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The Investigation of Voluntarily Childless Married Couples and Marital Satisfaction

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Abstract

This exploratory study was designed to investigate the impact on marital satisfaction as a result of being voluntarily childless. An open-ended questionnaire was the instrument used in this cross sectional, convenience population. A total of nine respondents mailed back the instrument for analyses. All nine respondents were married females except for one male respondent that decided to remain childless. The findings of the study were that all nine married voluntary childless individuals reported high levels of marital satisfaction. The reasoning for marital satisfaction was primarily the result of increased freedom, money, time together with spouse, and fewer responsibilities within the marriage as a result of being childless. The eight elements that were analyzed to derive levels of marital satisfaction were love, fidelity, companionship, flexibility, affection, intimacy, compatibility, and marital financial status. The information received from the open-ended questionnaires was then analyzed through content analyses by employing the themes as the framework for the study yet allowing for other peripheral and relevant patterns.

Advisor's Approval: _____

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

In America, as well as most other countries, it is the norm to marry and have children. In fact, the prevailing thought historically was the more children the better. In the past few decades the number of children per family unit has decreased and recently the number of married couples not wanting children is rapidly increasing in American society (Edmondson & Waldrop, 1993). This research seeks information pertaining to marital satisfaction of married couples that are childless by choice and to investigate the reasons for the change in our society. Furthermore, since many married couples are voluntarily electing to remain childless, the aim of this research is to discover if being childless impacts marital satisfaction among the married couples. Childless couples are a relatively new phenomenon, and there are limited studies on this discussion. Childless couples are becoming more commonplace in society and are achieving this without the extent of stigma and labeling that was the norm in the recent past.

Marital satisfaction is vital to a successful and happy marriage. The traditional responsibility of a satisfactory marriage was to have and rear children. However, some of the modern married couples today prefer to be married without having any children. Marital satisfaction has many different interpretations and definitions as well as an array of variables that conceptualize a happy and sufficient marriage. This study aims to verify and affirm that childless married couples by choice can achieve marital satisfaction despite being childless.

Statement of Problem

There is inadequate data on childless married couples and its effect on one's marriage satisfaction or quality of marriage. This research is being proposed to gather additional information as to ascertain in my respondent population, if childless married couples are happily

married despite not having children. Furthermore, there is interest as to why many married couples want to remain childless, since the traditional duty is to be fruitful and bear children. “Childless couples will increase from 22 million to nearly 31 million households. This will be a gain of 44 percent...” (Edmondson & Waldrop, 1993, p.1).

It is imperative to research why more married couples than ever before are opting to remain childless, when only a generation before it was more uncommon than today and prior generations were scorned or assumed to be childless involuntarily. It is also important to recognize what constitutes a happy marriage.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this research is to seek information pertaining to marital satisfaction of married couples that are voluntarily childless. Many people are married without children, this research intends to gather in-depth information that shall allow the respondent population a chance to acknowledge their own perspectives but also acknowledge that they serve as an influence to people interested in marital satisfaction among voluntary childless couples. Moreover, this research intends to discover themes and commonalities and differences among the married couples questioned.

Research Questions

This research hopefully will yield results as to answering questions that pertain to being childless and its impact on marital satisfaction across many aspects, identified as having significant input into marital satisfaction. It is hoped that these answers may lead to more in-depth quantitative research on specific variables pertaining to childlessness and marital satisfaction. The questionnaire sought to identify how the following factors were impacted by the choice to remain childless in the respondent’s eyes: love, fidelity, companionship, flexibility,

intimacy, affection, compatibility, and financial status. These themes were addressed by the following questions:

1. Do you believe that love to your partner or from your partner is impacted by being childless?
2. Do you believe that fidelity in your marriage by either partner is impacted by being childless?
3. Do you believe that companionship in your marriage is impacted by being childless?
4. Do you believe that flexibility in your marriage is impacted by being childless?
5. Do you believe that affection in your marriage is impacted by being childless?
6. Do you believe that intimacy in your marriage is impacted by being childless?
7. Do you believe that compatibility in your marriage is impacted by being childless?
8. Do you believe that marital financial status in your marriage is impacted by being childless?

Definitions Used in This Study:

Childless – Being without children

Childlessness by choice – Married couples who based on their own will, voluntarily desire to remain married without children

Marital satisfaction – Shall encompass the following components: love, compatibility, fidelity, companionship, flexibility, affection, intimacy. These components are the characteristics that will be noted and accounted for in this particular research.

Love – Strong affection for another arising out of kinship.

Fidelity – The quality or state of being faithful.

Companionship – Fellowship that exist among another person, comrade.

Flexibility – Characterized by a ready capability to adapt to new, different or changing requirements.

Affection – A moderate feeling or emotion.

Intimacy – The state of being personal or of a private nature including sexual relations.

Compatibility – Capable of existing together in harmony.

Financial freedom – The ability to live without monetary concerns.

Communication – A process in which individuals exchange information via signs, symbols, or behaviors. (Neufeldt, 1997)

Assumptions

The assumptions in this research study are that the respondents will confirm that being childlessness by choice allows for more freedom, autonomy, and money to do as each couple desires. It is assumed that the questionnaire will reveal that as a result of being childless, their level of marital satisfaction is high and therefore satisfactory at least. It is assumed that the questionnaire will be answered by all participants with the same or similar responses to the themes of love, flexibility, companionship, intimacy, compatibility, fidelity, affection, marital financial status. It is further assumed that these themes relating to marital satisfaction will be individually enhanced or positively stated to reflect high levels of marital satisfaction as a result of these individual themes. Also as a result of the cumulative effect of the themes on marriage as a whole, high levels of marital satisfaction will be reported by the respondents.

This research is believed to concur with existing data and findings of relevant research on the topic of voluntary childlessness and marital satisfaction. For example, Twenge, Campbell, and Foster (2003) report “Children greatly diminish the freedom of individuals in a marriage. Children demand a great deal of time and attention. These demands directly interfere with the

pursuit of the parents own pleasure” (p. 576). The themes and emerging patterns and sub-themes will be similar to what other researchers are reporting in their research. The characteristics of a happy marriage as reported by the nine respondents should be similar to prior research data on characteristics of a happy marriage. Consider these findings by Callan (2001): “Voluntarily childless wives were as happy and satisfied with life as other women. The voluntarily childless reported levels of fun, enjoyment, variety, and diversity in their lives that was as high as those of mothers and the infertile” (p. 854).

The demographics in this study should mirror the demographics in other studies as related to the married couple in regard to age, religious preference, family income, educational levels and ethnicity. It is further noted that as a result of this study being qualitative in nature, only inferences and assumptions based on the written responses of the married couples can be drawn. Therefore, no associations, links, cause and effect or correlational data can be construed as a result of this research study.

Limitations

It can be expected that this research will have several limitations, such as small participant size, no quantifiable data, improbability to examine all key themes, elements and intangibles that reflect marital satisfaction among the voluntary childless. The participant size for this study was only nine respondents. In addition, all but one respondent was female. The questionnaire used was experimental and not field-tested or standardized and the population was not randomly selected.

Significance of Study

There is limited research on childless couples by choice. Most research in the past and much of the research at present focuses on childless couples, but makes no distinction if the

childless couples lost their children as a result of death or custody problems. In addition, these studies fail to distinguish whether one or both partners have medical or biological difficulties producing children or if these couples once had children but are now undergoing the empty nest syndrome. Furthermore, there are few studies that give insight to thematic analyses in regard to marital satisfaction among childless couples. Therefore, this study intends to discover important and pertinent findings that are recent and to focus on the couple that is childless by choice. It will also hope to begin to address whether a voluntary childless marriage can achieve marital satisfaction.

CHAPTER II

Review of Literature

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the discussion of themes and other phenomena that occur in married couples that have chosen to remain childless. This chapter shall focus on the review of literature that serves to define, explain and discuss the unconventional childless married couple and their corresponding level of marital satisfaction.

Marital satisfaction has been studied by ways of cross-sectional analysis and longitudinal studies, but despite all the research, marital satisfaction is subject to interpretation and means something different among married couples. “Marital satisfaction is an evaluative, subjective judgment that individual partners make about their relationship” (Tallman, & Cooney, 2005, p.109).

A Comparison of Marital Satisfaction

In a study that compared 42 couples that were randomly chosen to determine if marital satisfaction was higher for parents or the childless couples. Data was analyzed following a questionnaire that was completed by 37 of the 42 couples. The reports found very similar levels of marital satisfaction among both groups. No group differences were noted between the husbands’ and wives’ score. “There were no differences between the two groups on their level of marital satisfaction. The couples differed however, on the extent of positive marital interactions, with the childless having significantly more of these interactions than did the parents” (Feldman, 1981, p. 597).

Callan (1983) notates these findings in his study: The voluntarily childless reported levels of fun, enjoyment, variety, and diversity in their lives that was as high as those of mothers and

the infertile. However, the voluntarily and the involuntarily childless were much more pleased than mothers about how they could spend their spare time, their level of personal privacy, opportunities for relaxation, and generally their greater independence. In addition, possibly in defense of their nonconformity, voluntarily childless wives were more pleased than other women about the amount of admiration they received from others. Voluntarily childless wives reported higher levels of discussion, involvement, agreement about life goals, and time together with their husband than did mothers. Without interruptions of children, voluntarily childless couples have more time together to be involved in each other's activities.

In a study comparing marital satisfaction of first-time parents to childless couples, it was discovered that first-time parents have noted they are more satisfied with their marriage than childless couples by interpretation of data which used three marital scales: The Marital Satisfaction Questionnaire, The Marital Satisfaction Scale, and the Marital Satisfaction Importance Scale (Guttman & Lazar, 2004). In a study done by Callan (1987), the voluntary, involuntarily childless and married wives were compared against one another to determine who of the three were the most happy and adjusted. It was found that involuntary childless were more frustrated and angry than their counterparts for not being able to have children. "The voluntary childless wives reported to be just as satisfied with their lives as other women and reported higher levels of discussion, involvement and agreement about life goals, and time together than did mothers. Without the interruptions of children, voluntary childless couples have more time to be involved in each other's activities" (Callan, 1987, p.853).

Research has shown that those couples who are currently childless may remain childless throughout their marriage or may be couples who later in their marriage decide to have children

and become parents. There are many issues and decisions that are the basis for couples deciding to remain childless.

None of the childless couples have children, nor were any of the wives' pregnant. Also, all of the childless couples were members of the National Alliance of Optional Parenthood (NACP), which is dedicated to eliminating the pressures on couples to become parents and to support those couples who select a child-free life-style. Those who are able to have children, but who have decided against doing so, perhaps have stronger commitment to a childless life-style than do those who lack ability or opportunity for parenthood and are resigned to the situation. Although they have been married on the average for sixty-two months, it is still possible that some of the childless couples of the current study could become parents at some future time (Feldman, 1981 p.593).

Marriage can be a difficult proposition without the addition of extraneous variables to the relationship. Marriage takes a lot of work by both partners and marital happiness is dependent on both partners being able to care for self as well as each other. It is common for married couples to want and have children sometime in their marriage. Some couples choose to have children early on in the marriage while others decide to wait a good deal of time before having children. Most research, including this article, state that marital satisfaction wanes or declines following the birth of the first child. "Wives who had children became significantly more likely than those in childless couples to report that their husbands were not paying enough attention to them" (Waldron & Routh, 1981, p.785).

Additional research supports the notion that married couples, especially the women have a significant decline in marital satisfaction following the birth of their first child, yet it is unknown to what effect subsequent children have on marital satisfaction (Twenge, Campbell, & Foster, 2003). The reorganization of the family system and family dynamics are thought to be responsible for such marital dissatisfaction.

The Effectiveness of Premarital Communication Training on Marital Satisfaction

Research involving 191 newly married couples attempted to determine if skill based programs such as PREP (Premarital Relationship Enhancement Program) enhanced communication among the couple and in turn increased their relationship satisfaction. The findings were mixed with increases and decreases in both genders in relationship to their involvement with self-regulation. Overall, the findings were that “there is no evidence that universal communicating-skills training to reduce negative communication enhance relationship satisfaction” (Halford, Lizzio, Wilson, & Occhipinti, 2007, p.186).

Psychopathology

“There is a growing body of research findings that psychopathology is intricately linked with marital functioning” (Whisman, Weinstock, & Uebelacher, 2004, p. 835). The goal of this research was to discover associations between one partner’s level of pathology and their self-reported marital satisfaction. The researchers used the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory on over 841 couples randomly solicited whom resided in seven states. The study looked to see if anxiety and depression affected marital satisfaction as well as what gender was mostly affected. The findings suggested that when a partner experienced depression or anxiety, they had lower levels of marital satisfaction. There were no gender differences noted between psychopathology and marital satisfaction levels. Furthermore, the study indicated that depression

was much more dramatic than anxiety in decreasing self-reported levels of marital satisfaction. It is still unknown according to this study if the depression in a partner directly affects marital satisfaction of the partner and consequently the partnership or if the depression results in negative or passive communication among the partners that marital satisfaction impacts are affected indirectly (Whisman et al.).

Historical Perspective on Childlessness in America

Childlessness may seem like a new movement or trend but voluntary childlessness has occurred since the beginning of our nation and the beginning of other nations globally since recorded time. For example, “The number of women who will remain childless throughout their lives has increased since the 1950’s. Seventeen percent of women born between 1946 and 1955 are expected to remain childless. Additionally, 22 percent of women between 1956 and 1972 will remain childless throughout their lives. In 1998, 19 percent of women 40 to 44 years reported being childless” (DeOllos & Kapinus, 2002).

In terms of a historical perspective or trend on childlessness in American, our recorded data relevant to childlessness begins in the Great Depression era and concludes with present day America. The reasons for childlessness vary but some common reasons for childlessness in the past were due to widowed women who lost their husbands to war and never remarried. Other noted causes for childlessness were a result of war and the economic hardships that go hand in hand with the cost of war. Many married couples opted to defer reproduction of children until times got better, which for some never came to fruition due to the loss of marriage. Also, wartime casualties upon civilians may have become a determinant for being childless during that time in American history (Konefall, 2006).

Birth control measures during the Great Depression were assumedly limited or non-existent and research is scarce on the correlation between the advent of sterilization or birth control measures and childlessness. Current research notes that sterilization is very common in present day America for those with children already as well as those not wanting children. The literature reviewed explains that sterilization is the new birth control as it is cheaper in the long run, permanent and has low-risks associated with the procedure. Many individuals before marriage are electing to have tubal ligations to remain childless and this number is increasing as noted by the obstetrician in the literature (Konefall, 2006).

Primary Reasons for Remaining Childless

Van Heerden (2005) states that many married couples elect not to have children for many and various reasons. Some of these reasons may be as a result of wanting their freedom, career minded or desiring not to undertake extra responsibilities as a result of having children. He also stated that children are expensive and many married couples either feel they cannot afford children or choose not to fund children. Also children need to be cared for in all aspects until they are of age legally speaking and longer; emotionally speaking. Furthermore, children for some married couples would be considered a duty opposed to a pleasure as many married couples may not have the time to be a dutiful parent. "The childless married couple exists in a society where certain views and beliefs prevail on what is expected of people and what a family should entail" (Van Heerden, 2005, p. 93).

Upon review of literature, as reported by surveys, in one study it was shown that there are numerous reasons and explanations for couples wanting to remain childless. Qu and Weston (2002), state there have been various reasons and explanations, yet the most common reasons are noted as follows: "1.) dislike of children, 2.) lifestyle choices, 3.) belief that the world is not

good for children, 4.) too old for children, 5.) have not found the right person, 6.) career-oriented, 7.) lack of interest 8.) and financial reasons.” (p.3) The findings are interesting and it may be that any single reason above was the reason for not having children however; it may also be a result of a combination of factors as noted above. The general findings of this study were that work issues, concerns about inability to parent or deal with responsibilities of parenting were genuine. Furthermore, concerns about financial risk and maintaining their freedoms were expressed by people partaking in this survey. Lack of a suitable partner was paramount, according to this study. A good many respondents noted that they enjoyed their lifestyle, freedom and autonomy and did not want to lose that on account of having a child. Lastly, the study found that these people who did not want children for various reasons were oblivious to societal demands and expectations of them to bear children. Therefore the micro-level aspects of life play a bigger factor in their decision making to remain childless than macro-level factors.

DeOllos & Kapinus (2002) report:

There are many reasons for women and men to decide to remain childless throughout their lives. The first of these is what they term “self-centered.” By this term, they mean the couple decides that children will interfere with their way of living. Individuals who remain childless for this reason express concern that children might prevent them from doing things they enjoy or interfere with their relationship with their spouse. Second, couples may decide to not have children because the wives feel child bearing will restrict or jeopardize their careers. Third, individuals may also choose to not have children because they are currently unable to afford children and wish to wait until their financial situation is better. Fourth, women who have health problems may choose to forgo having children rather than taking the risk associated with child bearing. Fifth, one of the

partners (or both) may dislike children. This dislike may result from a dislike of children, a dislike or fear of pregnancy, a dislike or fear of child bearing, or a fear of passing inherited illnesses to their offspring. Sixth, sexual activity may decline due to marital discord and/or lack of a socially acceptable sexual partner in the event of divorce, may result in childlessness. Finally, some couples, because of concern over their marital stability, may delay child bearing until they are certain they will remain married (p. 73).

Stigma and Social Perceptions Associated with Childlessness

Chancey (2006) states that many voluntary childless couples would prefer to use the terminology of being childfree as compared to that of being childless. The reasoning for this word change is that childless employs some form of negativity associated with the individual or couples whereas childfree notates a pleasurable, preferential choice made by the couple.

“Voluntary childlessness is becoming an increasingly prevalent alternative lifestyle in contemporary American Society. Childlessness rates declined from World War II until the mid 1960’s, but since then have increased dramatically” (Hoffman & Levant, 1985, p.197). The childfree lifestyle is a new type of family on the rise in American. “Census data indicates that the percentage of childless couples has more than doubled since 1960” (Somers, 1993, p. 645).

Many childless couples who have chosen to be childfree feel stigmatized, judged, or alienated from other members of their society. Many women during the colonial periods were accused of witchcraft for not contributing to society by giving birth (Griffin, 1996). President Theodore Roosevelt made this quote in 1906 to the citizens of America “Willful sterility is, from the standpoint of the nation...a sin for which there is no atonement. No man, no woman can skirt the primary duties of life...and retain his or self respect” (Roosevelt, 1906, p. 5). It is still common for childless couples to be blamed or treated insensitively for not having children.

Many women and couples are cut off from others with children as they are seen as weird, different or selfish. Therefore a Child Free Network comprised of 2500 members (since 1996) was formed in 1993 to give a sense of belonging to those married without children (Griffin, 1996).

Social perceptions of the voluntary childless in the past have been considerably negative and labeling of the voluntary childless couple has been commonplace among the traditionally married couples. Negative assumptions and perceptions still occur at present but not to the same extent as in the past. There have been very few studies aimed at research on societal perceptions or the values and views of the childless couple. “Although the negative view of the childless couple has been challenged in recent years by laypersons, professionals, and psychological research, the childless couple may still confront social disapproval. Couples encounter pressure toward parenthood from a variety of sources, and the attributes ascribed to voluntarily childless couples have included a variety of negative characteristics such as selfishness and poor psychological adjustment”(Calhoun & Selby,1980, p.181).

Lampman and Dowling-Guyer (1990) report “Research indicates that voluntarily childless couples are seen as unhappily married, psychologically maladjusted, emotionally immature, materialistic, career driven, selfish, lonely, unhappy, and misguided in their choice to remain childless” (p.2). Society expects married couples to have children and many people in society believe that the basis of marriage is to procreate. Many people that are religious or have religious affiliations believe that married couples should have children according to God’s will. Therefore, it is not unusual for the voluntary couples to be seen as different, dysfunctional or atypical of normal couples in society.

The voluntarily childless therefore constitute a deviant category: statistically, socially, ethically, and perhaps even psychologically. It is therefore not surprising that those few couples who deliberately choose not to become parents are viewed unfavorably and are subjected to a variety of pronatalist pressures. All of the wives interviewed reported that virtually everyone disagreed of their rejection of motherhood. Moreover, such disapproval was perceived as the basis for a number of implicit and explicit social sanctions, some of which were intended as expressive behaviors on the part of others, and some of which were designed to make them change their minds about the desirability of motherhood. The women reported social pressure from their parents, in-laws, siblings, work associates, friends and doctors-from almost everywhere except their husbands (Veevers, 1975, p. 473).

Further research on the perceptions of society on the childlessness appears to share similar views. There is a cultural expectation in America to have and rear children and those that refuse to oblige to their parental duties are seen as unfit, selfish or ascribed other negative attributes. Ritchey and Stokes (1974) note “The proposition that strong mores in our society prescribe that couples have children and proscribe childlessness, is widely held of the family and of population” (p. 349).

Limited Research on Voluntary Childless Couples

Research is limited on voluntary childless couples, until recently all research done on childless couples made no distinction on couples without children; voluntary or involuntary. These couples were just as happy as parents with children involved in a good relationship and happier than couples with children that were not close to their parents (Griffin, 1996). The researchers found that women who became mothers were initially satisfied with their marriages;

after having babies, 33 percent reported stable or improved marital satisfaction while 67 percent reported decline. Among childless couple, 51 percent of the wives reported stable or increased marital satisfaction and 49 percent reported a decline (O'Connor, 2001).

Childlessness Rates in the United States and Other Countries

In a study on childlessness among women in the Netherlands “A comparison of data from the 1982 Netherlands Fertility Survey and the 1988 National Fertility Survey shows that the proportion of women aged 35-37 who were childless rose from 14 percent to 17 percent in the period between the surveys” (Althaus, 1991, p.3). Ambry (1992) notes “The fastest growing household type in the 1990s will be married couples with no children at home. The rate of childlessness is higher among women who complete college, marry later, and take jobs outside the home. The result will be a stable but relatively high level of childlessness in the 1990’s” (p.55). Although, longitudinal studies are rare, other research seems to mirror the statistics pertinent to childlessness.

Rates of childlessness in the United States have varied substantially over the past several decades. Census data show slightly over 15% of white women born in the mid-1880’s remained childless. This childless rate increased to over 25% of women born in 1910 who reached normal childbearing age during the Depression. The percentage then dropped dramatically to about 10% of white women born in 1935 who reached childbearing age during the baby boom. Since then, the rate has increased again, with a projected childless rate 22% for women born in 1962. Non-white women experienced a similar increase in childlessness during the Depression and a similar decline during the baby boom, but they have not participated in the post-baby boom rise in childlessness due to the extent that white women have. These fluctuations indicate that potential parents do

respond to economic and social conditions, even when modern and efficient contraception is not available (Heaton, Jacobson, & Holland, 1999, p. 531).

Increasing Prevalence of Childlessness

Hoffman and Levant (1985) report “Voluntary childlessness is becoming an increasingly prevalent alternative lifestyle in contemporary American society. Childlessness rates declined from World War II until the mid 1960’s but since then have increased dramatically” (p. 197). Hoffman and Levant also estimate that the current levels of voluntary childlessness rate will likely rise in the near future.

Consider these statistics and findings “Although the projected prevalence of permanent childlessness in Australia varies, it seems likely that at least 20 percent of women currently in their reproductive years will not have children. The increasing prevalence of childlessness is also apparent in other advanced countries” (Qu, Weston, & Kilmartin, 2000, p.15).

Childless couples have always been a part of American society, yet they have remained in the minority and still remain in the minority, although there has been dramatic increase in childless couples over the past twenty years. It is commonly understood that childless couples are a modern movement yet history shows that childless couples have always been in our history as well as other countries. Qu and Weston (2002) state “One in five women who are currently in their early childbearing years will not have children. Although the modern rate of childless women seems high, it is not unique in our history” (p. 1). During the early 1900’s, approximately one-third of all women born remained childless up to the age of 45 years (Qu & Weston, 2000).

Subjectivity of Marital Satisfaction

Marital happiness is subjective and hard to measure, quantify or determine on a universal platform. Happiness means different things to different people. Most studies aim to discovering the characteristics, patterns or elements involved by couples that allege they are happily married. “Reports of studies dealing with one or more correlates of marital happiness or satisfaction in the United States are legion- a summary of the findings of even the more important studies would take more space than can be devoted to this article”(Glenn & Weaver, 1978, p.269).

There are numerous studies and research journals outlining the elements, variables and characteristics of a happy marriage. Marital satisfaction has been measured in many ways and many identified and unidentified components have been sought to understand marital satisfaction. Most research looks into the same aspects or characteristics of what is construed to be the most pressing or important features of marital satisfaction. These include aspects such as finances; time spent together; shared goals; and physical/emotional closeness of the couple.

This particular article which purports itself as a study of marital happiness notates that there is not enough understanding or knowledge of the variables and intrinsic and extrinsic factors involved in happiness. Furthermore, that marital happiness in essence is not able to be measured or scientifically studied. There have been many reports and studies on the matter but there has yet to be a cumulative body of knowledge. Some of the major problems with studies in this field have been that participant size is small or only a few independent variables have been accounted for, which is insufficient in determining all variables or influences on marital happiness (Glenn & Weaver, 1978).

Marital satisfaction is dependent upon several subjective indicators that encompass the emotional, physical, social, financial, spiritual realms of marriage. Is it understood that marriage

is dependent on these as well as numerous intangibles and immeasurable dynamics. Therefore, even accounting for the above-mentioned aspects, it is still improbable to define or measure marital satisfaction on an absolute basis. Research only tries to account for marital satisfaction on that which can be measured, observed or quantified. Furthermore, happiness is a self-reported feeling that is considered to be positive to the individual. Social selection and social causation are two explanations that deal with marriage and happiness.

Social Causation Theory/Social Selection Theory

“Social causation theory contends that marriage itself increases happiness by providing emotional and financial support. These, in turn buffer against the travails of life and preserve or increase happiness. In contrast, social selection theory contends that persons who are already relatively high in qualities like the psychological health and financial status are the ones to marry in the first place” (Stack & Eshleman, 1998, p.528).

Factors Associated with Marital Satisfaction

Financial

Financial support is thought to be a major factor in marital happiness. Those couples who have more money and can afford better housing, food, cars, clothes, medical insurance and the like report higher levels of marital satisfaction. Financial support is a very important element of a happy marriage in that it affects emotional and physical well being as well. In other words, money can lessen the burden of stress as well as provide for necessities and luxuries that make one happy- be it a spa treatment, vacation, or new car.

In one study, Dew (2008) reports that “High debt levels may relate to recently married couples’ marital quality. Indeed, debt predicts increases in marital conflict, and newlyweds rated debt as their second highest marital concern in a recent survey”(p.60). Some findings in this

particular study were that couples whom reduced their mortgage obligations or pay off their debts, reported higher increases in marital satisfaction whereas those with the personal consumer debt, including student loans reported less marital satisfaction on the account that some couples have to work extra which allows for less time to spend with one another. This study explains that one of the reasons people marry are to spend more time together, thus when spouses have to work long hours or more days, this places conflict and stress on the marriage. This is especially hard on newlyweds whom are trying to develop and establish maintenance in regard to their couple identity. Furthermore, debt that is not equitable also plays a significant role in marital happiness. It is expected for each partner to have an equitable share of debt. For those that have more debt than the other spouse, may lead to hard feelings and marital stress. This also holds true on the condition that a couple assumes debt during a financial crisis associated with a medical problem or as a result of unemployment. Couples experiencing either situation generally report more stress and subsequently more marital conflict than those couples whom are financially secure or maintained.

Physical Health and Emotional Support

Physical health is another aspect of health reported to be enhanced when one marries. Upon marriage, medical treatment is more likely to be sought and proper diet is encouraged. Healthy habits become more likely while risky behaviors diminish. Increased physical health leads to happier marriages and by way of the domino effect, leads to healthier emotional health as well. Emotional support is another aspect of a happy marriage. Married couples have reported higher emotional support as interpreted to mean that they are valued, respected, cared for by their spouse but yet this cannot be measured directly (Stack & Eshleman, 1998).

Sexual Satisfaction

Young, Denny, Luquis, and Young (1998) report “a person’s satisfaction with his/her marriage or primary relationship tends to be a pivotal factor in his/her overall happiness. Sexual satisfaction is an important aspect of marital satisfaction” (p.115). Sexual satisfaction fits under the category of physical health. Therefore, it is a good association that if one is sexually satisfied, then some aspects of physical health have benefited and consequently if physical health is good, then marital satisfaction is thereby enhanced. It is difficult to measure sexual satisfaction as many people may be happy with certain aspects of their sexual life however not so happy with other aspects of their sexual life. As sexual/physical health is reported to be good, then consequently marital happiness is reported to be enhanced. Since the apparent difficulty in measuring sexual satisfaction is evident for research methodology, the overall approach in this article researched is that sexual happiness is defined as the absence of not being satisfied (Young et al.).

Father’s Perspective on Childlessness

Fathers report a good many of the same features as their counterparts as well as other problems related to sexual responsiveness of the wife, less attention paid to them by their wives and economic difficulty due to the wife caring for the children opposed to holding down a job and providing an economic boost to the family. Furthermore, children demand the attention of both spouses providing less attention for each other. Discipline and child rearing issues also surface at this stage in marriage also causing role conflict in both parents. If the parents are on agreed terms on these matters, the role conflict may be negligible whereas parents whom differ substantially on child-rearing and discipline issues have more strife and chaos with each other

and as a family unit. Women tend to note the higher levels of marital dissatisfaction (Twenge et al., 2003).

Intimacy

Intimacy is another factor that declines when a child is born as stated by Greeff and Malherbe (2001). Although intimacy is only one aspect of a happy marriage, it may be one of the most important elements to a happy marriage. It is essential for the couple to establish and maintain intimacy throughout the marriage if marital satisfaction is important. Intimacy is what makes a couple feel close to each other. Intimacy is what nurtures one another and allows for empathy, trust, disclosure and other facets of a happy marriage. Intimacy is a necessity of marriage and those without a lot of intimacy report lower levels of dissatisfaction in their marriage.

Greeff and Malherbe (2001) had these conclusions to report on intimacy between gender roles:

a) There is a significant difference in men and women's experience of intimacy, b) men are significantly less satisfied with their experience of sexual intimacy than women, c) men are significantly less satisfied with the recreational aspects of their relationships than women, d) there is a greater difference between women's experience of social intimacy and the degree of social intimacy they desire than in the case of men, e) women show a greater discrepancy between their experience of sexual intimacy and the degree of sexual intimacy that they desire than men do, and f) a significant positive correlation exists between the experience of intimacy and marital satisfaction (p. 256).

Communication

Litzinger and Gordon (2005) state “Researchers have demonstrated in both cross-sectional and longitudinal observational studies that couples’ communication, when explored systematically, is consistently and significantly related to couples’ satisfaction” (p.410).

Communication is considered to be one of the most important facets of a happy marriage and lack of communication has shown in numerous studies to be a major reason for divorce. In this study on communication, it was shown through regression analysis to be alongside sexual satisfaction as the most vital aspect to a happy marriage. Despite being such a major influence on the marriage itself, these components are not the only determinants to a happy marriage. Couples reporting dissatisfaction in their marriage blamed poor communication skills and interactions with one another as major roadblocks to a happy marriage. Those same couples as well as other couples that had verbal conflicts or communication avoidance reported more distress and as a result, less happiness in their marriage. This same research has demonstrated that some couples communicate better with strangers than their own spouses, which has led to many hypotheses but due to its complexity, no absolute answer. Furthermore there may be other factors within the marital context that involve communication among the married partners (Litzinger & Gordon, 2005).

Young et al. (1998) report that “Several studies have shown a positive association between sexual satisfaction and closeness or quality of relationship. The closer the emotional relationship with one’s partner, the greater the chance that the relationship will be described as sexually satisfying” (p.117). This notion is expressed in other literature as well. “One potentially important relationship component that might contribute to a happy marriage, satisfaction with the sexual relationship, has until recently been ignored in the marital literature” as reported by

Litzinger and Gordon (2005, p. 411). Findings in this study found positive correlations among communication, sexual satisfaction and marital satisfaction. The analyses from this study on communication and sexual satisfaction found that marital satisfaction is dependent on both constructive communication and sexual satisfaction. It is thought that positive reports on these factors ward off negative communication and sexual problems and are good predictors for a happy marriage. Communication appears to be the best predictor of marriage according to this study and it was suggested that when good communicative interaction is present, sexual dissatisfaction could be overlooked and not mitigate the overall happiness of the marriage. However in couples that do not possess skills of constructive communication or fail to properly communicate; sexual satisfaction is more important and necessary to the overall satisfaction of the marriage. Nonetheless, this study indicates the importance of both dynamics in the realm of a happy marriage.

Religion

“There is no evidence that the childless differ in their backgrounds from those couples with children” (Feldman, 1981, p.597). Religion is another aspect associated with the childless. Research conducted by Heaton, Jacobson, & Fu (1992) found a small but consistent correlation between being childless and the impact of religion on the childless. It was discovered in this study that the childless have been shown to attend church less frequently or not at all compared to those couples with children. In addition, the childless in this study have no religious affiliations despite having a protestant upbringing. These same couples had lower levels of religiosity. Whereas, those couples who had a religious affiliation, attended church, and believed in the bible were less inclined to remain childless. This study claims couples have similar patterns and beliefs on religion, child preferences and the decision to remain childless.

Shared Values and Beliefs

In regard to childlessness and partner selection, research has shown that the good majority of intentionally childless people find partners that share the same values, beliefs, and attitudes towards children as themselves. Furthermore, research has elaborated on the notion that many partners had already made decisions to be childless prior to looking for a partner or being married (Callan, 1983). However, there have been limited studies that reveal the quality of such marriages.

Unlike women who expect to marry and have children, a single woman who has decided to remain childless but still wished to marry or cohabit is possibly influenced by a different set of expectations about a likely partner and her relationship with him. She most likely would have the typical appreciation of a partner's physical, intellectual, social, and reputational attributes. Studies of the voluntarily childless, however, indicate that the intentionally childless are more likely to be highly educated or hold advanced degrees...to be employed in professional and high income occupations and to report that they have no religious affiliation. Thus, if individuals are drawn together in the combination of their stimulus attributes, it is likely that single women who want to be voluntarily childless would prefer well educated, professionally qualified males, not identified with a former religion. In addition, the voluntarily childless tend to view themselves as individualistic, non-conforming, creative, and free to enjoy a highly flexible lifestyle (Callan, 1983, p. 181).

Buffer Effect against Societal Stigmatization

Parenthood has always been expected in societies of past as well as the present. The majority of couples in the past or present has had desires to marry and have children, or is

married and has children. Those couples who decided to remain childless were stigmatized and labeled with negative connotations and/or expectations in their contribution to society as a whole. Recent literature has noted that childless couples in the past had to deal with such social stigma whereas childless couples at present are usually not questioned or viewed negatively to the extent of their peers in the past (Calhoun & Selby, 1980). Despite the research that social stigma, labeling and negative assumptions have been made in the past and less so in the present by society on the childless couples, it is interesting to find that many couples are able to maintain a shield or buffer that does not allow these sanctions and negative attributions to affect their lives which include their childless lifestyle. “Although many reported that in the past various punishments and pressures had left them feeling uncomfortable and upset, very few reported that they were still distressed by them. Rather, they seemed to be generally unperturbed by social disapproval” (Veevers, 1975, p.474).

Although society may have a discriminating view towards childless couples and make assumptions that either they medically cannot have children or dislike children due to some maladaptive behavior or internal flaw in their character, research has shown quite the opposite. “Becoming childless is a process rather than a single decision by the couple. While the decision to remain childless is shared by both individuals in the marriage, each individual may come to that decision at slightly different times within the marriage and for different reasons” (DeOllos & Kapinus, 2002, p.74).

Summary

As indicated in the review of literature, marital satisfaction is impacted by being childless. Most of the research reviewed indicated that married couples who are voluntarily childless are happier and more satisfied with their marriage than their counterparts who have children or

involuntary childless couples. The research indicated that marital satisfaction was dependent upon many factors, some measurable and some not. There appeared to be a strong correlation between finance, communication, and sexual satisfaction among the couples reporting marital satisfaction. Weak associations on marital satisfaction included those of education and religion. Research also indicated that there is a growing population of voluntary childless couples and it is expected that the childless couple population will continue to grow.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

Introduction

This study addresses the following research question: Does being voluntarily childless impart marital satisfaction? Since it is the aim of this researcher to do a more in-depth study that arises from participants' personal experiences and constructs, a qualitative approach was considered appropriate. In this chapter, we will examine the methodology of the research project. For this particular study, qualitative data will be collected with questionnaires and analyzed. For this particular study, the qualitative data shall look for emergent themes and other phenomenological aspects of a childless marriage in relation to marital satisfaction among the childless couple using thematic analyses.

Respondents

This study examined responses from married voluntary childless couples as given by the researcher on an open ended questionnaire. The participant population in this study totaled nine respondents. This qualitative research had eight female married women and one married man use a convenience population. Participants were solicited by word of mouth in the school and work settings to initiate a respondent population. Thus, the participants may be contacted by the researcher directly or indirectly. The researcher provided a self-addressed stamped envelope to each interested party in a direct or indirect fashion. The participants were responsible for mailing back the results of the questionnaire they completed.

The respondent population consisted of four participants of 45 years or older, one between the ages of 35 and 45, two between the ages of 25 and 35, and two between the ages of 18 and 25. The mean number of years married for the respondent population was 16.39 years.

Seven of the nine respondents reported family income greater than \$75,000 annually with two respondents reporting annual family income between \$50,000 and \$75,000. One respondent had only a high school education, one reported “some” college, one reported two years of college, two reported Bachelor’s level college educations, and four respondent’s reported Master’s level college educations.

Five respondents reported Caucasian ethnicity, one reported being Hispanic, and one reported being Hispanic/Caucasian. Two respondents declined to respond to the question regarding ethnicity. One respondent declined to respond to the question about religious affiliation. Two reported that they had no religious affiliation, three identified with the Catholic faith, one identified as Episcopalian, one as Southern Baptist, and one as Church of Christ.

Protection of Human Subjects

The researcher requested and received permission from the Institutional Review Board to protect the rights of the participants. Each and every participant in this study received a consent form. The return of the questionnaire was demonstrated by the respondent to be consent for participation in the study as noted on the consent form. The consent form explained in complete detail the purpose of the study and noted that participation is completely voluntary (See Appendix A). All participants had knowledge of the study and had the option to drop out of the study by simply not returning the questionnaire. All participants that received a questionnaire directly or indirectly returned the questionnaire. Therefore, no participant in this study dropped out or refused to participate in the study. Pertaining to matters of confidentiality, only the researcher and the committee have knowledge of their participation as well as their completed questionnaire and consent form. Participants did not have any identifying markers on their

questionnaire. This researcher will destroy any paper or electronic data associated with this study within six months with the exception of the actual thesis.

Instruments

The instrument used in this qualitative research project consisted of a questionnaire that asked 19 open-ended questions as well as some demographic questions for categorical data. The open-ended questions allowed the respondent to give clear and precise data on their particular reasons for desiring to remain married without children, as well as notate their marital satisfaction. The responses were addressed using pen or pencil in narrative fashion which provided the researcher with many components, elements, explanations and rationale behind the unconventional married but childless couple's marital satisfaction.

Design

A cross-sectional research design was implemented for this study. The design was qualitative in nature. The design allowed for qualified participants to partake in an open-ended questionnaire. This provided the researcher with personal and in-depth narrative information in regard to the participant's voluntarily childless state and how their childlessness impacted their marital satisfaction. The questionnaire was experimental and was created by the researcher. Furthermore, the instrument was not field tested but the researcher did conduct a pilot study for legitimacy of use in the study.

Procedures

Respondents were identified through various sources including, but not limited to, direct solicitation of known childless couples and through referrals of known childless couples through friends, family and coworkers. Respondents were screened on the basis of self-identification of voluntarily childless couples by direct query. This qualitative research allowed both members of

the family to respond openly in written form to the questions as designed by the researcher. The researcher used a convenience population. Participants were solicited by word of mouth in the school and work settings to initiate interest. The researcher provided a self addressed stamped envelope to each interested party in a direct or indirect fashion. The participants were responsible to mail back the results of the questionnaire.

Analysis of Data

Upon receipt of all questionnaires, researcher reviewed the questionnaires by way of content analysis for information pertaining to demographics and recurrent themes, commonalities, and differences among respondents. All questionnaires analyzed through content analysis by this researcher looked for patterns resulting from themes generated by the respondents' response to the questionnaire as well as any sub-themes that may occur as a result of the data provided by the population in this study. Content analysis was used in this qualitative study as the form of analysis which allowed the researcher to make inferences and develop categories or patterns based on questionnaire data related to the themes of the study. Thus, the themes that were analyzed to discover what the impact on marital satisfaction of the participants involved the elements of love, fidelity, companionship, flexibility, affection, intimacy, compatibility and financial marital status. The researcher in this study looked for meanings, common words, language, statements or particular vocabulary usage from the respondents to establish common patterns associated with the pre-set themes established as having an impact on marital satisfaction.

The patterns established through content analysis revealed many commonalities, such as that all respondents' valued marital financial status as very important in their marriage. This was the most meaningful attribute to a happy marriage based on the nine respondents. Another

significant pattern noted on the theme of fidelity was that all but one respondent claimed children had no influence on a partner being unfaithful. All other themes had similar language and meaning from one respondent to the next. The final pattern of naming the five characteristics of a happy marriage (Question #18) as noted by the respondents most commonly chose love, God/religion, trust and love followed by communication. Interesting sub-themes emerged as a result of the questionnaire demographics. All but two respondents in this study noted that they make over \$75,000 a year. Another commonality or pattern noted was that all but one respondent indicated that they had some level of a college education with four of the nine reporting attainment of a Master's degree. Another pattern noted was that five of the nine respondents participating in this survey reported being 45 years of age or older. In addition, five of the nine respondents reported being Caucasian. Another sub-theme was that most respondents had identified religious affiliations.

In the construct of content analysis by way of qualitative research, no correlational or causative results are noted. Only inferences and revelation of commonalities, themes, sub-themes or patterns were established on the basis of the limited data provided to this study. Therefore, no generalization of data to the general public is made on the basis of this small and limiting study.

CHAPTER IV

Findings

Introduction

This chapter encompasses the interpretation and analyses of the data as retrieved by the open-ended questionnaire. As a result of this study being conducted in a qualitative manner, the interpretation and analyses will be discussed together.

Descriptive Data

Nine respondents answered the open-ended questionnaire. Of these, eight respondents were female and one was male. The respondents reported an average of 16.4 years of marriage with the lowest reported years of marriage being two years and the greatest length of marriage being 35 years. In regard to education, the respondents overall were highly educated. Only one respondent did not have any college, only reporting a high school degree. Of the others, one respondent had an associate degree, three had bachelor level degrees and four earned Master's degrees. In respect to socioeconomic status, seven of the nine respondents reported income levels over \$75,000 a year with the other two reporting earning between \$50,000 and \$75,000 yearly. The age of the respondents were primarily 45 years of age and older; four were 45 years of age or older, two respondents were 18-25 years of age, two respondents were 25-35 years of age with only one respondent being between the age of 35-45. In terms of religious affiliation, one of the respondents did not answer, one claimed to be affiliated with Southern Baptist, three respondents noted they were affiliated with the Catholic Church, one respondent noted Episcopalian ties and one respondent noted an affiliation to the Church of Christ. In regard to ethnicity, three respondents failed to mention their ethnicity, four reported being Caucasian and two reported being Hispanic.

Discussion

Nine respondents completed questionnaires for this study on the impact of marital satisfaction among childless couples. All respondents were informed of the study in writing and had to be a childless couple to participate in this qualitative study. Each respondent was given the Informed Consent form and those responding to the questionnaire gave full consent to be a human subject for the purpose of discovering themes, patterns, and commonalities among those couples whom are voluntarily childless and participated in this study. All respondents were to answer twenty questions with some elaboration as well as respond to some demographical data. The reasoning behind the elaboration was to yield a more in-depth analysis of data rather than a perfunctory yield. Elaboration also allowed for the researcher to possibly discover insights, preferences, or characteristics by this respondent population. The respondent population was considered small but still reliable and valid for exploratory research. This subject matter has produced some literature on the topic but with many limitations, and varying and inconclusive results. This study was designed to yield more pertinent and recent data on a growing segment of population that prefers to be childless.

The findings were similar in many regards and will be discussed by category. All respondents felt that love on a partner or from a partner occurred regardless of children but the majority of respondents stated that being childless allowed each partner to focus all their love on each other with undivided attention. Being childless allowed for each other to spend all their love on one another without sharing that love on children.

All respondents noted that being childless had no bearing on their fidelity. All respondents wrote that both spouses trust one another and remain faithful to one another

exclusive of the fact that there may be children involved as an equation for the basis of infidelity. Fidelity is something that is expected of married couples regardless of their intent for children.

Most respondents noted that companionship is a very important factor in their marriage and that companionship was deemed more crucial for those childless couples as their spouse provided all or most of their companionship needs and that children were not necessary to fill any void.

Most respondents noted that flexibility is a very crucial component in a happy marriage and therefore compromised by children. Respondents that elaborated to some extent noted some common features as: being childless allowed for them to be spontaneous. Vacations on a whim were no problem; the ability to stay up late or go out on the town was not a problem as they had no responsibilities to maintain the welfare of any children. Couples could entertain, be entertained or simply sleep in on the weekend without the worry of children compromising their schedule.

All respondents indicated the importance of affection in their marriage and emphasized that affection is boosted by not having children. Their spouse is the main source to receive affection and give affection to each other. All respondents to varying degrees felt that children demand and require affection too, and therefore compromised affection on the spouse as it is now would be a shared commodity.

All respondents valued intimacy as being crucial and necessary for a happy marriage. All felt that intimacy in their marriage was enhanced as a result of being childless. Intimacy was noted as being sexual as well as just being and feeling close with one another. The main attribute to being intimate was being able to have the freedom to be intimate any time they felt the desire as opposed to when the children were asleep or otherwise allowed for intimate moments.

All respondents considered compatibility to be an important facet of marriage but felt that children had no bearing on compatibility with one another. All felt to varying degrees that either a spouse was simply compatible or not compatible without any consideration of the merits or demerits of having children.

As was the case in my reviewed research, all respondents strongly agreed that financial matters were very important to a happy and successful marriage. All respondents noted that financial security accounted for less stress, negative emotions and conflicts in their marriage. Money also allowed each other to go on vacations or buy merchandise or products that made them feel happy such as better car, house, clothes, and the like. Thus finances were improved as a result of the couple being able to be dual wage earners opposed to a single waged couple or a dual earner paying for child care. Also, some couples in the study reported that they can put that money away for retirement rather than for a child's college education.

All respondents knew of several other couples that opted to remain voluntarily childless. All respondents reported that society in general expected children from them. Most reported that their parents put pressure on them to have children so that their respective parents may have the benefit of grandchildren. Most respondents reported that their friends or co-workers wondered why they did not want children or made the assumption that they physically/medically could not produce children. As a general rule, most respondents felt that society was more accepting of them being childless than was the case 10-20 years ago when almost all married couples had children. The majority of society today still want and have children however there is a growing number of couples that are opting to remain childless and not being scrutinized or demeaned to the same effect as in the past. The majority of respondents reported that they knew before marriage that they did not want children.

Results varied somewhat on whether respondents view children as negative or positive but the majority responded that children are a positive element to a family that desire children and a negative element to couples whom want to be childless. All respondents being childless surmised that children have wonderful attributes and are considered a great gift for couples wanting children as part of their family makeup. Yet, all respondents reported the negative elements and impacts of children which support their reason of not wanting children.

All respondents reported that their marital satisfaction across the board was greater as a result of remaining childless. Marital satisfaction was mainly accounted for on the basis that couples had more time for each other to be affectionate, intimate with one another as well as have financial freedom not afforded to them if they chose to have a family with children.

All respondents reported various reasons as to why other couples are electing to remain childless; however, the majority noted three main reasons which were to spend more time with one another exclusively, to have increased financial status, and to allow freedom and opportunity for one another without the burden of being responsible for a child or children.

Most respondents had similar definitions as to what comprises marital satisfaction. Some of the most common definitions were: “Happiness, love and delight experienced within your spouse, respect, a person that you love, trust, and makes you happy, my satisfaction and hers, being complete within ourselves, enjoying life.”

All respondents listed the five characteristics of a happy marriage and most respondents had very similar characteristics. Some of the most common characteristics were communication, religion, financial wealth, forgiveness, understanding, friendship, love, and trust.

Summary of Results

Findings in this particular study were meant to provide in-depth yet crucial supporting evidence as to the reasons that married couples want to be childless. More importantly, how does being childless impact marital satisfaction on a negative to positive continuum? In researching other journals as well as conducting this exploratory study, it is quite evident that there is a growing population of people in our modern society that are electing to remain childless for numerous reasons. The data from previous research as well as reiterated in this study appear to reflect that the most common reasons are those of intimacy, freedom from the responsibility of raising children and the financial freedom to spend money on themselves or save money for the future.

Research is clear to notate that there are numerous known as well as unknown variables that affect the overall marital satisfaction of a married couple. Due to the fact that some of these variables are unknown or are intangible make it practically impossible to give the “exact” reasons for marital happiness or discord on an absolute basis. Another difficulty in obtaining absolute discovery for the basis of what constitutes a satisfactory marriage is that no test or instrument can account for all the subjectivity and intangibles congruent to what is being tested, analyzed and evaluated over a short period of time or a long period of time. In regard to longitudinal studies, there are not many studies that have accounted for longitudinal measure of marital satisfaction, and those that have only were identifying a very limited variable, aspect or characteristic of what constitutes marital satisfaction.

CHAPTER V

Summary of Conclusions, Recommendations, and Future Directions

Introduction

This study considered the problem associated with childlessness and its impact on marital satisfaction of the childless couples. The research discussed the problem of childlessness on society. Research noted that childlessness is becoming a prevalent lifestyle choice being made by many Americans as well as other married couples in other countries. The purpose of this study was to investigate and explore through means of an open-ended questionnaire if voluntarily childless married couples whom participated in this study were satisfied with their marriage. Furthermore the goal of the researcher was not only to ascertain marital satisfaction among this select population, but to uncover and detect common themes, patterns or similarities among each other. The questionnaire encompassed twenty questions relating to commitment, finance, intimacy, compatibility, flexibility and the like to gather an in-depth working knowledge of their perspective and thoughts relating to marital satisfaction as a result of being childless.

Definition of terms have been included in the primary chapter, however there were no variables or hypothesis set up by this researcher for this study as it was qualitatively researched and thus relies on narrative record. The second chapter in this study was designed to orient the reader with existing data on the topic of childlessness, especially the voluntarily childless. The existing data found in journals also involved marital satisfaction and compared differences and similarities of the childless and the married with children to gather knowledge on this phenomenon that is increasing in prevalence in American society. This chapter explores and examines the factors that are responsible for a married couple to remain childless as well as if the result of being childless positively or negatively impacts marital satisfaction.

The third chapter involves methodology and procedures involved for this particular study. This study was a pilot study that was exploratory in nature. The design of the study was a self-created questionnaire involving twenty questions as well as demographical questions. These questions were open-ended in an attempt to illicit an elaborative narrative from the participating respondents in the study on matters pertaining to marital satisfaction directly influenced by being voluntarily childless. The respondents were not randomly selected but selected based on criteria thus a convenience population. Any individual or couple that met the criteria of being married and never wanting children was eligible to participate in this study. Furthermore, all participants were directly or indirectly asked to participate with informed consent if they met criteria. Completing the questionnaire was considered to be consent on the subject as they had written explanation of the intended aim of this study and further noted that all participant participation was voluntarily and they could quit or fail to participate at any point in the study without any recourse or negative attributions by this researcher. This direct or indirect approach occurred from word of mouth from people the researcher knew directly or from people that others knew unknown to the researcher. All interested parties received a self addressed stamped envelope with the researchers address to return upon completion of the survey. All questionnaires had no identifying marks and required no signature or names thus the people completing the questionnaires maintained their privacy and the questionnaires are to be kept confidentially by the researcher, his co-investigator and the committee members associated with this study. The questionnaires and any peripheral data will be maintained in a locked security cabinet for six months past the date of completion of this study. Assumptions are that all respondents were honest in answering the questions and elaborated as much as possible. This allowed the

researcher to gather as much in-depth knowledge in regard to how they feel about being childless and how it impacts them in terms of marital satisfaction.

The limitations of this study are that it is not a cause and effect or correlational study that serves to make links and associations between an independent and dependent variable. There are no variables to measure or hypothesis that require testing. Furthermore, the population was neither randomly selected nor large enough to be generalized to the general public. Lastly, the questionnaire was self-created by this researcher and not field tested or standardized.

The findings of this study were that childless couples are well adjusted and report high levels of marital satisfaction. Respondents indicated that love is impacted by remaining childless because “you have more time, energy, and less stress to be with your partner.” This is directly related to companionship issues, which respondents reported are strongly and positively impacted by the choice to remain childless. “We can concentrate on each other without anything or one to distract us” and “the adult couple has the necessary energy to build companionship and enjoy each other as individuals.” Respondents also believed that within the scope of a childless marriage, intimacy is enhanced due to increased spontaneity and increased energy and focus on the relationship. “There is freedom from responsibilities which can dampen desire.”

Respondents indicated that they have more financial freedom due to having no children. Respondents did not seem to believe that fidelity within the marriage is impacted by the choice to remain childless. Love for travel, adventure, feelings that the world is not suitable for bringing new life were the reasons given for remaining childless. The majority of respondents reported that the decision to remain childless was made prior to or very early in the marital relationship.

Conclusion

The conclusion of this study is that this particular research was exploratory in nature and had limitations. However, regardless of this account, the study still had merit and yielded interesting data on the voluntarily childless and its impact on marital satisfaction. The research allows one to infer that childlessness in America is less stigmatizing than in the past and that respondents are more open than in the past to disclose their lifestyle of being childless. Surprisingly, all respondents through my inference appeared proud of their decision and no respondent noted any regrets to their decision to remain childless. Furthermore, the results and factors that influenced my participants to remain childless mirrored the reasons and factors revealed in the review of existing data from prior research on the topic for the exception that all respondents had religious affiliations whereas the data shows that most childless couples have no religious affiliation, church attendance or religious inclinations.

Recommendations

Due to the fact that this study had a small population and no quantifiable data, it is without reservation that I recommend additional studies on childlessness and its effect on marital satisfaction. Further testing and research may reveal more insight on why so many people are opting to remain childless despite having good jobs, money, secure homes and the like that would be well suited to bearing children.

Realizing the factors and attitudes of childless people and couples in our society might encourage society to prepare for this growing population of childlessness which has many positive and negative outcomes for society as a whole. Programs may be developed that educate and counsel young people considering sterilization prior to marriage. Economic

impacts and social ramifications would need to be considered considering the rise in childlessness.

Research on this topic is crucial and can have significant influences on relationship issues, religious issues, social issues, educational issues and a number of other considerations that have a direct impact on society as a whole. This researcher would suggest that both qualitative and quantitative research be conducted in order to gather some numbers on just how prevalent childlessness is on a local or state basis. Further study also needs to be done to chart or table some statistical data to compare with this qualitative study and future qualitative studies. Lastly, the researcher would recommend that more study needs to be more inclusive of all measurable variables or factors. Studies reviewed are limited in descriptive factors for the basis of their justification to remain childless. A more complete research design and a more recent study would be helpful in this area as most data researched appeared to be outdated or limited in its scope and measure.

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APPENDIX A

Informed Consent

UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL OKLAHOMA

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Research Project Title: A PHENOMENONOLOGICAL APPROACH: THE IMPACT OF VOLUNTARY CHILDLESS MARRIED COUPLES ON MARITAL SATISFACTION.

Researcher (s): Paul R. Harvey/ Dr. Glee Bertram

A. Purpose of this research: This research is being proposed to gather additional information to ascertain in my sample population, if voluntary childless couples are happily married despite not having children. Furthermore this research aims to discover themes, commonalities, and differences among the couples questioned. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to ascertain marital satisfaction data among married voluntary childless couples.

B. Procedures/treatments involved: The Principal Investigator will use a convenience sample to collect data. Social contacts will be given a packet that contains the Solicitation Letter, Informed Consent Form, return envelope and the questionnaire. The solicitation Letter addresses that participation is voluntary and that there is absolutely no recourse for not participating. Also, the letter addresses that there are no identifying markers on the questionnaires, protecting the anonymity of the respondents. Respondents may complete the questionnaire in the place of their choosing. All participants will be provided a self-addressed, postage paid envelope to return the questionnaire and the Informed Consent Form to the Principal Investigator.

C. Expected length of participation: 30 minutes

D. Potential benefits: The participants in this study may gain insight and perspective into their own relationship that may be beneficial in their decision making processes as related to marital satisfaction and or the state of being childless. Furthermore, the participants data may be beneficial to other people in society that could use some pertinent data to their own life. Additionally, this research may be carried out further in a more extensive or comparative manner which may even include quantifiable data by way of a quantitative approach.

E. Potential risks or discomforts: None known

F. Medical/mental health contact information (if required): Not required

G. Contact information for researchers: Paul R Harvey

10312 Koch Drive Midwest City, Oklahoma 73130

405-259-9644(Home) or 405-503-9688 (cell)

Dr. Glee Bertram

100 N. University Drive Edmond, Oklahoma 73034

HES Department Box 118

Phone: 405-974-5631

H. Explanation of confidentiality and privacy: All questionnaires will be free of any identifying markers to ensure all respondents information remains anonymous.

The data in the study will be kept confidential by placing all records, instruments, notes, data, in a secured metal cabinet that is key operated by the Principal Investigator. This secured cabinet is located at the Principal Investigator's residence. The Principal Investigator will have sole access to the data obtained from the study until the data is shared with the Co-Principal Investigator and the Thesis Committee members subsequently.

All data collected from this study shall remain secured by the Principal Investigator at his residence until six months past the time that the Master's degree has been granted.

Effective November 2008, all paper documents will be destroyed by use of a shredding machine that the Principal Investigator owns at his residence.

I. Assurance of voluntary participation: There is no mandatory or coerced participation to take place for this study. All respondents that participate will do so on a voluntary basis and will sign accordingly that they have read the Informed Consent Form and agree to participate on a voluntary basis and of their own free will. There are no inducements, monetary gains, promises or enticement in return for their participation. Furthermore, there is no recourse to the participant for not participating or quitting the study abruptly.

AFFIRMATION BY RESEARCH SUBJECT

I hereby voluntarily agree to participate in the above listed research project and further understand the above listed explanations and descriptions of the research project. I also understand that there is no penalty for refusal to participate, and that I am free to withdraw my consent and participation in this project at any time without penalty. By returning the attached survey I acknowledge that I have read and fully understand this Informed Consent Form and that this copy has been given to me to keep.

APPENDIX B

Survey

OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONNAIRE

For additional space to answer questions, please use blank pages attached and number your answers to correspond with the questions. Thank you for filling out this questionnaire as completely as possible.

1. Do you believe that love to your partner or from your partner is impacted by being childless? Please explain your reasoning.
2. Do you believe that fidelity in your marriage by either partner is impacted by being childless? Please explain your reasoning.
3. Do you believe that companionship in your marriage is impacted by being childless? Please explain your reasoning.
4. Do you believe that flexibility in your marriage is impacted by being childless? Please explain your reasoning.
5. Do you believe that affection in your marriage is impacted by being childless? Please explain your reasoning.
6. Do you believe that intimacy in your marriage is impacted by being childless? Please explain your reasoning.
7. Do you believe that compatibility in your marriage is impacted by being childless? Please explain your reasoning.
8. Do you believe that your marital financial status is impacted by being childless? Please explain your reasoning.
9. How many other couples do you or your spouse know that are voluntarily childless?

10. What made you decide to be childless?
11. How have others in society treated you as a married couple without children in the past?
(10 years ago) In the present?
12. When in your marriage (in terms of years married) did you decide you did not want children?
13. Do you see children in general as positive or negative element to a family? A liability or an asset?
14. What are your extended families thoughts on you being childless?
15. How is marital satisfaction influenced by remaining childless as a couple?
16. How do you explain more people deciding to remain childless in society today?
17. How do you define marital satisfaction?
18. Name at least five characteristics of a happy marriage?
19. What impact on marital satisfaction has being childless helped?

Please also answer the following demographic questions to assist with categorical data.

Gender: Male or female

Age 18-25

25-35

35-45

45+

How many years have you been married?

Socioeconomic status (combined or total family income)

15,000-30,000

30,000-45,000

50,000-75,000

75,000+

Highest level of education attained?

Ethnicity of participant? (optional)

Religious preference? (optional)

APPENDIX C

Institutional Review Board Acceptance



Office of Research & Grants
Academic Affairs

March 6, 2008

Mr. Paul Harvey
Dr. Glee Bertram
Department of Human Environmental Sciences
College of Education and Professional Studies
Campus Box 118
University of Central Oklahoma
Edmond, OK 73034

Dear Mr. Harvey and Dr. Bertram:

Re: IRB Application for Research Involving Human Subjects

Thank you for submitting your revised application (UCO IRB# 08066) entitled, *A phenomenological approach: the impact of voluntary childless married couples on marital satisfaction*. The Office of Research & Grants is pleased to inform you of the approval of your application.

Caveat: The IRB will grant you a waiver of signed Informed Consent, as that would unnecessarily identify the subjects. Therefore you will need to change the last two lines of the Affirmation Statement. We suggest language as follows: "By returning the attached survey I acknowledge that I have read and fully understand this Informed Consent Form and that this copy has been given to me to keep". Remove signature and name line and you may or may not want to have them date it. You should send the revised Informed Consent Form to me as an attachment to an email.

This project is approved for a one year period but please note that any modification to the procedures and/or consent form must be approved prior to its incorporation into the study. A written request is needed to initiate the amendment process. You will be notified in writing prior to the expiration of this approval to determine if a continuing review is needed.

On behalf of the Office of Research & Grants and UCO IRB, I wish you the best of luck with your research project. If our office can be of any further assistance in your pursuit of research, creative & scholarly activities, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,

Jill A. Devenport, Ph.D.
Chair, Institutional Review Board
Office of Research & Grants, Academic Affairs
Campus Box 159
University of Central Oklahoma
Edmond, OK 73034
405-974-5479 or 405-974-2526

APPENDIX D

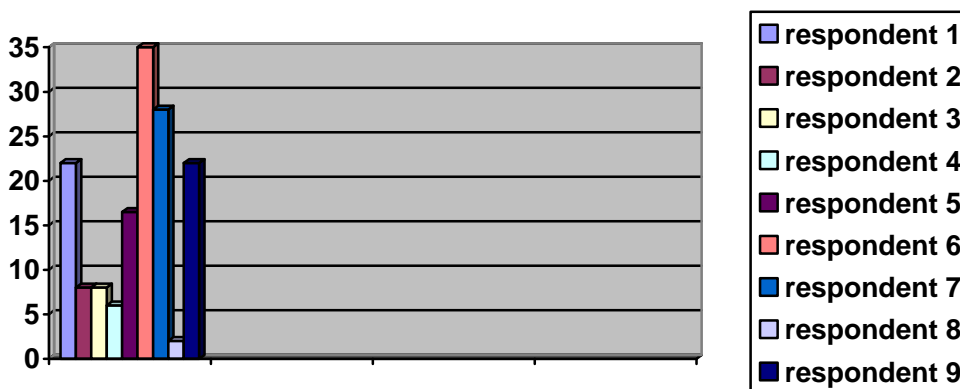
Respondent's Demographic Information

Total number of Respondents for all questions- 9
 8 female respondents
 1 male respondent

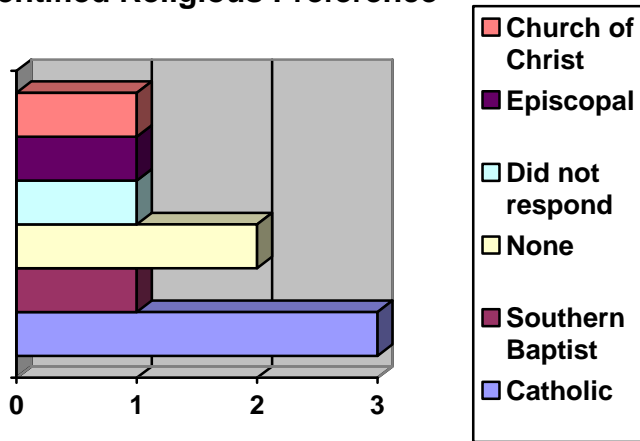
Age of Respondents



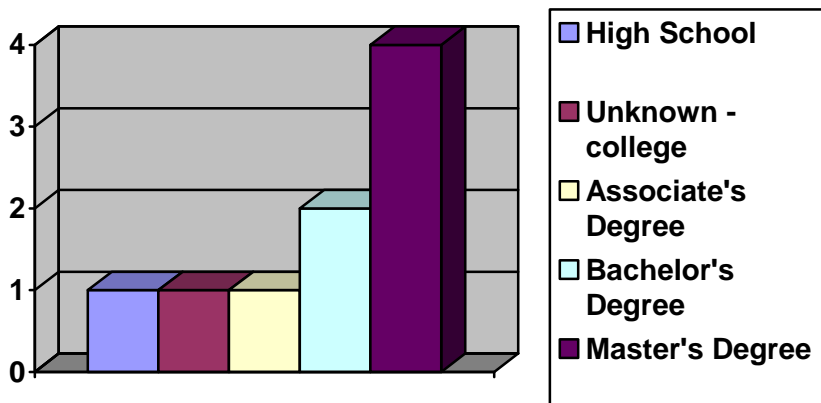
Years Married



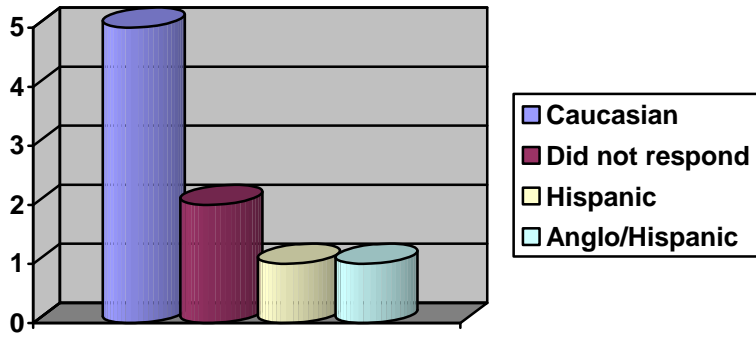
Identified Religious Preference



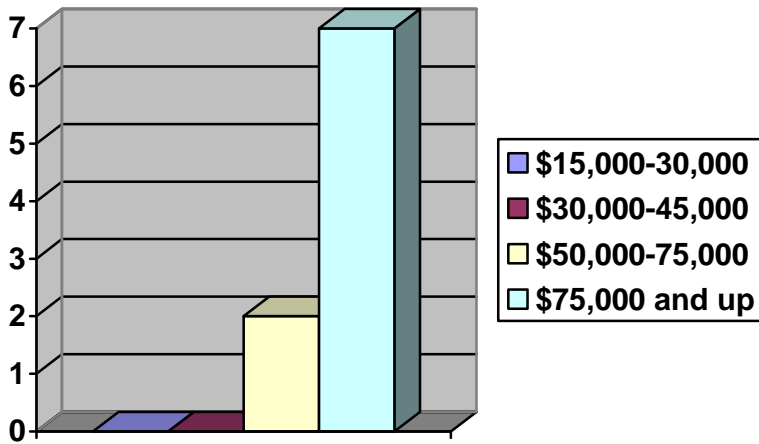
Education of Respondents



Ethnicity



Socioeconomic status



APPENDIX E

Content Analysis Summary Sheet

Content Analysis Summary Sheet

Content analysis on the open-ended questionnaire was performed by simply tallying the responses. However, responses had to be analyzed carefully as a yes answer could, upon reading the full answer actually be a negative response to the question.

There were nine total respondents. The basic breakdown of respondent responses were as follows:

- a) 7 of 9 respondents reported that love within their marriage was positively impacted by being childless;
- b) 8 of 9 respondents reported that fidelity within the marriage was not impacted by being childless;
- c) 7 of 9 respondents reported that companionship within the marriage is positively impacted by being childless, with 1 respondent responding that companionship is not impacted by being childless and 1 respondent being ambivalent about the impact of childlessness on companionship;
- d) 6 of 9 respondents reported that they feel they have more flexibility within their relationship due to not having children;
- e) 5 of 9 respondents that affection is positively impacted within their marriage due to being childless, 2 reported being ambivalent toward whether affection is impacted, and 2 reporting that affection is not impacted by childlessness;
- f) 8 of 9 respondents reported that they feel that intimacy within the marriage is increased by being childless;

- g) 6 of 9 respondents reported that marital compatibility is not impacted by childlessness; and
- h) 9 of 9 respondents reported that they feel they have more financial freedom and security as a result of their choice to be childless.