-laws regarding the issue.

“My family does ask questions about when we will have a child, but not frequently. I could say that they are still in the process of accepting the issue wholeheartedly. I think their reactions are more to worry about my wife and me. They do suggest some alternatives that we should try to bear a child...” (Mr Azri)

“When we returned to my family-in-laws, I felt embarrassed when I saw my parents-in-law play with other family member’s children. Besides, family members are very insensitive and keep throwing uncomfortable topics or questions when we are gathered.” (Mr Taufiq)

By the friends. Based on the data analysis, most participants also reported receiving negative comments or sensitive questions from their friends or colleagues.

“... They somewhat claimed something that sounded like I am not good or skilled in bearing a child. They also questioned when I will have a child.” (Mr Taufiq)

“...something like ‘When will you have a child?’. I think that is the common question I got” (Mr Malik)

By the public. A few participants also claimed that they faced difficult situations with people around them, such as their neighbours who kept asking sensitive questions and bringing up the issue when they met or gathered.

“Some of her friends keep on asking about the issue. Besides, most of her friends around our house already have children. Hence, she is the centre of attention when it comes to this issue.” (Mr Kamarul)

3.2.2 Emotional Consequences

Sadness. Most of the participants reported feeling sad about being childless, yet they claimed that the feeling was only strong during the early phase of childlessness.

“The feeling of sadness towards the absence of children is still there, yet I keep being optimistic, positive about everything I face.” (Mr Shaiful)

Loneliness. A few participants also mentioned that they felt lonely due to the absence of children.

“I do admit I feel lonely sometimes due to the absence of children.” (Mr Zakaria)

Jealousy. Some participants reported being jealous of other couples, siblings, or relatives who already have children.

“I do admit that I am jealous or affected when I saw my father bring their grandchildren shopping, and I will have thoughts on when I will be able to see my children get along with their grandparents.” (Mr Shaiful)

“Sometimes I do feel affected or specifically jealous when people around me talk about their children.” (Mr Kamarul)

Offended. Participants also felt offended by the negative comments or sensitive questions they received from people around them, which is believed to be one of the sources of their sadness or loneliness.

“I do admit that their actions and questions offend me sometimes. However, there is nothing much that I can do as we lived together, right?” (Mr Taufiq)

3.2.3 Practical Consequences

Supporting their wives. Participants also faced challenges in their role as husbands while dealing with the issues of childlessness. They are the ones their wives can depend on and they are the ones that need to protect, comfort, and calm their wives. Most participants mentioned that their wives complained or shared their feelings of sadness about the issue.

“She did share her feelings sometimes. However, we agreed to just ignore them and their negative comments.” (Mr Zakaria)

“I think this is because she always stays at home and interacts with neighbours, hence during that time, some of her friends keep on asking about the issue.” (Mr Kamarul)

Self and family wellbeing. Participants also faced challenges in maintaining their wellbeing and family wellbeing. As husbands, they should ensure that their wives can depend on them.

“... most of the time, I just keep comforting her by reminding her that she is not alone, that I will always be there, and that we are always together in facing the issue.” (Mr Kamarul)

“Ah... if the thing is only among the staff, maybe it (discrimination) does happen sometimes. For example, regarding leave, especially during special celebrations like Hari Raya, other staff members often ask me not to take leave so I can cover their shifts before the holiday. This way, they can start their celebrations early.” (Mr Haikal)

3.3 Coping Mechanisms

3.3.1 PERMA+ Model of Wellbeing

Positive emotions. Participants reported that despite the challenges they faced in maintaining their wellbeing as childless fathers, they managed to experience positive emotions such as hope, joy, and thankfulness.

“The hope is still there, but if it is not our sustenance to have one, I gladly accept that. I believe there will always be a reason for everything that happened.” (Mr Haikal)

Engagement. Participants tried to avoid being consumed by the issue by shifting their focus to other things, which they believed would help them avoid feeling stressed or pressured.

“I shift my focus by keeping myself busy with work, I always work hard with my business, make friends with customers, and serve them well. When I am tired from work, I will sleep, hence there is no time to worry or be stressed about the issue.” (Mr Zakaria)

Relationships. Participants agreed that relationships with and support from significant ones such as wives, family and friends made them believe that they were not alone, and enabled them to go through the issue.

“They (family) did not give any negative comments on my situation. Instead they shared some suggestions or alternatives and rooted for us to bear a child.” (Mr Malik)

Meaning. Most participants tend to see the brighter part of the issue instead of continuing to question their destiny in bearing a child. They believed that the issue also brought advantages or opportunities for them to improve their relationship with wife.

“I can use the issue as a chance for me and my wife to improve our relationship. We can spend our time together more, which will strengthen our bonds and allow us to understand each other better.” (Mr Kamarul)

Accomplishment. Some participants also claimed they had developed a sense of satisfaction with their current life, which helps them feel better about not having children.

“I am already satisfied with what I have now. So, if even after we try everything to bear a child, and we still did not manage to have one, I would feel okay and accept it with an open heart.” (Mr Haikal)

(+)-Optimism. Most participants tend to be optimistic about facing the issue. They tend to be positive about their situations by believing in God’s plan and everything happens for a reason.

“... I will comfort and persuade myself by saying that maybe it is not my turn yet, staying positive, and always believe in God’s plan.” (Mr Azri)

“I believe that whatever God had planned for us, there must be reasons for it. And it may be the best for us. We should always be back to our religion and reflect on ourselves.” (Mr Haikal)

4 DISCUSSION

The discussion explores how childless fathers perceive their situation, facing the hurdles of the challenges related to childlessness, and the coping strategies they employ to maintain their wellbeing, linking these insights to prior research and relevant theories.

In going through the childlessness issue, these childless fathers have different ways of defining their experiences. The current research revealed that most participants' perceptions of a childless father are positive. They claimed that their experiences as childless fathers were a test or a gift. This is contrary to the past research by Adhikari (2020) which claimed that most couples who faced childlessness issues took it as a personal tragedy or misfortune. The current research's participants also mentioned that their experiences serve as an opportunity to be better people and more mature, contrary to past research by Winarnita (2017), which claimed the childlessness issue was a potential source of family problems. The beliefs and religions of the participants in the study may have contributed to the contradictory findings compared to past studies. These factors played essential roles in shaping the participants' perceptions of the childlessness issue. The researchers believe that the major factor influencing the findings is the religion and beliefs practised by the participants. In this study, most participants are Muslim and adhere to the concepts of rezeki and qada' and qadr.

According to Maher and Bissoondath (2017), the concept of qada' and qadr is one of six normative articles of faith in which a Muslim must declare they believe in it. Ones who failed to believe in qada' and qadr or rejected the concept, would be considered as committing the greatest sin in Islam, which is to associate partners with God. Qada' refers to the divine will of God, which represents what he has already written, planned and appointed for his creation, whereas qadr deals with the divine decree. In other words, the concept brings insight into the predestined life events or life paths, including one's lifespan, wealth, and progeny, which, as a Muslim, one should believe and practice the concept as well as obey the decree. The belief poured into this concept by the participants may contribute to their perception development in which they need to believe that God may have planned better outcomes or destiny for them which motivated them to stay in a positive state. Adhering to this notion also boosts one's motivation, resulting in a greater state of wellbeing, as Rajab and Fariq (2013) claimed. This may explain why current findings contradict past studies and why the participants may react more positively than past research.

Besides, being a childless father urged them to opt for some alternatives in bearing a child in their marriage. This includes trying the fertility test and sketch planning to try other methods of conceiving a child. This finding corresponds with the study by Moore et al. (2016). The similarities in current findings may be due to the common early step used in experiencing the childlessness

issue. This can be seen as the effort made by the participants to resolve their concerns about the childlessness they faced. Current research findings also revealed that childless fathers employed some traditional alternatives such as massaging and consuming 'jamu' which correlates with the Malay cultures in the study by Salim (2022). In addition, the childless fathers also mentioned that they consulted with specialists with their wives, mostly seeking advice for their dietary and medical check-ups. They believe that having an unhealthy diet will affect their hormone regulation, which affects their chances or ability to bear a child. This aligns with the research done by Mackenzie (2020).

The research findings revealed that childless fathers experienced stigmatisation and discrimination from relatives, family, friends, and the public. This aligns with previous studies by Adhikari (2020), Appleton (2021), Chou and Chi (2004), Pujari and Unisa (2014), and Scott (2020). However, the current study found that the stigmatisation faced by childless fathers was less severe compared to what some childless women have reported, who often received derogatory nicknames. In contrast, childless fathers primarily encountered negative comments and sensitive questions from their relatives, in-laws, friends, and the public, such as inquiries about when they will have children or accusations of delaying parenthood. Some were also labelled as lacking the ability to conceive. This is consistent with findings from studies by Scott (2020) and Pujari and Unisa (2014).

From the researchers' perspective, most Malaysians currently accept the childlessness issue and are doing so gradually. However, the stigmatisation that was applied to childless couples still cannot be deleted or diminished. Some people still stay at or below the same notch, holding the same opinions about childlessness issues that could be characterised as closed-minded behaviour. Besides, Malaysian people have this kind of culture where they are ashamed of being different from others. As a result, if they encounter a situation where most people have negative opinions or perceptions about the problem, they will adopt those same opinions, even if they are at odds with their initial ideas or holds. They behave this way because they are afraid to stand out or act differently from the crowd, possibly due to the influence of group dynamics.

The childless fathers also reported facing emotional consequences while going through the childlessness issue including the feeling of sadness, loneliness, offence, and jealousy. The participants claimed experiencing feelings of sadness but not extremely as in the early phase of the childlessness issue. This finding correlates with past findings by Bhaskar et. al. (2018). Childless fathers believe the feeling of sadness is caused by being stigmatised or discriminated against by people around them. They also mentioned that they felt lonely due to the absence of children and felt affected or jealous whenever they saw other people playing or interacting with their children.

Participants also mentioned that they faced practical consequences, such as childless fathers struggling to balance their roles while supporting their wives and taking care of their wellbeing and family's wellbeing. They need to be the ones that their wives can lean on while going through the issue, and they also need to maintain their wellbeing in facing all the negative comments and sensitive questions from people around, including at their workplace.

This study also found that childless fathers encounter various challenges associated with the childlessness issue. However, they effectively employ coping mechanisms to support their wellbeing, as Seligman's PERMA+ Model of Wellbeing illustrated. The model suggests that people who practice positive psychology are led through the terrain of pleasure and contentment, up into the high country of virtue and strength, and ultimately to the heights of lasting fulfilment, meaning, and purpose. In other words, if the childless fathers manage to develop positive emotions (one of the model factors) such as hope, love, and gratitude while going through the experiences of childlessness, it will increase and ensure their psychological wellbeing and resilience. This then will lead to long-term fulfilment and life satisfaction. This also applies to other factors in the model.

Current findings indicate that childless fathers often develop positive emotions such as hope, love, and gratitude towards those around them while navigating childlessness. This perspective contrasts with the findings of Bhaskar et al. (2018), who noted a focus on negative emotions. The current participants believe that concentrating excessively on negative feelings hinders their growth and prevents them from moving beyond the issue. This contradiction may stem from the beliefs held by the participants, many of whom focus on the positive aspects of their situation, aligning with the religious concept of *husnudzon*. This outlook is also rooted in their faith, which emphasises belief in *qada'* and *qadr*. Moreover, childless fathers engaged more with their work and other aspects of life, which helped them shift their focus away from childlessness. This aligns with previous research by Tudy and Gauran-Tudy (2020), which suggests that diverting attention from the source of stress is a common coping mechanism. By temporarily stepping away from the problem, individuals can better maintain their wellbeing and function effectively. Support, encouragement, and advice from significant and positive relationships have bolstered their confidence and faith in living as childless fathers. Enhancing social interactions may further assist them in overcoming their challenges, consistent with the findings of Vikström et al. (2011).

Besides, ascribing positive meanings to their situation by considering different perspectives on childlessness has helped childless fathers maintain their wellbeing. Rather than merely conforming to societal expectations of marriage, they sought to find meaning in achieving happiness and satisfaction in their married lives. This sense of satisfaction contributes to their wellbeing, as noted by Seligman in his model of wellbeing known as PERMA (Madeson, 2017). The childless fathers reported actively choosing to remain positive and to have faith while navigating this issue, which aligns with the findings of Tudy and Gauran-Tudy (2020). This similarity may stem from their exposure to positive psychology, enabling participants to reflect on their experiences through the internet and interactions with those around them.

The study also highlights its theoretical implications by enhancing the understanding of the experiences of childless fathers and contributing to the existing literature on male childlessness and wellbeing. It aims to raise public awareness about the impact of childlessness on fathers, demonstrating that they are significantly affected by this issue. Additionally, the findings offer valuable insights for future researchers and can serve as a reference for further studies in this area. Practically, this research provides meaningful insights that can assist childless fathers in maintaining their wellbeing and resilience amidst their challenges. It also benefits health organisations by offering new knowledge and opportunities for clinical psychologists and

therapists to develop diverse treatment and intervention methods for individuals facing similar experiences.

Despite these findings, the study has some limitations, including the relatively small sample size and the use of perspective-based research, which may affect the diversity of experiences among childless fathers. Expanding the number of participants in future studies could provide broader insights into the issue. The researchers also recommend considering the duration of the participants' childlessness, as those who have been childless for longer may adapt to their situation and no longer perceive it as a challenge or struggle. Additionally, future researchers are encouraged to broaden their focus by examining additional factors, such as religion and culture, to make the findings more universal and applicable to diverse norms. Finally, improving interviewing and data collection skills is essential, as the targeted participants tend to keep their feelings and thoughts to themselves, indicating that they rarely open up about their experiences.

In conclusion, this research successfully highlighted the meaning and experiences of childless fathers and the challenges faced by them, including stigmatisation and discrimination, emotional consequences, and practical consequences in maintaining their wellbeing. Childless fathers can develop and employ effective coping mechanisms despite various struggles and difficulties, as categorised by Seligman's PERMA+ Model of Wellbeing.

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