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Original Article

CHALLENGING NORMS: Marital Satisfaction and Diverging Priorities Of Voluntarily Child-Free and Parenting Couples In A Pronatalist Society

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Abstract. This study explored the impact of parental status on marital satisfaction and quality of life among parenting and child-free couples. Using an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, 412 participants from the Greater Manila Area participated in the quantitative phase, and 20 participants were involved in the qualitative phase. Married individuals aged 25-50 years, married for at least two years, were included. The ENRICH Marital Inventory and WHOQOL-BREF were used to measure marital satisfaction and quality of life, respectively, with semi-structured interviews adding depth to the findings. Quantitative results showed that having children positively influenced marital satisfaction, with parenting couples reporting higher satisfaction than child-free couples. Additionally, the number of children and length of marriage were positively associated with marital satisfaction, while age had a slight negative effect. Monthly income did not have a direct effect on marital satisfaction, but its relationship with quality of life weakened as income increased. The qualitative findings highlighted different priorities: parenting couples focused on their children's future and often suppressed conflict to maintain family harmony, while child-free couples prioritized financial independence, travel, and open communication. These findings provide valuable insights for couples making decisions about parenthood, offering a clearer understanding of the factors influencing marital satisfaction and quality of life.

Keywords: *Child-Free, Parenthood, Marital Satisfaction, Quality Of Life*

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Pendahuluan

The deeply ingrained pronatalist values in the Philippines, which equate parenthood with marital success and personal fulfillment (Ballaret, 2024; Erkaya & Ustunel, 2023), leave voluntarily child-free couples marginalized and misunderstood (Carroll, 2018; Hutchinson, 2022), underscoring the urgent need to explore their experiences. In the Philippines, the central cultural values are wrapped around family and parenthood. In this respect, most cultures in the country tend to view having children as an important marker of success in marriage and marital fulfillment (Kuang, 2018). Childbearing is a means to self-actualization and a way of maintaining good relational bonds within the family unit. Parents in Filipino culture place emphasis on the education of their children, sometimes performing sacrifices, which include working abroad, to meet familial obligations and societal expectations (Alampay & Garcia, 2019). Values greatly upheld by the nuclear family that transcend work-life balance, caregiving, and the roles of men and women in society (Dapiton et al., 2020; Abalos et al., 2018). For same-

sex couples, who have a strong cultural desire for families, are pressured to explore other ways to form their families through processes such as adoption or raising their relatives' children (Ballaret, 2024).

While family and caregiving continues to remain in the heart of a Filipino culture, there have been new shifts regarding modern family dynamics. Migration and modernization have brought new expectations where the older generation would rather have a harmonious relationship than expect traditional caregiving roles from the family members (Montayre et al., 2020). Despite these changes, traditional family structures continue to pressurize people, especially in raising children and continuing the family line (Gozum, 2020; Alampay & Garcia, 2019).

Despite the fact of being a culturally family-oriented society, there has been a remarkable increase in child-free couples by choice. While it is globally rising, this faces particular challenges in a pronatalist society like the Philippines, where choice to remain child-free is generally stigmatized and stereotyping (Agrillo & Nelini, 2008; Erkaya & Ustunel, 2023). Coming from a Filipino setting, which believes childbearing is part of marital success, individuals without children are viewed as selfish and without direction or meaning in their lives (Koropecj-Cox et al., 2018; K. Park, 2002). This perception is further heightened by the importance placed on extending the family line and caregiving roles, consequently piling tremendous social pressure on child-free individuals, including teachers (Tudy & Tudy, 2020). These belittling views fail to consider personal, economic, and environmental complexities involved in decisions to remain child-free (Yazid et al., 2023; Agrillo & Nelini, 2008).

As concerning the growing trend toward child-free marriage, this does mirror broader global shifts in attitudes toward family life. Indeed, there is greater acceptance of diverse life courses across the world, as manifested in the rising rates of non-marriage and cohabitation in the Philippines (Abalos, 2023; Rios & Gomes, 2009). Despite this, child-free marriages are still judged as going against traditional roles in many cultures, though other societies are gradually embracing these choices (Carroll, 2018; Samsudin et al., 2023). Other studies have also noted that child-free individuals adopt strategies in coping with pressures expected from society, which go against the stereotypes of not being fulfilled or having no purpose (K. Park, 2002). This dynamic increasingly lands in the face of evolving family structure, hence underpinning the increased interest in child-free living and furthering research on the child-free experience and its effects on marital satisfaction and societal perception (Letherby, 2002; Yazid et al., 2023).

Recent studies have challenged the assumption that a child-free marriage is less satisfying. Many voluntarily child-free couples often report high levels of marital satisfaction, the same as that of the parenting couples (Bernardi et al., 2020; Roesad & Rumondor, 2021). A systematic review found a positive association between childlessness and life satisfaction: in the older child-free women, high satisfaction was reported both from interview-based reactions and standardized measures of satisfaction (Stahnke et al., 2022). While the pronatalist cultures may further pressurize, the emerging body of research supports the possibility that child-free couples can enjoy marital satisfaction and quality of life equal to those of parenting couples. Furthermore, sexual satisfaction among single people is higher, which relates to a reduced interest in traditional marriage (Y. Park et al., 2020), furthering the questioning of societal norms. Although childlessness may in some cases decrease marital satisfaction (Chehreh et al., 2021), the general evidence suggests that child-free marriages can be just as rewarding.

However, despite this knowledge, there is still a significant gap in Philippine-based research focused on experiences related to child-free couples as opposed to parenting couples in terms of marital satisfaction and quality of life. Most studies are focused on traditional family structures; hence, the experiences and priorities of child-free couples remain understudied. This study investigates the experience of marital satisfaction and quality of life of child-free and parenting couples in the Philippines, given the differential investment in parenthood shaped by their differing priorities.

Method

Sampling Procedures

This research explored the differences between parenting and child-free couples in terms of marital satisfaction and quality of life among 412 heterosexual married couples in the Greater Manila Area. Quantitative data collection involved all 412 respondents in the first phase, while in the second phase, 10 couples participated, with five parenting couples and five child-free couples.

Inclusion criteria of the respondents are: a) couples with children; b) childless couples during the time the research was conducted; c) couples married for at least two years, either in a religious or civil ceremony. The exclusion criteria included the following: (a) couples with any adopted children, stepchildren, or children from a previous marriage or relationship; (b) couples currently cohabiting; (c) arranged or fixed marriages; and (d) child-free couples due to infertility or health reasons that prevented them from having children. No demographic restrictions were imposed, including social standing.

The ages of the participants sampled range between 25 and 50 years, averaging 35 years. On average, the length of marriage is approximately 10 years, ranging from 2 to 28 years, which indicates the quite young sample has marriages that have been long on average. Not having children characterizes half of the interviewed, and in the rest, a family with an average of just one child is prevalent.

The predominant respondents are Roman Catholic, followed by Iglesia ni Cristo and other Christian religions. As the Roman Catholic respondents are predominant in the survey, it may be interesting to compare this group against the non-Catholic respondents. The biggest respondent categorization by monthly income is in the category of ₱21,000 to ₱30,000, followed by those earning a monthly income of ₱50,000 and above. On the scale rating from 1 to 5, the average monthly income is hopefully around 3.1.

Procedures

For phase one, the quantitative phase, a survey instrument consisting of four sections was administered: (1) an Informed Consent Form, (2) a Demographic Questionnaire, (3) the ENRICH Marital Inventory, and (4) the WHOQOL-BREF.

The Evaluation and Nurturing Relationship Issues, Communication & Happiness (ENRICH) Marital Satisfaction Inventory

The (ENRICH) Marital Inventory, developed by Olson, Fournier, and Druckman in 1983, comprises 11 scales with 115 items, assessing intrapersonal, interpersonal, and external issues in marriage. Intrapersonal issues include personality traits, personal habits, expectations, and values, while interpersonal issues cover communication, conflict resolution, sexual satisfaction, commitment, and roles. External issues pertain to relationships with relatives, friends, and financial matters. Each scale contains 10 items. Participants are required to evaluate each item on a 5-point scale. The scale yielded an overall Cronbach's alpha of .081, indicating acceptable range of reliability. Sample item of the test includes "My partner and I understand each other perfectly."

The World Health Organization Quality of Life Brief Version (WHOQOL-BREF)

The WHOQOL-BREF is a 26-item questionnaire developed by the World Health Organization as a shortened version of the WHOQOL-100. It measures quality of life across four domains: physical health (7 items), psychological health (6 items), social relationships (3 items), and environmental health (8 items), along with two general items on overall health and quality of life. The overall Cronbach's alpha was .91 (Almarabbeh et al., 2023), demonstrating acceptable reliability. Sample item of the test includes "How satisfied are you with your sex life?"

In phase two, the qualitative phase, data were collected through in-depth interviews using semi-structured and open-ended questions to gain deeper insights into the marital satisfaction and quality of life of the couples.

Data Collection

The researchers sought approval from the Institutional Ethics Review Board for the conduct of the study. Once ethical approval was granted, data collection began. The study targeted the Greater Manila Area, using a combination of house-to-house distribution of paper-and-pencil survey forms and online surveys via Google Forms.

The study's objectives, inclusion and exclusion criteria, and the rationale for the research hypothesis were explained to potential respondents, ensuring transparency in the research process. Debriefing was conducted as a structured or semi-structured verbal discussion between the researchers and participants, clarifying the true objectives of the study and the reasoning behind specific questions included in the questionnaire. Data collection took approximately one to two months to complete.

The married couples were informed that their participation would be anonymous and confidential, and they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time. The researchers met participants in person to explain the study and distribute printed questionnaires. Respondents had the option to complete the survey either through Google Forms or in person. All selected respondents were required to complete an informed consent form before proceeding with the survey, which consisted of five sections: (1) Informed Consent Form, (2) Demographic Questionnaire, (3) ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Inventory (EMI), (4) WHOQOL-BREF, and (5) a Semi-Structured Interview, which had been validated by a professional. Each respondent took between 30 minutes and two hours to complete the survey and interview.

Upon completing the questionnaires, the researchers conducted follow-up interviews with 10 randomly selected couples: 5 parenting couples and 5 child-free couples, to gather in-depth views on parenting and their experiences as couples. After the data collection, participants were debriefed, during which a comprehensive explanation of the study was provided.

Data Analysis

The researchers began by calculating descriptive statistics to summarize the demographic characteristics of the respondents. To explore how various demographic factors influence Quality of Life and Marital Satisfaction, multiple regression analysis was employed. This method is particularly suitable for examining complex relationships because it allows for the simultaneous analysis of multiple independent variables' effects on dependent variables. Multiple regression is especially useful when dealing with both continuous variables (e.g., income, years of marriage) and categorical variables (e.g., gender, religion). By examining the regression coefficients, the analysis quantified the strength and direction of each factor's impact on the dependent variables, enabling the identification of significant associations between demographic variables and Quality of Life and Marital Satisfaction.

In addition to quantitative analysis, thematic analysis was used to interpret the qualitative data gathered from the interviews. This approach was selected to better understand the experiences, thoughts, and behaviors of both parenting and child-free couples. Thematic analysis is a qualitative research method designed to identify, analyze, and report patterns or themes within data. The process followed a structured approach: (a) familiarization with the data, (b) generation of preliminary codes to categorize data, (c) organization of these codes into potential themes, (d) review of themes to ensure compatibility with both coded data and the overall data set, thereby creating a thematic "map," (e) defining and naming the themes, and finally, (f) producing a comprehensive report. This method allowed the researchers to

systematically explore the nuances of the participants' experiences and uncover key insights into the dynamics of marital satisfaction and quality of life.

Result and Discussion

Result

Phase 1: Quantitative findings

The results of the multiple regression analysis provide valuable insights into how various demographic factors influence marital satisfaction. First, having children demonstrates a strong positive relationship with marital satisfaction, as indicated by a coefficient of 0.839 ($p < 0.001$), suggesting that couples with children tend to report higher satisfaction compared to child-free couples. Age, however, shows a significant negative relationship with marital satisfaction ($\beta = -0.058$, $p = .036$), meaning that as individuals grow older, their marital satisfaction tends to decrease slightly. In contrast, both the length of marriage ($\beta = 0.061$, $p = .049$) and the number of children ($\beta = 0.329$, $p = .001$) are positively and significantly associated with marital satisfaction. This indicates that couples who have been married for a longer period and those with more children generally experience higher levels of satisfaction in their marriage. On the other hand, monthly income ($\beta = 0.085$, $p = .307$) does not have a statistically significant direct effect on marital satisfaction, meaning income alone is not a major determinant in this context. Similarly, quality of life (QOL) ($\beta = -0.447$, $p = .508$) shows a negative but non-significant relationship with marital satisfaction, suggesting that QOL on its own does not significantly impact marital satisfaction in this model.

Table 1. Multiple regression analysis of demographic factors and quality of life on marital satisfaction

Marital Satisfaction	β	SE	t	p	95% CI	
Quality of life (QOL)	-0.447	0.674	-0.66	.508	-1.773	0.879
Having children	0.839	0.237	3.54	< .001	0.374	1.304
Age	-0.058	0.028	-2.1	.036	-0.112	-0.004
Length of marriage	0.061	0.031	1.98	.049	0	0.121
Number of children	0.329	0.097	3.39	.001	0.138	0.52
Monthly income	0.085	0.083	1.02	.307	-0.078	0.248
Roman catholic	1.399	0.357	3.92	.001	0.697	2.101
QOL x Age	-0.011	0.021	-0.53	.595	-0.053	0.03
QOL x Length of marriage	0.019	0.022	0.85	.395	-0.025	0.063
QOL x No. of children	0.132	0.092	1.44	.151	-0.048	0.312
QOL x Monthly income	-0.155	0.066	-2.35	.019	-0.285	-0.025
QOL x Roman Catholic	0.49	0.25	1.96	.05	-0.001	0.981
Constant	-0.452	0.952	-0.53	.596	-2.126	1.223

$R^2 = .107$, AIC = 1842.313, BIC = 1890.536.

One of the most striking findings is the strong positive relationship between being Roman Catholic and marital satisfaction ($\beta = 1.399$, $p = .001$). Roman Catholic respondents report significantly higher marital satisfaction compared to non-Catholics, suggesting that religious

identity plays a significant role in shaping marital dynamics. The interaction effects provide further nuance to these relationships. Although age and length of marriage do not significantly moderate the relationship between QOL and marital satisfaction, the interaction between QOL and monthly income ($\beta = -0.155, p = 0.019$) reveals a significant negative effect. This suggests that as monthly income increases, the negative impact of QOL on marital satisfaction becomes more pronounced, possibly indicating that higher-income individuals derive less marital satisfaction from improvements in quality of life. Similarly, the interaction between QOL and being Roman Catholic ($\beta = 0.49, p = 0.05$) is borderline significant, indicating that the positive effects of quality of life on marital satisfaction may be slightly enhanced for Roman Catholic individuals.

Overall, the model explains 10.7% of the variance in marital satisfaction ($R^2 = .107$), with significant contributions from age, length of marriage, number of children, and religious identity. While monthly income and QOL do not directly impact marital satisfaction, their interaction terms with income and religious identity suggest that these factors play a more complex role in influencing marital dynamics. The findings emphasize the importance of family structure and religious identity in marital satisfaction, while also highlighting the need for further exploration of income-related dynamics.

Phase 2: Qualitative findings

In the qualitative part of the study, an inductive thematic analysis was utilized to analyze the collected data from the semi-structured interview. With the grand question “What is your experiences and how would you describe your life as either parenting couple or being child-free?,” answers were categorized into six domains— physical, social, emotional, spiritual, financial, and moral.

Table 2. Domains and themes gathered from parenting couples and child-free couples.

Parenting Couples		Child-free couples	
Domains	Themes	Domain	Themes
Physical	Health and wellness	Physical	Health and wellness
	Connection and intimacy		Connection and intimacy
	Quality time and presence		Balancing individual and shared needs
Social	Social circles and networks	Social	Social circles and networks
	Communication and interaction styles		Communication and interaction styles
	Diversity		Active engagement in social events
Emotional	Conflict resolution	Emotional	Conflict resolution
	Coping strategies		Use of love language
	Empathy and understanding		Growth and development
Financial	Financial planning	Financial	Financial planning
	Financial communication		Financial communication
	Shared financial goals		Shared financial goals
Spiritual	Shared beliefs and values	Spiritual	Shared beliefs and values
	Integration into daily life		
Moral	Shared principles	Moral	Shared principles
	Cultural influences		

As shown in Table 2, the experiences of parenting and child-free couples are largely similar, with both groups providing comparable responses and sharing common themes. The

first domain highlights diverse perspectives on prioritizing physical needs, emphasizing health and wellness. Participants from both groups identified the importance of routines, health supplements, mindful eating, and proper hygiene and grooming. Positive connections and intimacy were linked to habits such as self-care and making healthy food choices. Regarding quality time and household responsibilities, both groups emphasized cooperation, turn-taking, and task-sharing. Child-free couples expressed this concept as balancing individual and shared needs, reflecting the same focus on harmony and collaboration within relationships. Overall, both parenting and child-free couples shared similar life experiences in the physical domain.

Similarities were also observed in the social, spiritual, and moral domains. In the social domain, both groups prioritized the quality of relationships over quantity, allowing time with friends and family and engaging in diverse social activities. For the spiritual domain, both groups underscored the importance of shared values and beliefs. Parenting couples additionally noted the integration of spiritual values into daily life as a means of teaching spirituality to their children. In the moral domain, both groups highlighted the importance of addressing issues independently through internal problem-solving. Cultural values, such as mutual respect, were foundational to maintaining healthy relationships.

Differences emerged in two areas: the emotional and financial domains. In the emotional domain, parenting couples preferred staying quiet and avoiding conflict, whereas child-free couples leaned toward open and verbal communication with their partners. In the financial domain, parenting couples focused on saving for their children's future, while child-free couples prioritized financial security for retirement and often maintained separate bank accounts to support travel and other personal goals. Despite these differences, the experiences of parenting and child-free couples were largely similar across domains.

Discussion

The findings from both the quantitative and qualitative phases of this study provide meaningful insights into the marital satisfaction and quality of life of parenting and child-free couples. Several key factors emerge as significant predictors of marital satisfaction, with some differences in how these factors play out in the context of parenting versus child-free marriages.

Phase 1: Quantitative findings

The quantitative analysis reveals that the presence of children, marriage duration, and the number of children contribute positively to marital satisfaction, while age has a very slight negative contribution. These results are both supported and contradicted by findings from some studies and further place this relationship in more complex light when placed in the context of general literature.

This study also identified that the presence of children benefits marital satisfaction, which varies from some studies suggesting that childless couples are more satisfied due to a life of freedom and less conflict (Bernardi et al., 2020; Roesad & Rumondor, 2021). Couples with children would normally go through more stress in child-rearing, but in this study, they were the ones who were more satisfied with their marriage. This could be a function of cultural factors peculiar to the Philippines, for example, where children are generally understood as central to family and marital success. It may be that the sense of fulfillment and purpose for parenting couples is deeply implicated in their role as parents. Which would explain why children correlate positively with marital satisfaction. On the other hand, child-free couples lack parenting stress and may derive marital satisfaction from other relational factors such as emotional closeness, lifestyle flexibility, and financial independence, in tune with research findings of higher satisfaction in marriages without children Lioe (2023).

Longitudinal studies also show that marital satisfaction may decline immediately following childbirth because of the pressures of child-rearing but increase over time as the

couples adapt to their roles and build family cohesion (Seo, 2020). This may be the reason why longer marriages in our study are more satisfying; perhaps the couples have passed the initial challenges of parenting and have reached a more stable and satisfying phase of their relationship.

However, family size is another factor, and several studies indicate that larger families are at an additional disadvantage due to other stressors that may reduce marital satisfaction in the end time (Kowal et al., 2021). Our findings agree with the idea that a moderate number of children might increase satisfaction by providing a sense of fulfillment without overwhelming the couple's resources. Kindness, humor, and dependability moderate the influence of parenting stress; the more relational a couple are, the more they will buffer parenting's stresses (Weisfeld et al., 2024).

Income and marital satisfaction

While one's income level alone does not explain marital satisfaction in this study, the relationship between QOL and marital satisfaction weakens as income increases. This is congruent with previous research where couples with higher incomes may have more resources to buffer relationship stressors, thereby relying less on marital satisfaction to obtain overall life satisfaction (Johnson et al., 2022; Ratnasari & Fatheya, 2022). Among couples with higher incomes, perhaps individual pursuits-such as seeking career advancement or personal fulfillment-might be emphasized more, and therefore might decrease the centrality of marital satisfaction in one's life (Lee et al., 2020).

In contrast, low-income couples face greater economic pressure, which often contributes to the worsening of relationship problems more frequently (Williamson et al., 2019). In these marriages, marital happiness is a significant part of maintaining one's overall well-being because the couple could not rely on the exogenous resources of higher-income couples to alleviate their stress. This suggests that targeted interventions-for example, financial counseling or stress management programs-can indeed ease some of the pressure on lower-income couples and improve their quality of life, as well as their marital satisfaction.

Religion and marital satisfaction

This study also underlines the fact that being Roman Catholic strengthens the relationship between quality of life and marital satisfaction. More often, religious convictions bring about emotional resilience and a sense of purpose, further influencing the dimensions of life satisfaction and relational harmony (Szcześniak et al., 2019).. Shared religious practices, such as community involvement, prayer, and spiritual guidance for Roman Catholic couples, may have helped them establish deeper connections and get through most of the problems in their marriage (Kasapoğlu & Yabanigül, 2018).

Religious comfort and belief in God provide couples with a framework to cope effectively with conflict, adversity, and uncertainty (Wnuk, 2021). This leads to the assumption that for Roman Catholic couples, faith serves as the relationship moderator by facilitating forgiveness, patience, and commitment over a long period of time. These common beliefs may underlie why religious couples in our sample reported higher marital satisfaction. Since their faith enables them to stand against any challenge, their perspective and unity in the marriage are maintained accordingly (Ślusarczyk et al., 2024).

The role of children in marital satisfaction

The study also reveals that the presence of children is positively associated with higher marital satisfaction. This finding is in agreement with studies showing that children provide the couples with a shared sense of purpose and cohesion that shores up their commitment to each other (Tavakol et al., 2019). However, the literature shows conflicting views on this, as other studies indicate that the more children a family has, the more stressful the life is, with lower marital satisfaction of its parents (Kowal et al., 2021; Ghahremani et al., 2019). This contrast

may illustrate the differences in family dynamics, parental support systems, and the age of the children studied.

Qualitative Findings

The qualitative phase supported these findings by highlighting that, though both parenting and child-free couples report different levels of marital satisfaction, these differences arise from diverging priorities. Parenting couples give priority to the future of their children and therefore suppress conflict to ensure family harmony is maintained. This also aligns with research suggesting parenting stress leads to conflict suppression as a strategy to protect the family dynamic (Meyer & Sledge, 2021). The downside is that this avoidance of conflict may be nutritiously expensive emotionally, and unresolved issues can serve as a source of long-term dissatisfaction.

Oppositely, child-free couples gave great importance to financial independence, travel, and open communication since they emphasized mutual autonomy in their relationship. This verifies the literature that child-free couples have more equal relationships, focusing on communication and personal fulfillment rather than child-rearing responsibilities (Erkaya & Ustunel, 2023; Günther-Bel et al., 2020). Because they are open in communication, they can keep the relational balance going and make it possible to speak directly about conflicts, which might be another reason for their general satisfaction.

Financial priorities

However, a leading difference concerns the level of financial planning. The parenting couples mostly focus on saving for the children's future, while child-free couples plan majorly for financial independence and attainment of lifestyle goals such as early retirement and travels. This is supported by Biggs (2022), who stated that many parents consume more and save less during the child-rearing years, although their savings increase afterwards when the children become independent. On the other hand, childless couples have more resources at their disposal to invest in self-realization and therefore plan finances in quite a different way (Biggs, 2019).

Limitations and future research

One limitation of this study is its focus on couples within a specific geographic area, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Future research could explore how these dynamics differ across cultural contexts or at different stages of the life course, particularly among couples with older or adult children. Additionally, longitudinal studies could examine how the presence or absence of children impacts marital satisfaction over time, considering factors such as career development, retirement, and health.

Conclusion and practical implications

In conclusion, this study underscores the diverse factors that influence marital satisfaction among parenting and child-free couples. While having children, religious identity, and length of marriage are positively associated with higher marital satisfaction, age has a slight negative impact. Child-free couples, though reporting lower satisfaction in this study, emphasize different values, such as autonomy and lifestyle flexibility.

These findings have practical implications for counselors, financial advisors, and relationship experts. For parenting couples, interventions that focus on improving conflict resolution and financial planning for both their children's future and their own security could enhance marital satisfaction. For child-free couples, strategies that encourage open communication and financial planning for long-term goals may help sustain their satisfaction.

Finally, this study contributes to the growing body of research that challenges traditional assumptions about parenting as a primary source of marital fulfillment, suggesting that both parenting and child-free couples can enjoy satisfying marriages, albeit through different paths and priorities.

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