



A Description Of Happiness In A Toba Batak Couple Who Doesn't Have Children

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Abstract

This study was conducted to understand and describe in depth how childless Toba Batak couples interpret and maintain happiness in their married lives. Through a qualitative approach using in-depth interviews with two married couples (Subject 1 and Subject 2), as well as further research through significant others (informants), it was found that happiness in marriage is not only determined by the presence of children as successors to the family, but is more determined by the quality of the relationship, the depth of communication, acceptance of reality, and the meaning of life that is built together in married life. From both couples who participated in this study, a strong similarity was found regarding the purpose of marriage. Although they do not have children, whether due to medical factors or because the process has not produced results, both still demonstrate determination and commitment to building a family that is spiritually prosperous. This is reflected in how they live their married life with love, emotional support, and healthy and open communication. They do not have children, whether due to medical factors or because the process has not produced results, both still demonstrate determination and commitment to building a family that is spiritually prosperous. This is reflected in how they live their married life with love, emotional support, and healthy and open communication. They do not interpret the absence of children as a failure in marriage, but rather as part of the dynamics of life that must be accepted and lived with maturity and sincerity.

Keywords: Image, Happiness, Couple, Toba Batak Tribe, Children

INTRODUCTION

Marriage is a social bond that creates interpersonal relationships. Most people who choose to marry consider having children and becoming parents to be important goals that add special meaning to their lives. Regarding the decision to marry, research conducted by Vartanian (Magta & Yeni Lestari, 2022) shows that women have a stronger desire to marry than men, driven by a strong desire to fulfill the traditional roles of wife, mother, and parent. Research by Hoffman (Ruqayah, 2025) shows that having children is seen as an important source of affiliative satisfaction for women. The presence of children in a family can strengthen marital relationships by increasing emotional closeness with one's partner, strengthening social ties, and providing joy in witnessing their development from infancy.

This view encourages many people to hope for children. However, not all couples are able to fulfill this hope due to various obstacles, particularly physical problems such as infertility, which can reduce the chances of conceiving.

Women are expected to provide for their families, and this is an ideal that many women strive to fulfill. This nature shapes the ideal image of women. However, if this expectation is not met, women often receive negative judgment (Faizati, Sa'diyah, Prihatini, & Khusna, 2022). According to Vartanian, for women, the desire to become mothers is part of the traditional demands that are considered the main achievement in their lives (Rahmahdianti & Rusli, 2020). Therefore, there is a strong expectation in women to fulfill this. However, women who experience difficulties in having children often receive negative treatment from their environment, considered abnormal, different, or imperfect, even blamed and held responsible for their inability to produce children. Sumapraja (Budiarti & Hanoum, 2019) stated that in Indonesian culture, children have a special meaning for parents, especially among the Batak people who highly value the presence of children.

Survey data from DIPA Healthcare Business Unit Manager, Laksmi Wingit Ciptaning, while giving a guest lecture at the Faculty of Biology, Gadjah Mada University, shows that infertility is still a concern for married couples who want to have children. Likewise, in Indonesia, the problem of infertility is quite high. Around 11 percent of the 150 million couples of childbearing age in Indonesia experience infertility. The causes of infertility can come from the woman, the man, or other factors such as lifestyle. Infertility can be caused by female factors (e.g., hormonal disorders, problems with the ovaries or uterus, endometriosis), male factors (e.g., spermatogenesis disorders), and other factors such as lifestyle. (Pandemic Talks, 2024) shows that 8.2% of women of childbearing age in Indonesia (around 71,000 people) chose to be childfree in 2022, this figure increased from 7.0% in 2019. The inability of a married couple to have children after a long marriage becomes a struggle in the household, with that the married couple must carry out positive activities even though they do not have children in their family, married couples or households try and strive to have children. However, not all couples are blessed with children for many years, socially this has an impact on the stigma experienced by married couples who do not have children (infertility) (Hermawati & Sugito, 2021).

In this situation, couples are unable to have children due to certain obstacles, not due to a shared desire to remain childless. Women account for 40-50% of infertility cases, while men account for 30%, and other causes account for around 20-30% of these couples. Therefore, the perception that infertility is experienced only by women is a major error. Women are the ones who suffer the most when it comes to infertility. Social stigma holds that if a couple does not have children, the woman is considered the one at fault (Pasyola, Abdullah, & Puspasari, 2021). The deeply rooted patriarchal culture in some Indonesian cultures still considers infertility taboo, with gender bias being a factor preventing couples from obtaining optimal infertility health services. This also plays a role in the decision-making process for infertility services, where every decision usually rests with the husband.

Veevers (Mansari, Jauhari, Jauhari, Yahya, & Hidayana, 2018) explains that the impacts of childlessness include feelings of worthlessness, a weakening of warmth and affection between husband and wife, a sense that their marriage and life lack meaning, increased stress in women, feelings of hopelessness, and a loss of hope. This situation can also trigger stress in married couples (Laman, Ma'ruf, Sakka, & Meidiyansyah, 2023). Lestari and Suprpti (Hidayat, Anwar, & Hidayah, 2017) state that childless couples often fail to achieve

happiness in their married life. This situation becomes a burden for couples experiencing the absence of children in their household and has a negative impact on family harmony. Wibawa, et.al (Purwaningrum, Wahyuningsih, & Nugraha, 2018) showed that couples who do not have children try to maintain the harmony of their household by respecting each other, strengthening their bonds of love, even though not having children in their family often makes them bored and eager to have children, because they really want to be like other couples, who have children. There are also married couples who do not have children because they are influenced by infertile partners. Even though they cannot have children, the couple always tries to maintain their marriage, by loving each other, always being open, maintaining good and harmonious communication.

The Batak people are one of the Indonesian tribes that place great importance on the birth of a child. In the Toba Batak community, marriage serves as a determinant of rights and obligations within the community, ensuring the continuation of the lineage. In addition to continuing the lineage, marriage also serves as a bridge in the implementation of the Dalihan Na Tolu tradition in the Toba Batak community. For the Toba Batak, custom is a law that must be upheld throughout life. Custom is accepted as an obligation to maintain a balanced social life, which will then be passed on to descendants. Batak people uphold their customs well and behave accordingly (Mongdong & Kusumiati, 2023).

Dalihan Na Tolu, or "Tungku Nan Tiga," refers to a patrilineal social system, meaning that men hold a higher position, requiring married women to follow their husbands and become members of their husband's family, including their descendants. Through marriage, the newlyweds will produce successive generations (children) of their family. Among the Toba Batak people, successive generations (children) are a source of wealth for their parents. This aligns with the Batak philosophy of anakkonhi do hamoraon, which is still firmly held by the Toba Batak people. The presence of children in a family holds significant significance.

In Batak society, there are also three cultural value systems that serve as life values: wealth (hamoraon), many descendants (hagabeon), and honor (hasangapon). These cultural values, which have always been a mainstay of the Batak people, remain to this day. These cultural values are still practiced from generation to generation. One value applied in every Batak family is having many descendants. The Toba Batak believe that the more children a child has, the more fortune (wealth) and honor the child will bring to their parents (APRIANTI, 2022).

If a family does not have children, it will cause conflict in the household. Koentjaraningrat (in Manik, 2015) stated that the main goal of marriage is to have children. This is also true in Batak society.

Toba can accept a wife being returned to her parents or "dipaulak" if the wife is unable to have children. This is the alternative chosen by the Toba Batak people, sirang so sirang (separation not separation) as a way out of their family problems without legal divorce. This is the result of an agreement from each party because divorce in Toba Batak society is prohibited by religion and culture itself. In Toba Batak society, having children is the main goal of marriage. If the wife cannot produce children, she must be willing to be a cohabitant. If the wife does not accept, her choice is to leave her husband (Manik, 2015).

This dipaulak phenomenon is supported by a true incident, information the author obtained from his brother-in-law, S. Tambunan, in 2021, when he lived in the area: Sirisirisi Village, Doloksanggul District, Humbang Regency.

Hasundutan occurred in 2017 in a family. The problem involved a married couple experiencing sirang so sirang because the wife was unable to bear children, forcing her to

return to her parents' home. Meanwhile, the husband was permitted to remarry, claiming he wanted to have children from his second marriage.

A similar incident occurred in Purba Village, Doloksanggul District, Humbang Hasundutan Regency in 2019, involving a married couple who were still childless after six years of marriage. In addition to the struggle of not having children, the couple nearly experienced a breakdown in their marriage due to interference from a third party from the husband's family who demanded their child be separated, or *sirang*, on the grounds that they wanted their child to be happy with the presence of a child. Meanwhile, in this situation, the wife had not been blessed with children, so her in-laws constantly tried to ensure they *sirang*, and asked her to be sent to her parents' house by gathering the clan and following Batak customs. However, in this case, the husband and wife did not *sirang*, arguing that the husband would continue to be with his wife and there was no reason for them to separate. This was reinforced by the husband's belief that children were a bonus given to them by God, and if they had not been blessed with children, they had not been entrusted by God to be parents to their future children.

Based on the above phenomenon, in line with Manik's (Purba, Surbakti, Sari, & Panjaitan, 2024) research, it states that *hagabeon* (blessed by offspring), with the principle of "many children, much fortune" is very important. In many wedding ceremonies, a blessing is always expressed so that the couple is blessed with many offspring: thirteen sons and seventeen daughters (*maranak sapulu tolu, marboru sapulu pitu*). If a woman is not *gabe*, that is, unable to provide male and female offspring to her husband, then this will be the cause of cultural conflict that leads to divorce or *sirang*.

The lives of wives who have not yet been blessed with children are inseparable from their desires. Both subjects have hopes and desires to have children and build a prosperous and harmonious household. This hope motivates them to continue striving for a better life. Diener (Gede Pupung Januartika, Komang Febrinayanti Dantes, & I Nengah Suastika, 2022).states that people feel happier and more satisfied with their lives when they have an optimistic outlook on the future.

Furthermore, Wirawan stated that people who have desires tend to feel happier than those who don't have many desires. Both subjects' optimism about their future happiness is what creates satisfaction with their future outlook. Diener et al. (in Ulfah & Mulyana, 2014) stated that an optimistic attitude towards the future leads to greater happiness and life satisfaction.

RESEARCH METHODS

The type of research in this study is qualitative, the aim of qualitative research itself is to understand the conditions of a context by directing a detailed and in-depth description of the portrait of conditions in a natural context (natural setting), about what actually happened according to what is in the study field (Darmayanti et al., 2020).

Qualitative research is a research process to understand human or social phenomena by creating a comprehensive and complex picture that can be presented in words, reporting detailed views obtained from informant sources, and conducted in a natural setting .

According to Sugiyono ((Lutfiana, 2023) research subjects are parties related to the subject being studied (informants or sources) who obtain information related to the research data, which constitutes a sample of a study. Research subjects can provide information about the research data that can explain the characteristics of the subjects being studied.

Therefore, the subject of this research is a single mother of Batak ethnicity, with the following criteria:

1. A Toba Batak couple who have no children
2. Have been married for at least 5 years.

The analysis process consists of three simultaneous activity streams: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing/verification. Data reduction is the process of selecting, focusing on simplifying, abstracting, and transforming raw data that emerges from written field notes. As data collection progresses, further reduction stages occur (summarizing, coding, and exploring themes).

This data reduction/transformation process continues after the fieldwork, until a complete final report is compiled. Next comes data presentation. Miles and Huberman (in Emzir, 2012) define data presentation as a collection of structured information that allows for drawing conclusions and taking action. Data presentation is useful for understanding what is happening and what further analysis or action needs to be taken based on the understanding gained and the presentation of the data (Maulani, 2019).

The third analytical activity is drawing conclusions and verifying them. Drawing conclusions can be used from the initial data collection process, where qualitative researchers begin to search for the meaning of objects, noting regularities, explanations, possible configurations, causal flows, and propositions. Drawing conclusions, according to Miles and Huberman, is only part of a whole activity and configuration. Conclusions are also verified throughout the research. Verification can be a fleeting thought that crosses your mind during writing, a review of field notes, or perhaps a thorough and laborious review. The meanings that emerge during the data collection process must be tested for their truth, robustness, and appropriateness – which constitutes their validity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Setting

In this chapter, the author will describe the results and data from a study aimed at understanding the happiness of childless Toba Batak couples. This study used qualitative methods, which are useful for understanding happiness based on experienced phenomena. The study was conducted from April 16, 2025, to May 10, 2025.

The results of this study are based on in-depth, direct interviews aimed at obtaining direct information and data, as well as observation and documentation methods to gain a deeper understanding of the existing data for analysis. This analysis will focus on the happiness of childless Toba Batak couples.

The data collection setting for this study was in Tanah Jawa and Pematangsiantar. The subjects were childless Toba Batak couples. The study required two pairs of subjects (husband and wife) and two informants, each with different educational backgrounds, social backgrounds, age, and length of marriage.

Research setting subject 1 The first subject is a married couple of Batak Toba blood who have been married for 7 years without children. Their background is that they do not have children due to several diagnoses from the media, such as cysts and ovarian cancer, so they had to have their uterus removed.

The interview was conducted in Tanah Jawa, specifically inside the official residence where the couple lives. The official residence is located directly adjacent to the church, while on the other side is the deaconess's residence. The official residence is quite isolated from the general residential area, with a considerable distance from other residents' homes. Behind

the house, a small plantation area with lush oil palm trees adds to the serene and secluded feel.

The interview took place in the living room of the official residence, specifically on the sofa the couple usually uses to receive guests. The room was quiet and conducive, with natural lighting from the windows and good air circulation. The choice of this living room provided a comfortable space for the participants to share their stories, as it was a familiar space and away from outside noise.

The second subject was a married couple living in the Pematangsiantar area. The couple had been married for nine years, were childless, and had a medical examination that declared them healthy.

The interviews took place at a well-known cafe in the area, Café Ikon. The cafe has two main areas: an indoor and an outdoor area. The first interview took place indoors, where it was relatively crowded, with other customers enjoying the cafe's relaxed atmosphere. However, the researchers chose a relatively quiet corner to minimize noise, though not completely silent.

The subsequent interviews were conducted in the outdoor area of the café. This location was chosen for participant comfort and the quieter environment compared to indoor areas. The researchers and subjects were seated directly facing each other to create a friendly and open atmosphere. The sound of traffic from the surrounding road was audible but did not disrupt the flow of the interview. This semi-open setting provided a relaxed atmosphere and encouraged participants to be more expressive in their responses to the questions.

Discussion

Based on the results of in-depth interviews and observations conducted with two childless Toba Batak couples, it can be concluded that both couples exhibit unique and diverse depictions of happiness. Both live married lives in situations that are often considered less than ideal culturally, especially in the context of Toba Batak society which views the presence of children, especially boys, as a symbol of honor (*hasangapon*), continuation of the lineage (*hagabeon*), and a source of social status (*hamoraon*). Nevertheless, both couples are still able to build and maintain a meaningful, emotionally stable marriage, rich in spiritual values and deep affection.

These two couples find themselves in complex marital roles and relationships, given the significant social pressures they face. In Toba Batak society, which upholds patrilineal kinship and clan continuity, childless couples are often vulnerable to social stigma, negative judgment from extended family members, and even pressure during traditional rituals. Nevertheless, both couples demonstrate strong psychological resilience and high adaptability in dealing with their circumstances. They are not only able to accept the realities of life that do not align with the expectations of the dominant culture, but also successfully forge a deep meaning for their marriage based on their experiences, communication, and shared values.

Overall, both couples demonstrated that marital happiness isn't solely determined by the presence of children, but rather by the quality of the emotional connection, mutual support, and understanding in living together. Through the narratives shared by each subject, it's clear that they view marriage as a space for shared growth, a space where love, tolerance, and spirituality are the primary foundations for building a family.

The discussion in this chapter will elaborate on how the dimensions of marital happiness are reflected in the lives of both subject couples, as well as how they construct meaning from

their life situations. Each aspect analyzed, from the purpose of marriage, views on family and parenting, to the basis of emotional relationships such as love and self-acceptance, will be linked to theories outlined in the literature review, such as Gunarsa's (Simamora, 2024) theory of marriage and family. Furthermore, this discussion will be compared with the findings of previous relevant studies, in order to provide a more complete and comprehensive picture of the marital happiness of childless Toba Batak couples.

Through an interpretive and reflective approach, this chapter not only aims to reveal the reality experienced by subject couples I and II, but also to provide a deeper understanding of how happiness in marriage can be formed and maintained, even in conditions that are often considered less than ideal socially and culturally (Edelweiss, 2020).

First, the similarity in the purpose of marriage: the formation of a prosperous family, both couples I and II in this study demonstrated a very mature understanding of the purpose of marriage. Both did not focus their marriage solely on the presence of children, but rather on the formation of a family that is emotionally and spiritually prosperous. Couple I, in their interview, explicitly stated that from the beginning they did not place the presence of children as the main goal of marriage. For them, inner peace, open communication, and mutual support are the main elements in building a prosperous household. Their marriage is still lived with gratitude, despite the fact that they are not blessed with children and this couple I also faced other struggles, namely before being diagnosed with childlessness, this couple, especially the wife, had a cyst and underwent surgery to remove it weighing 10 kg. The following year was diagnosed again with ovarian cancer and the removal of the uterus which resulted in the couple subject I will not have children.

Likewise, Couple II displayed a similar attitude. They viewed marriage as a place to support each other through joy and sorrow, and to live life together in harmony, regardless of whether or not they have children. They chose not to let pressure from their extended family or social environment be their primary burden. Instead, they emphasized that happiness in marriage lies in healthy emotional relationships and the spiritual values they hold dear.

This interpretation aligns with Gunarsa's (APRIANTI, 2022) theory, which states that the purpose of marriage is not merely to procreate, but also to create a space for psychological, spiritual, and emotional growth for both individuals. In a healthy marriage, couples experience character development, maturity, and the formation of a shared identity, with children being just one, not the only, element of happiness.

Besides Gunarsa, Maslow's (Rensia, 2019) theory of needs also supports that once basic needs (physiological and safety) are met, humans will seek love, affiliation, esteem, and self-actualization. In this context, both partners demonstrate that they have progressed through these basic stages and found self-actualization through a mutually complementary marital relationship, regardless of the presence of children.

Hazan and Shaver's (SUGIARTI & Oktaviani, 2022) theory of intimate relationships is also relevant. They explain that emotional closeness in mature relationships significantly determines relationship quality. When partners can provide each other with comfort, security, and emotional support, they experience profound happiness and relational satisfaction, as reflected in the experiences of both partners in this study.

Second, they share a common opinion about the future form of their family: the number of children and their educational direction. This couple also demonstrated a rational and open understanding of the family's future and how they would fulfill their roles as parents if they were blessed with children. Couple I acknowledged that they had discussed the possibility of not having children from the beginning of their marriage and agreed that their family

would remain legitimate, intact, and happy even without them. If they were to have children, their primary focus would be on education and affection, not solely on lineage or social status.

Couple II displayed a similar attitude. They stated that family is not simply a biological institution, but rather a system of relationships shaped by shared values, shared responsibilities, and shared goals. The quality of communication and shared understanding are more important to them than the number of family members. Their readiness to design a healthy family demonstrates careful planning and an awareness of their moral responsibilities as a couple.

Duvall & Miller (Lisa Astini, Nur Afni Safarina, & Ella Suzanna, 2022) in their Family Developmental Theory also emphasize the importance of couple consensus at every stage of the family life cycle. They argue that joint decisions on important aspects such as the number of children and parenting methods are indicators of a healthy and adaptive family. Third, the foundation of a strong marriage and family life: goodwill, tolerance, and love. Both couples in this study also demonstrated sincerity, empathy, and deep love in their marital relationship, reflected in their concrete actions and mutual acceptance. Couple I, for example, described how the husband showed total support when his wife had to undergo a painful medical process related to fertility. Even after surgery, he was always ready to accompany his wife for routine checkups. The husband was not only physically present but also emotionally supportive, without blaming or demanding. He demonstrated empathy and patience toward his wife's condition, demonstrating a high level of tolerance and love. Couple II also demonstrated a similar relationship dynamic. They supported each other in the face of the social stigma of being a childless couple. They stated that they never felt regret or blame, but instead focused on building a meaningful home life. This demonstrated a strong emotional commitment and a deep understanding of the value of marriage.

Gunarsa (Rizdanti & Akbar, 2022) emphasized that goodwill, tolerance, and genuine love are the foundation of a healthy and happy marriage. These three elements enable couples to not only accept each other's strengths and weaknesses, but also to view life together as a space for growth, not demands.

Carl Rogers (SUGIARTI & Oktaviani, 2022) in his theory of unconditional positive regard, also emphasized that a healthy relationship is only possible if there is unconditional acceptance of one's partner. When love is not contingent on certain conditions (for example, having children), the relationship becomes a powerful source of psychological growth and balance.

Berscheid & Regan (Edelweiss, 2020) in their study of the psychology of love and romantic relationships stated that true love is characterized by "companionate love," that is, love built on emotional intimacy, commitment, and a sense of long-term responsibility toward a partner beyond mere physical or biological attraction. This closely aligns with the dynamics demonstrated by the two couples in this study.

Similarities and Differences between Subject I and Subject II

Similarities of Subject I & Subject II

Similarities between Subject 1 (PS&DB) and Subject 2 (EP&CP) of this study, both couples, namely PS and DB as the first subject, and EP and CP as the second subject, show a number of fundamental similarities in living a married life without the presence of children. The most fundamental similarity of these two couples is the deep acceptance of the condition of not having children as part of their destiny. Although coming from the Toba Batak

community that upholds values such as hagabeon (many descendants), hamoraon (wealth), and hasangapon (honor), these two couples were able to free themselves from strong cultural pressures and chose to build a happy household based on the meaning they formulated themselves, not based on social expectations.

Both Subject I (PS&DB) and Subject II (EP&CP) define marital happiness not as the number of children or reproductive status, but rather as the quality of the relationship between husband and wife. They emphasize the importance of open communication, mutual support, and genuine love. This is evident in how they describe their daily lives: understanding each other, not blaming each other, and maintaining a warm and harmonious relationship. In this case, they have actualized the values of happiness as explained by Gunarsa (2003), that a prosperous family is not solely shaped by the presence of children, but by the psychological and spiritual maturity of the couple in building a household.

Furthermore, the couple demonstrated a shared motivation for starting a family. Their marriage was based on love and a shared vision, not simply on social expectations or the pressure to have children. This solidified the foundation of their marriage, enabling their relationship to endure even when reality didn't meet expectations (e.g., the lack of children). This shared goal served as a key pillar in maintaining the harmony and stability of their marriage. Even when pressure from family or society arose, they remained united and chose to support each other rather than question the situation.

Both partners also agree that their relationship has brought them a unique form of happiness. In their childlessness, they have found a unique and profound emotional closeness and the freedom to live their lives together with a greater focus on each other. Spiritual and religious support also runs through both partners' lives. They believe that their lack of children is part of God's will and should be accepted wholeheartedly. This attitude demonstrates their strong spiritual orientation as a coping mechanism for the difficult situations they face.

2. Differences between Subject I (PS&DB) & Subject II (EP&CP)

Despite having many similarities in their perspectives on marriage and happiness, there are also a number of significant differences between the couples of subject I (PS&DB) and subject II (EP&CP), especially in terms of emotional expression, the background to the causes of childlessness, and the coping strategies used by each individual in their marital relationship.

A striking difference in the couple of Subject I (PS&DB) lies in the cause of their childlessness. PS, as the wife of the first subject, suffered from serious health problems. She had to undergo a hysterectomy due to ovarian cancer and cysts. This condition not only precluded the possibility of having children biologically, but also had a profound psychological impact on her. PS honestly expressed her feelings in interviews, even crying several times as she recounted her struggle to accept this reality. Feelings of sadness, loss, and self-disappointment are emotions that still accompany her to this day, despite her efforts through prayer and service. However, the trials faced in their household did not allow her to dwell on this sadness. For PS, there are many other things to be grateful for, and children are not the only source of happiness in her household.

Unlike subject II (EP&CP), EP, the wife of the second subject, did not experience any specific medical challenges. In the interview, EP stated that she and her husband were in good health, but they had not yet been blessed with children. EP's stress was not as severe as that

of subject I, but she responded to the situation with smiles and jokes. EP was more relaxed and relaxed in dealing with her childlessness, and focused on positive things such as selling tomatoes, cooking with her husband, traveling and enjoying culinary delights with him, and living a joyful married life. In this regard, EP demonstrated a high level of acceptance and a more tangible expression of happiness in her daily life.

Another difference is evident in how the two couples deal with social pressure. Subject I (PS & DB) placed more boundaries with their immediate environment, such as the congregation, and focused on the spiritual environment of the church, serving as a source of strength and a space for healing. Meanwhile, Subject II (EP & CP) was more open to their surroundings, remained socially active, and didn't feel burdened by questions or comments from neighbors or family. CP even emphasized that they never argued about children, as they had a mutual understanding from the start (Maulani, 2019).

In terms of the expressions of the male partners, DB and CP also show different characteristics. DB, as PS's husband, appears more rational and spiritual. He recognizes his wife's limitations and never touches her in a hurtful manner. He even willingly returns home from his assignment in Balige every weekend to ensure his wife doesn't feel lonely. Meanwhile, CP, EP's husband, displays a more relaxed demeanor, is full of jokes, and acts as an equal partner in daily activities. He helps his wife with work and even helps with household chores like cooking or shopping together.

Emotionally, Subject I (PS&DB) appeared more serious and profound in their marital life. Their traumatic medical experience shaped their relationship through significant struggle and inner strength. Meanwhile, Subject II (EP&CP), despite being childless, displayed a more fluid relationship dynamic, punctuated by more laughter and shared experiences of simple, enjoyable activities.

CONCLUSION

This study was conducted to understand and describe in depth how childless Toba Batak couples interpret and maintain happiness in their married life. Through a qualitative approach with in-depth interviews with two married couples (Subject 1 and Subject 2), as well as in-depth interviews with significant others (informants), it was found that happiness in marriage is not only determined by the presence of children as the next generation, but more so by the quality of the relationship, the depth of communication, acceptance of reality, and the meaning of life that is built together in married life.

The two couples participating in this study found a strong shared perspective on the purpose of marriage. Although they were childless, either due to medical reasons or because the process was unsuccessful, both still demonstrated determination and commitment to building a family with spiritual well-being. This was reflected in how they lived their married life filled with love, emotional support, and healthy, open communication. Although they were childless, either due to medical reasons or because the process was unsuccessful, both still demonstrated determination and commitment to building a family with spiritual well-being. This was reflected in how they lived their married life filled with love, emotional support, and healthy, open communication. They did not interpret the absence of children as a failure in their marriage, but rather as part of the dynamics of life that must be accepted and lived with maturity and sincerity.

Regarding their shared views on family structure and number of children, both partners acknowledged that they once hoped to have children and establish a family in a conventional format. However, when these hopes were not met, they jointly revised their

expectations without creating conflict or lingering disappointment. Instead, they strengthened their marital relationship and made it central to the meaning of the family they had built. This demonstrates flexibility in responding to reality and the ability to adapt to conditions that are less than ideal according to Batak cultural constructs.

Furthermore, the dimensions of goodwill, tolerance, and love emerge as fundamental aspects of the couple's relationship. In the face of social pressure, which often comes in the form of questions, suggestions, or comments from those around them, both partners demonstrate emotional maturity and the ability to remain calm. Although in Batak culture, having children is often seen as a symbol of marital success and the continuation of the clan, these couples do not allow external pressures to undermine their internal harmony. They are able to neutralize these social pressures by strengthening each other and focusing on their own happiness.

This study also found that the sources of happiness in the couples' marriages varied widely, but they shared a common thread: the presence of emotional closeness between husband and wife. Their happiness arose from small activities they shared together, such as cooking, casual conversations, praying together, and even joking around in their daily lives. These activities, though simple, held great emotional value because they were carried out with awareness, acceptance, and gratitude. Furthermore, their spiritual values served as a foundation that strengthened their resilience in facing the reality of not having children. Both entrusted their life journey to God's will, without neglecting effort and prayer.

Overall, this study shows that childless Toba Batak couples can still experience and build a full and meaningful marital happiness. The absence of children is not a reason to blame one's partner, compare oneself to other families, or feel like a failure in raising a family. Instead, in this absence, they are able to create a healthy relationship space, unify their life vision, and strengthen their spiritual bond. Happiness in marriage does not depend solely on external factors, but on the quality of the internal relationship between husband and wife, namely how they understand, support, accept, and walk together through thick and thin.

Thus, the findings of this study provide insight that, within the Toba Batak cultural context, which values offspring, there are still couples who are able to exist happily and whole without children. They are living proof that the meaning of family and happiness can be built through love, loyalty, and a strong commitment between two individuals united in marriage. Happiness is not always determined by meeting certain social standards, but rather by how individuals and couples construct meaning, respond to reality, and build a life filled with love and respect for one another.

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