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## Struggles, Coping Mechanisms, and Insights of Childless Teachers in the Philippines: A Descriptive Phenomenological Approach

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## Struggles, Coping Mechanisms, and Insights of Childless Teachers in the Philippines: A Descriptive Phenomenological Approach

### Abstract

The phenomenon of childlessness has elicited interest among professionals all over the world. However, this phenomenon received little interest, particularly in the Philippine context. The purpose of this study was to describe the struggles, coping mechanisms, and insights of childless teachers in the Philippines. We employed a descriptive phenomenological research design. Ten childless teachers participated in the semi-structured key informant interview (KII), and the data were analyzed using Colaizzi's method. Results revealed the following themes: embarrassment, incompleteness, and pressures for their struggles; escapism and optimism for their coping mechanism; and work commitment and acceptance for their insights. Although being childless continued to be a challenge in their married life, the informants found a way to be happy and considered their situation as a plus factor, particularly in being available and committed to their teaching job.

### Keywords

Childlessness, Childless Teachers, Qualitative Research, Phenomenology, Philippines

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# Struggles, Coping Mechanisms, and Insights of Childless Teachers in the Philippines: A Descriptive Phenomenological Approach

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*The phenomenon of childlessness has elicited interest among professionals all over the world. However, this phenomenon received little interest, particularly in the Philippine context. The purpose of this study was to describe the struggles, coping mechanisms, and insights of childless teachers in the Philippines. We employed a descriptive phenomenological research design. Ten childless teachers participated in the semi-structured key informant interview (KII), and the data were analyzed using Colaizzi's method. Results revealed the following themes: embarrassment, incompleteness, and pressures for their struggles; escapism and optimism for their coping mechanism; and work commitment and acceptance for their insights. Although being childless continued to be a challenge in their married life, the informants found a way to be happy and considered their situation as a plus factor, particularly in being available and committed to their teaching job. Keywords: Childlessness, Childless Teachers, Qualitative Research, Phenomenology, Philippines*

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## Introduction

The phenomenon of childlessness has triggered the interest among sociologists and demographers throughout the world (Köppen, Mazuy, & Toulemon, 2017; Kreyenfeld & Konietzka, 2017; Livingston, 2015; Rotkirch & Miettinen, 2017; Tan, 2016). Aside from the decline of fertility in developed countries, there is also an increase in childlessness (Gobbi, 2013). In Europe, for example, childlessness for the past decades was growing (Kreyenfeld & Konietzka, 2017; Mills, Rindfuss, McDonald, & Velde, 2011). However, misconceptions and negative stereotypes about childless people are still very evident until today (Keizer, Dykstra, & Poortman, 2011; Rich, Taket, Graham, & Shelley, 2011). In the Philippines, a country where parenthood is highly expected for married individuals (Medina, 2001), childless couples experience so much pressure. Filipinos expect young couples to conceive a child.

We, as a couple-researcher, became interested in digging deeper into the phenomenon because we are also childless. We found this phenomenon worth investigating because we are intrigued to know the experiences of other childless couples and to gain insights using the scientific method. In our experience, family members, colleagues in the school, and other people gave us so many pressures after several years of not having a child. We believed this phenomenon is an area of interest for childless teachers who are supposed to be the second parents, but they do not have an experience of parenting. Moreover, the phenomenon of childlessness in the Philippines is poorly studied, more so for childless Filipino teachers. This study is our contribution to the body of knowledge as both childless teachers and researchers by shedding light on this particular phenomenon. The main purpose of this article is to describe the struggles, coping mechanisms, and insights of childless teachers in the Philippines. We also highlight their contribution to the teaching profession. The findings of this study contribute to understanding the lives of childless teachers, not only in the Philippines but also to those in

other places, particularly the developing countries, with similar cultural expectations for married couples.

## **Literature Review**

### **Realities of Childlessness**

In understanding the phenomenon of childlessness, we present here a review of literature focusing on the realities of the phenomenon. It begins by discussing the concept of voluntary and involuntary childlessness, followed by topics on the disadvantages of being childless, reasons for childlessness, pressures for childless couples, and desire for children.

### **Voluntary and Involuntary Childlessness**

Childlessness was defined as having no child, although this was quite a debatable definition because some childless women consider this term inappropriate (Rich et al., 2011). Several terms describe childless women. These are without children, non-mother, postponers, and passive decision-makers (Houseknecht, 1987; Kelly, 2009). The term childlessness is also included in the second demographic transition (SDT) along with a postponement of marriage, cohabitation, and divorce (Merz & Liefbroer, 2012). According to Lesthaeghe (2010), SDT was used to describe an individual focus on personal needs. The SDT theory explains the reason for low fertility because of increased individualism and the influence of the material world (Kane, 2013).

Though sociologists and demographers have various definitions of childlessness, there is, however, an agreement to distinguish between voluntary and involuntary childlessness (González & Jurado-Guerrero, 2006). The distinction is on the state of not being able to bear children (involuntary) and the decision of not having a child at all (voluntary). This distinction is “based on motivation and questions whether the people who preferred not to have children were the same as those who could not have them even though they wanted to have them” (Houseknecht, 1987, p. 369). Kelly (2009), considering the views from several scholars, defined voluntary childlessness as “women of childbearing age who are fertile and state that they do not intend to have children, women of childbearing age who have chosen sterilization, or women past childbearing age who were fertile but chose not to have children” (p. 157).

Waren and Pals (2013) identified four theories of voluntary childlessness: demographic variation, socialization or life course, neo-classical economic theories, and attitudinal theories. Based on these theories, one could argue that there are many perspectives about voluntary childlessness, which influence the reason for couples or individuals to remain childless. For example, many women prefer to be childless, and they feel happy with their decision. In a study among 72 middle-aged and older women, the results showed one-third of them considered themselves as childless by choice, which means they chose this kind of lifestyle (Jeffries & Konnert, 2002). Koropecj-Cox and Pendell (2007a) did a cross-sectional analysis of the National Survey of Families and Household (1987-1988, 1992-1994) and found positive attitudes among childless people. Likewise, another study in the United States of America revealed that childless women possessed positive attitudes compared to men (Koropecj-Cox & Pendell, 2007b). In other words, some women find happiness by choosing to be childless.

Involuntary childlessness is an entirely different case. It is a state usually related to infertility, which is a reality among 10% of the world population (Rouchou, 2013). Involuntary childlessness is defined as “the inability to have a child because of infertility or circumstances in the life course” (Waren & Pals, 2013, p. 152). It is a common scenario in developing countries. Unfortunately, for those who want to have a child, because of personal and societal

pressure, they are being isolated, stereotyped, and stigmatized (Rouchou, 2013; Sternke & Abrahamson, 2015; Tabong & Adongo, 2013). They want to have a child, but they could not have one.

### **Disadvantages of Being Childless**

Childlessness is one of the most misunderstood situations (Rich et al., 2011). Even the term itself has an unconstructive connotation. Some women dislike the word childless because, in the first place, they do not want to have a child. There is a need to reframe it as a “natural and familiar way of being” (Rich et al., 2011, p. 243). In many instances, childless women are in a very difficult situation. For example, a study in Bangladesh using the gathering of life history method revealed a strong stigma experienced by rural childless women (Nahar & Richters, 2011). Similar findings of a qualitative study in Ghana showed how childless couples were stigmatized and were not allowed to handle leadership duties in the community and were prohibited from becoming members of the ancestral world (Tabong & Adongo, 2013). Likewise, in Nigeria, according to Rouchou’s (2013) literature review on the consequences of infertility in developing countries, not being able to conceive a son disqualified a woman from becoming an elder. In India, childlessness could lead to social stigma, particularly to those childless women in rural areas (Childfree By Choice, 2015). Dykstra and Keizer (2009) found them to have lower social integration. Indeed, childlessness is a global concern, which puts the childless couples in a disadvantaged situation.

While childlessness is common among developed countries (Buchanan & Rotkirch, 2013), it is slowly gaining ground in developing countries like the Philippines. However, this phenomenon receives very little attention in the Philippines. Interestingly, the case of Filipinos is more intriguing since there is a strong cultural expectation for couples to have children (Medina, 2001). Considering that it is predominantly a Catholic country, there is a strong belief among Filipinos that a child is a gift from God. Moreover, Filipinos believe that children bring good luck to their families (Concepcion & De Guzman, 1981). Culturally, there is a high expectation for married Filipinos to become parents (Medina, 2001). Hence, there is much pressure on childless women in the Philippines.

### **Reasons for Childlessness**

The phenomenon of childlessness continues to grow, and scientists identify several reasons for its emergence. Delayed motherhood, which raised the probability of childlessness, especially when a woman reached a certain maturity age, is one reason (Office of National Statistics, 2013; Tavares, 2016). Some studies pointed out different motivations for why women did not want to have children. For example, researchers discovered two alternative modes in a comparative study about childlessness with respondents from Spain, West Germany, Italy, and France. In Spain and Italy, wherein raising a child is costly, motherhood is dependent on having a stable and high paying job. Likewise, in France, González and Jurado-Guerrero (2006), in using comparative analysis, reported that motherhood is a dual-earner partnership situation. They concluded that before having a child, some socio-economic factors must have been in place. Several other studies considered these factors as significant to childlessness (Kelly, 2009; Merz & Liefbroer, 2012; Portanti & Whitworth, 2009). In the United States of America, one study found opportunity cost as one specific factor in childlessness (Baudin, de la Croix, & Gobbi, 2015). Gobbi (2013) also discovered that women with higher salaries than their husbands preferred to remain childless. These social and economic changes explain the reason for childlessness, which facilitated an increase in gender

parity in the labor market where women are receiving higher salaries and considering the high cost of having children (Gobbi, 2013).

There are other factors aside from socio-economic reasons. For example, studies showed an association between the higher level of education and high rates in childlessness (Baudin et al., 2015; Livingston, 2015; Waren & Pals, 2013) and between education and career path decisions (Chancey & Dumais, 2009). In analyzing 20 books on family and marriage from 1950 to 2000, Chancey and Dumais (2009) pointed out the pursuit of a career as one major reason for voluntary childlessness. Similarly, Dr. Catherine Hakim, a sociologist, affirmed this finding based on her extensive study on childlessness. She argued that the contraceptive and the equal opportunity revolution influenced this phenomenon. Moreover, women find an alternative not to bear children because of the contraceptive revolution (Pew Research Center, 2010).

Another significant factor is a personal decision. Cain (2013) described this choice of childlessness as “positively childfree.” Some women simply consider themselves not fit to become mothers (Carmichael & Whittaker, 2007). They see their lives differently. In an investigation on childlessness in Britain and Italy using a quantitative comparative method, Fiori, Rinesi, and Graham, (2017) found decisions to remain childless could be a “specific combination of intended childlessness, postponed decisions or constraints affecting abilities to achieve intentions at the individual level” (p. 319). Using a grounded theory approach, Brooks (2019) identified freedom as one prevailing reason. The other prevailing reason was the belief of being childless as a vocation (Llewellyn, 2019). These identified reasons paint a picture of the lived experiences of childless persons around the world. However, being childless for some people puts a lot of pressure on their day-to-day living.

### **Pressure for Childless Couples**

Aside from being stigmatized in society (Nahar & Richters, 2011; Tabong & Adongo, 2013), couples with no children have to endure different types of pressures. In India, a phenomenological study among rural childless couples revealed a significant psychological effect, given the socio-cultural pressure to have children in this country (Dhar, 2013). While these realities come from developing countries, where couples want to have children but could not, childlessness could also pose a problem in developed countries. A study in Denmark using a natural experiment showed childless women had higher rates of mortality than women who became mothers and reported that childless women had a four-fold crude death rate ratio (Agerbo, Mortensen, & Munk-Olsen, 2012).

Strained family relation is another adverse effect of not having a child. In a study among childless men using the data from the first wave of the Netherlands Kinship Panel Study, they manifested weaker quality family relationships (Dykstra & Keizer, 2009). Undeniably, there are several areas to understand the potential adverse consequences of this phenomenon. Childless persons face so many pressures from society, particularly from family members, relatives, and friends.

For Filipinos, the pressure is similar. In fact, not having a child is an “unfortunate and pitiful state” for married couples (Medina, 2001, p. 193). Until today, it remains a cultural expectation for any married couple in the Philippines to have a child. Newly married couples constantly receive questions like “Do you have a baby already?” Hence, the situation of childless Filipinos is understandably a difficult one.

## Desire for Children

The Philippines is one of the fastest-growing populations in the world. The number could balloon to 142 million by 2045 (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2015). With the cultural expectation for married couples to have children, the growth will continue. However, there is a scarcity of data on the rates of childlessness in the country. The Philippine Statistics Authority included some information on childlessness in its 2005 report. In that year, there were 37.9 million Filipino women, and half of them belonged to the 15 to 45 years old group. These women had a 94.7 percent literacy rate, and half of them had children. Of these 15 to 45 years old group, half of them were married. Among these literate ever-married women, 11.2 percent remained childless. In summary, the report said that the percentage of these women who stay childless within their productive years is 11.5 (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2005). Despite these data, there is minimal information on the childlessness in the country.

Many Filipino couples are desperate to conceive a child. There is so much societal pressure. Some seek medical help. Even religion, being Catholic in particular (Waren & Pals, 2013), is a factor for the desire for any couple to have a child. In the Philippines, known as a predominantly Catholic country, a good number of couples visit Obando, Bulacan, to join the fertility dance, hoping to conceive a child with the intercession of the Virgin of Salamba (Zshornack, 2015). Other notable rituals around the world would include an *Ikoku* dance of South-western Congo-Brazzaville (Plancke, 2010), and Mbende/Jerusalem dance of Zimbabwe (Ngoshi & Mutekwa, 2013). All of these rituals give hope to childless couples that they could have a child.

The joy of having a child is a distinct feeling for couples, but some studies added more insights to this. In three studies using a strategy of converging evidence conducted by Nelson, Kushlev, English, Dunn, and Lyubomirsky (2013), they concluded that parents were happier, had positive emotion, and had a higher level of life meaning than nonparents had. Filipinos want to have children too. Hence, having children was necessary for them (Medina, 2001). Pressures come in when Filipino couples are not able to produce a child after years of marriage.

## Method

### Research Design

We employed a qualitative phenomenological design. Phenomenology is about studying the lived experiences of people (Creswell, 2007; van Manen, 1997). Specifically, we followed the descriptive phenomenological approach to understand the lived experiences of childless teachers. Following Husserl's philosophy, a descriptive phenomenological method describes "the experiences being lived through very carefully, and once the raw data has been obtained, a thorough phenomenological psychological analysis of the data takes place within the perspective of the phenomenological psychological reduction" (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003). In contrasting two phenomenological methods of Heidegger and Husserl, Giorgi (2007) preferred the latter as it is "designed to deal with any type of object and its manner of appearance is the basis upon which investigative procedures should proceed" (pp. 73-73). In this study, we focused on understanding the lived experiences of childless teachers based on their sharing. We specifically dig into their struggles and coping mechanisms. As a descriptive phenomenological approach, we focused on understanding their experiences, not putting our own interpretation because our goal was to see who the childless teachers are and how they live according to their context. We listened to their stories for us to be able to make a careful description of the phenomenon as we tried to be consistent with subscribing to what Husserl suggested by seeing the phenomena as they are (Shosha, 2012).

## Study Participants and Sample

We made sure that the informants were the intended individuals who qualified on the criteria set for this study. The criteria included the following: (a) The informants must be Filipino married teachers who lived together with their partners; (b) The informants must be in the category of “involuntary childlessness,” meaning they wanted to have a child, but they were not able to have one; and (c) All informants are married for 3 to 20 years. We limited inclusion to 20 years in marriage because, beyond the 20th year, childless couples might have adjusted well to their situation. We believed that, after 3 years of marriage, they already encountered pressures from people expecting them to have a baby. In the end, 10 childless teachers, composed of three men and seven women, were able to participate in the Key Informant Interviews (KII). The number was within the range suggested by Morse (1994).

In recruiting the informants, we asked the help of the principals and other teachers. We asked if they knew of a teacher who is childless and who satisfied our set of criteria. We received several referrals from both teachers and principals. After getting the names of these qualified teachers, we wrote letters to them asking for their participation. We also made phone calls and asked if they were willing to participate. For those who gave their positive responses, we then set the date of the interview.

Due to the nature of the study and the difficulty of getting informants, we utilized purposive sampling. The use of this sampling technique enabled us to select the informants who had the experience of the phenomenon and could give credible information (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). We selected the informants who were Filipino teachers and worked in the provinces of Davao del Sur and Davao Occidental, Southern Philippines.

## Data Collection

The main sources of the data were from the responses of the Key Informant Interviews (KII). According to Kumar (1989), KII is usually chosen since there are a limited number of participants who are needed to provide information about the phenomenon. We decided to use this technique because there were very few who satisfied the inclusion criteria. Also, the locations of those who agreed to be interviewed were hugely dispersed. Some of them lived in the far-flung villages. The interview was semi-structured with the use of interview guide questions. We asked permission from the informants to record the interview using an audio recorder. We tried to make the interview conversational in nature to make the informants comfortable. As noted by van Manen (1997), we used the interview to create a conversational relationship with the informant and to draw data as a resource for providing the meaning of the phenomenon and as a technique. During our first interview, we noticed that the informant, a woman, was more comfortable if the one asking questions is a woman, who is the second author. After that first interview, we decided that, though we would still be present together during the interview, the second author would take charge of the interviewing while the first author would focus on the recording and note-taking.

In the data gathering, we followed the data collection circle, as identified by Creswell (2007). First, we located our intended informants who satisfied our inclusion criteria through the recommendation of the principals and some teachers. Hence, we employed purposive sampling. Second, we established rapport with them before the start of the interview proper. We allowed them to use their first language. Third, we collected the data through the key informant interview. The location of the interview depended on the informants' preferences, although most of the interviews happened in schools. We asked them questions based on the main purpose of the study. The interview was in Cebuano, the local dialect of the informants, using the following three research questions: (a) What are the struggles of the childless



teachers? (b) What are their coping mechanisms? (c) What are their insights as childless teachers? For each research question, we prepared interview guide questions. For example, for the first research question, we asked questions like, “What were the challenging situations that you experienced as a childless teacher?” or “What kind of treatment you received from your colleagues?” For the second research question, we asked a question like “How did you handle those challenging situations?” For the third research question, we asked them questions like “What pieces of advice can you share with other childless individuals?” and “What insights can you share with other teachers in the academe in general?” Fourth, we recorded the information and transcribed it later. Fortunately, we did not have to deal with field issues except for some delays in the agreed time. Fifth, we stored data safely. Sixth, we did the analysis and interpretation after the conduct of the interviews using the method suggested by Colaizzi (1978) as this method was reported to be effective for descriptive phenomenological research (Shosha, 2012; Wirihana et al., 2018).

### **Analysis and Interpretation of Data**

In the analysis of the data, we followed Colaizzi’s (1978) method. The seven steps in Colaizzi’s method are (as cited by Shosha, 2012, p. 33):

Step 1: Each transcript should be read and re-read in order to obtain a general sense about the whole content.

Step 2: For each transcript, significant statements that pertain to the phenomenon under study should be extracted. These statements must be recorded on a separate sheet noting their pages and lines numbers.

Step 3: Meanings should be formulated from these significant statements.

Step 4: The formulated meanings should be sorted into categories, clusters of themes, and themes.

Step 5: The findings of the study should be integrated into an exhaustive description of the phenomenon under study.

Step 6: The fundamental structure of the phenomenon should be described.

Step 7: Finally, validation of the findings should be sought from the research participants to compare the researcher's descriptive results with their experiences.

First, we read transcripts several times to have a full grasp of the informants’ responses. We did this part separately for us to have an individual understanding of the actual response. However, prior to that, we already did casual discussion after every interview we conducted. However, we did not record these conversations or discussions because we wanted the actual responses of the participants to be the main data in future analysis and interpretation.

Second, from the transcript, we identified significant statements. We contributed to this step by individually identifying significant statements from the transcribed data or transcripts. We then shared our outputs of identified significant statements by collating our outputs and putting them in our first table with three columns. The first column contained our identified significant statements. The second column had the pseudonym for each statement, its corresponding transcript number, page number, and line numbers. We reserved the third column for the next step.

Third, we formulated the meaning for each significant statement. We did this by analyzing the significant statement, which was the actual response, and provided the meaning of such a statement. Providing meaning was necessary because there were actual responses that an outsider could miss the meaning, especially that the interviews were in the local language.

We made sure that what the informants said was what they really meant; hence, we had the formulated meaning. We placed these formulated meanings on the third column of our first table.

Fourth, after providing formulated meanings, we identified the theme clusters and emergent themes. We created the second and third tables to help us in the analysis. We grouped the formulated meanings into categories and later into theme clusters. In other words, we grouped “these formulated meanings into categories that reflect a unique structure of clusters of themes” (Shosha, 2012, p. 35). For the cluster themes, we analyzed and arranged the formulated meanings that represented a unique structure or group of meanings, thus, producing the theme clusters. Our second table contained the formulated meanings extracted from the third column of the first table and the theme clusters. After identifying the theme clusters, we created another table for further analysis. The third table contained theme clusters and emergent themes. We came up with the emergent themes after we analyzed the cluster of themes and grouped them into a distinctive construct. The result of this step was the finalization of the emergent themes that describe the phenomenon under study. See sample Tables 1, 2, and 3 below.

Sample Table 1: Significant Statements and Formulated Meaning

<b>Significant Statements</b>	<b>Code</b>	<b>Formulated Meaning</b>
1. When you go home, no one will welcome you. No child will ask for food or a request to have a playmate. When you arrive home, you are tired, and you just turn on the television set. No experience of having a child to disturb you.	Antonio, Transcript 2, Page 4, Lines 105-106	Feeling lonely at home when no children would welcome
2. There are times like family gatherings when I feel uncomfortable. Every family brought with them their children. We are different. I only have my husband.	Rosie, T2, Page 5, Lines 162-163	Out of place during family gatherings when other members brought children

Sample Table 2: Formulated Meanings and Clustered Themes

<b>Formulated Meaning</b>	<b>Clustered Themes</b>
1. Feeling lonely at home when no children would welcome	Feeling of loneliness
2. Longing for a child voice to welcome home from work	
3. Out of place during family gatherings when other members brought children	

Sample Table 3: Clustered Themes and Emergent Themes

<b>Clustered Themes</b>	<b>Emerging Themes</b>
Feeling of loneliness	Incompleteness
Feeling incomplete	

Fifth, we wrote the results based on the emergent themes providing an exhaustive description of the phenomenon. The struggles, coping mechanisms, and insights of the childless teachers were explained, giving a glimpse of the lives of childless teachers in the Philippines. After writing the findings, we asked an expert to review and check if we did an exhaustive description

of the phenomenon. Then, we submitted our findings for review and validation to the research committee of the school we are connected to.

Sixth, we checked the fundamental structure of the findings by checking on repetitive or redundant themes. In this step, we received help from the research committee and peer reviewers in refining the fundamental structure of the phenomenon. In the process, we removed some themes because they were redundant. After this process, we finally came up with three themes for struggles, two themes for coping mechanisms, and three themes for insights.

Lastly, we asked the informants to verify our findings if these indeed described their experiences. We gave them a copy of the findings. For those who were located in far-flung areas, we sent them through email. We got their validation of the findings through the signed participant's verification form.

## **Trustworthiness**

To ensure the trustworthiness, we strictly observed credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, as asserted by Guba (1981) and Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, and Spiers, (2002). Credibility is ensured when a researcher follows the process of "reflecting, sifting, exploring, judging its relevance or meaning, and ultimately elucidating the themes and essences that comprehensively, distinctly, and accurately depict the experience" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 32). Our experience of being childless teachers was an advantage. We also experienced pressures from colleagues, friends, relatives, and family members. We could easily relate to their experiences. We struggled and found ways to cope. Being childless couple-researchers gave us a sense of confidence in doing our task as researchers. Moreover, we subjected our outputs to member checking and debriefing. We showed the informants the findings of the study. We asked for their approval to ensure the correctness of the data. For debriefing, we requested the assistance of our researcher-colleagues and another expert in qualitative research to read and to evaluate our manuscript. We also asked the college's research committee to evaluate our work. Their role was to ensure that we followed the protocols of qualitative research. Finally, we established credibility through member checks. We let our participants read and review our findings to avoid personal bias on our side.

Transferability refers to the application of the findings into similar situations. As Merriam (1998) explained, transferability had to do with the use of the results in a different situation. In promoting transferability, we provided a thick description of the phenomenon of childless teachers in the Philippines by following the protocols of descriptive phenomenological research. We discussed how we recruited the participants and how we collected, analyzed, and interpreted the data. We explained each emergent theme supported by verbatim of the responses of the informants.

Dependability refers to consistency. We conducted an audit trail, which included our field notes, audio recording, notes, research committee and experts' comments, and peer reviewers' suggestions. We supported the results of the study with related studies about experiential learning, wherein knowledge generation became possible (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). We subscribed to the idea that the shared experience of the informants would make the study very dependable. We did this in the analysis of the data, making sure we identified the common themes from their responses. In the discussion section, we provided supporting literature.

Confirmability is the linking of the findings to the original sources of the data. To achieve this, researchers must show that the findings emanate from the source and not from their own predispositions (Shenton, 2004). It was a bit of a challenge on our part as researchers because we are also childless, and our bias might affect in the analysis and interpretation of the data. Hence, we made sure we focused on the data. We kept the original texts of the interviews

and provided audit trails of the process we went through. We reinforced flexibility and subjectivity through member checks, where we allowed our participants to confirm the accuracy of the findings.

### **Ethical Considerations**

For ethical consideration, we secured permission to conduct the study from the division offices of the Department of Education, where our potential informants belonged. We assured the prospective informants that we would uphold confidentiality and respect their rights. We also secured their informed consent by asking them to sign the informed consent form. In the encoding of names, we used pseudonyms to protect their privacy and to ensure confidentiality. We kept confidential any other information, such as the place or the school where the informants were working. We made adjustments subject to their pleasure if they felt uncomfortable during the interview. As a protocol, we were mindful of issues that were critical to disclose. We established a supportive and respectful relationship with the informants, as advised by Weis and Fine (2000). Though the informants were teachers, we allowed the use of any language so that they felt comfortable to share.

### **Results**

Based on the purpose of the study, we presented the results into three clusters-discussion on the struggles experienced by childless teachers in the workplace, coping mechanisms, and their insights.

#### **Struggles of Childless Teachers in the Workplace**

Our first line of questioning focused on the struggles of the informants. After the interviews, we analyzed the data, and three themes emerged. These were embarrassment, incompleteness, and pressures.

##### ***Embarrassment***

One of the shared experiences among childless teachers was the feeling of embarrassment. Ridicule from colleagues were some of their embarrassing experiences. For male informants, being childless sometimes put them in the center of jokes among male colleagues and friends. They were annoyed upon listening to their jokes and comments. Jojo, a 31-year old Grade 7 and Grade 8 teacher who had been married for 11 years, expressed his experience with peers.

I am tired of listening to my colleagues. It pisses me off to listen to them. In fact, I will cut the conversation by saying I am infertile (Transcript 2, Page 1, Lines 9-11).

Moreover, both male and female informants considered themselves victims of murmuring by colleagues and other people outside the school. Moreover, the ridicule and jokes from other teachers made them uncomfortable. Their colleagues would make fun of them and challenged them to do something even more to have a child. Nida, a 32-year-old Grade 10 teacher and married for just over 4 years, shared her experience saying,

Sometimes I am pressured by my colleagues. They would tease me. They said I should make it fast to have a baby. I should become pregnant soon. Even my students would tell me to have a baby. They asked why I do not have one (T1, P5, L129-131).

Based on the sharing of the informants, people, especially co-teachers, could create an embarrassing situation for childless teachers. They felt uncomfortable even if they understood their colleagues just pushed them to have a child. They felt embarrassed when their situation became the focus of the discussion. Though the jokes and comments were forms of challenges, the effect on them was disadvantageous. In short, they felt embarrassed.

### *Incompleteness*

Childless couples looked at themselves as different from others considering the majority of couples in society have children. Since the situation of our informants was involuntary childlessness, they felt something essential was lacking in their lives. For example, Romeo, a 40-year old Grade 10 teacher who had been married for just 3 years, shared his desire to have a child.

Our life is not complete because we have no children. It will be a different life experience if we have a baby. I think it is a good feeling of having children (T3, P5, L133-134).

Our informants said they felt lonely at home when there was no one (referring to a child) to greet them. Some of them expressed a desire for a child's voice to welcome them at home, coming from work. They also provided scenarios wherein they felt incomplete. For example, during family gatherings or reunions, childless couples felt incomplete because others brought with them their children. They acknowledged something was lacking in their married life. Some of them succumbed to self-pity and felt useless. They still had the concept of the family composed of a couple with children. Zenaida, a 47-year-old Grade 4 teacher who had been married for 18 years, was even more specific in narrating her own experience.

A family is not a family without a child. It is different, awkward. Sometimes, I blamed the Lord. I want to have a child. I want to work, but it is different with no child at all. Your efforts are useless. I love my work, but it is better to have a child. Who knows by luck it will come? I always pray to God to give me a child. I am the youngest in the family, but I am the only one who is childless (T3, P2, L44-46).

The narratives of Romeo and Zenaida painted a picture of childless teachers who are still longing for a child to complete their married life. Indeed, the struggle was real for the informants. It appeared that for them having a child makes a big difference. In other words, they considered themselves incomplete without children. However, they continued to pray for the grace they had been asking for, but for the moment, they had to live a life wanting to have a child someday.

### *Pressures*

Aside from embarrassment and incompleteness, childless couples had to hurdle the challenges brought about by their situation. All of them said there were pressures on their part.

These were more evident in their first 2 to 3 years in marriage when the expectation of having a child was high. In most instances, people challenged them to hurry since they were not getting younger. For instance, a 40-year-old Estelita, who was teaching Grade 7 students and had been married for 16 years already, described how people challenged her. She said,

If there are gatherings, my companions are bringing with them their babies while I have none. I have nothing to share and be proud of. Others would even say, "Oh, I already have a college student." I have nothing to say (T1, P2, L47-49).

Others would push them to seek medical help. Some would ask if they were not jealous of seeing others with children. Of course, they were, but the pressure was mounting on their part, just hearing these questions. They also had an internal struggle. For example, when they saw children, they would wish they were their own. Moreover, the pressures were more external than internal. Their colleagues were sometimes sarcastic though they seemed like they were just joking. Linda, a 31-year-old Grade IV teacher who had been married for 6 years already, expressed her frustration this way:

Some people would pressure us to have a baby. They would ask, "when are you going to have a baby? We already have many children while you do not have one. Others (referring to me) here do not know how to do it" (T3, P3, L76-77).

The statements of Estelita and Linda manifested the kind of pressures these childless teachers went through. Those jokes or challenges from colleagues and other people put the informants in a tough situation. Indeed, pressures were their constant companion when they were with people, especially with colleagues.

### **Coping Mechanisms of Childless Teachers**

We asked the informants how they coped with all the challenges they experienced. After analyzing all their responses using Colaizzi's method, two emerging themes were identified. These were escapism and optimism.

#### ***Escapism***

Childless teachers learned different strategies or coping mechanisms in dealing with their feelings and pressures from others. There were instances in school where colleagues would talk about their situation. Some offered words of advice, while others cracked jokes or gave degrading comments. In most cases, the childless teachers avoided the topic of their being childless. Antonio, a 50-year-old high school teacher who had been married for 18 years, shared his way of escaping from the comments of other people.

I just ignore them. I just laugh or ride on with their comments. I also think that I am not alone. Before, my world would seemingly collapse. However, I just think other people have no babies also (T2, P3, L89-90).

According to the informants, they instead made themselves busy with work to avoid being the subject of discussion among colleagues. Intentionally, they tried not to talk about their situation. They tried to ignore people and avoided negativities. Sometimes they responded with jokes just to escape from being the center of talks. Jojo expressed it this way when he said,

I just tried to avoid being the center of discussion. I initiated jokes or discussions away from the topic. Fortunately, my experience is not the same this time, unlike before (T2, P1, L24-25).

Childless teachers managed to evade embarrassment and pressure. As expressed by Antonio and Jojo, they found ways to escape. They created mechanisms not to be talked upon or even being ridiculed. Instead of entertaining the comments and jokes, they spent their energy doing their tasks well. In other words, they would rather focus on being productive than being pressured and embarrassed.

### *Optimism*

When informants noticed that their continuing efforts to have a child did not bear fruit after some time, most of them remained optimistic. First and foremost, they tried to stay positive. They remained hopeful. Maryjane, a 35-year-old teacher who had just been married for 3 years, shared her mindset.

I motivate myself that maybe it is not yet the right time. I avoid pressure by having positive thinking (T1, P5, L138-139).

Being childless was not a hindrance for them to be happy. They focused on their spouse. Second, most of the informants had accepted their situation as childless but remained hopeful and positive. They could not reverse the reality of the moment; however, they put their trust in God. Prayer had been their powerful weapon. For instance, Nida narrated her faith in God in this way:

Wait for God's perfect time. Do not lose hope. If it is God's will, He will give you a child. Think positive. Do not be too negative in life. Focus my time with my spouse to fill the emptiness in life. Just pray (T1, P6, L161-162).

Despite their situation, childless teachers remained optimistic. They stayed hopeful by putting their fate in God. Remaining optimistic was understandable because their situation was involuntary childlessness. They wanted to have a baby, and their strong faith in God allowed them to be optimistic. They did not lose hope that someday God would grant the desires of their hearts.

### **Insights of Childless Teachers**

We asked the informants about their insights as childless teachers. They also shared their advice with other childless teachers. Based on their responses, the following themes emerged. These were work commitment and acceptance.

#### *Work Commitment*

Despite the struggles experienced by the Informants, they were very proud of their commitment to work. Childless teachers were the most available if there was a need to go out to faraway places for specific school-related activities. Their availability could extend beyond the responsibilities within the school premises. Antonio, when asked about the advantage of being a childless teacher, share his views, saying,

There are many advantages. You can do so many things. You bring school work home and continue working. You can go anywhere. You can work easily. There is also no disturbance during work hours (T2, P4, L101-102).

Some informants explicitly articulated their commitment to the teaching profession. Because they were childless, they had fewer responsibilities in the family. Hence, bringing work at home was not a problem. They had enough time. There was less destruction at home for doing their job. For example, Estelita shared how she focused much on her job. She said,

When it comes to working, we can focus much on our students. You have more time. You have more focus on your students. My routine revolves around school, house, and church only. However, others would still insist it is better to have my own child (T1, Page 2, Lines 39-40).

Just like what Antonio and Estelita had shared, childless teachers showed how committed they were in their teaching profession. Their commitment was synonymous with the luxury of time since they did not have many responsibilities at home, particularly in taking care of children. They were available for extra work needed by the school. Thus, they had more time and energy to focus on their teaching vocation.

### *Acceptance*

We also asked the informants what suggestions they could give to other childless couples who are also teachers like them. The very first thing they shared was the need for acceptance of their situation. They suggested for other childless teachers to be positive and happy with what they have instead of looking at themselves as different from others. They needed to accept that they only have each other as couples instead of worrying about not having a child. Hence, they had to accept the reality and to focus on building a harmonious relationship by spending quality time with each other. For example, Nora, a 35-year old Grade 6 teacher, married for 7 years, shared her advice to other childless couples.

Strengthen your relationship with your husband. Being childless is not a problem at all. You have to accept that most people will have children (T3, Page 8, Lines 231-233).

Moreover, as part of acceptance, they pointed out the importance of faith in God. Since all of them still wanted to have a child while at the same time accepting their current situation, they put their trust in God for a miracle or for the guidance of living as childless couples. Eight of the respondents (Nora, Zenaida, Antonio, Estelita, Nida, Jojo, Nida, and Romeo) mentioned God in relation to their situation. In saying that other childless teachers need to accept and to put their faith in God, Jojo put it this way:

Live as a childless teacher. If this is what God has given, then accept it. If you carry it as a problem and then react negatively, the job will be affected (T2, Page 2, Line 40).

From the sharing of Nora, Jojo, and other informants, acceptance was a key to finding meaning in their lives despite their situation. Their suggestion to other childless teachers to find happiness was an expression of acceptance. Moreover, their faith in God was the fountain of strength for acceptance and happiness.



## Discussion

Interviewing the informants was not only fulfilling as a couple-researchers. It was also a source of enlightenment for us. We learned a lot from their sharing, such as how they handled the pressures. We also learned from their insights, particularly about remaining committed and effective in their works as teachers. Indeed, our journey with childless teachers opened a lot of insights and learning both as a childless couple and professional teachers. Their struggles, coping mechanisms, and insights were pieces of information for us, for other childless teachers, and society in general.

Childlessness is a global phenomenon, and it is growing in the Philippines. With insufficient attempts to study this phenomenon in the country, this study provided a glimpse of the lived experiences and insights of childless Filipino teachers. Being childless was not a comfortable journey for these teachers. They identified their struggles of embarrassment, incompleteness, and pressures. Culturally, the pressure was real. Parenthood for Filipinos was a “natural outcome of marriage” (Medina, 2001, p. 193). Hence, producing offspring created pressures for married couples. Understandably, childless Filipino couples experienced different struggles. These were not new since couples in other countries did have similar experiences. Childless women, for instance, experienced depression and other psychological challenges because of societal pressures due to childlessness (Batool & De Visser, 2016; Doyle & Carballedo, 2014; Onat & Beji, 2012). These childless Filipino teachers, though not articulating psychological effects, still shared the same sentiments brought about by the pressures from society, particularly from among their colleagues and family members.

Incapable of conceiving a child was not only burdensome but traumatic as well. It was where embarrassment, incompleteness, and pressures came in as experienced by the informants. Several studies showed how childless couples struggled to cope with the pressures. For example, childless people are stereotyped (Chancey & Dumais, 2009), misunderstood (Rich et al., 2011) and alienated (Rouchou, 2013; Tabong & Adongo, 2013). Some people question their manhood (Thomas, 2018). Nevertheless, both male and female childless individuals continue to withstand the storms of living normally because their acceptance in the society seemed to be an uphill battle, especially if one is a Filipino with so much expectation from society.

On the one hand, childless women informants felt the pressure with negative consequences. A study among South African women indicated that they experienced emotional turmoil as expressed in their disbelief, anger, and frustration. To cope with being embarrassed or pressured, these women subjected themselves to isolation or social withdrawal (Pedro, 2014), an act that led to lower social integration (Daibes, Safadi, Athamneh, Anees, & Constantino, 2018). Likewise, our informants showed the tendency to distance themselves from people. However, these negative experiences could affect their physical and mental health. In Australia, a study revealed a statistically significant finding of childless women having poorer health, vitality, social functioning, and mental health (Graham, Hill, Shelley, & Taket, 2011). Moreover, these struggles sometimes affect the whole fabric of childless women. The inability to conceive a child has a significant impact on women’s self-identity (Greil & Johnson, 2014). Thus, childless women continue to suffer physical and psychological problems.

On the other hand, men informants shared similar struggles. They were more embarrassed when they were with peers or groups of friends. Their experience is not far from other childless men. Pujari and Unisa (2014) discovered that they were expected recipients of taunts and sarcastic comments, which has a negative psychological impact. A study among 24 European countries found an association between childlessness and worsening psychological well-being for men respondents (Huijts, Kraaykamp, & Subramanian, 2011). Other studies

found childlessness could even lead to depression, anxiety, and other health problems (Lechner, Bolman, & van Dalen, 2007), and possibly worse for couples who had unhealthy relationships.

Moreover, childless men have greater risks of having physical and mental problems than women (Keizer & Ivanova, 2017). If they succumb to pressures, coupled with embarrassment and incompleteness, it could affect their mental and physical well-being. Eventually, it could also affect their teaching job. In the Philippines, childless individuals suffer more because of cultural expectations. In contrast, for countries with more tolerant norms, the psychological effect is less (Huijts et al., 2011).

Facing pressures and avoiding being caught up in negative feelings, we found interesting responses from the informants. They resorted to some forms of escapism or diversionary tactics. They looked for ways to escape from embarrassment and pressures by doing additional work. Childless couples managed to handle themselves in situations where they were very vulnerable despite the embarrassment, feeling of incompleteness, and pressures. They tried diverting topics when they became the center of the discussion. Goffman (1963), in his theory of stigma, explained what he called *social deviance* wherein the stigmatized individuals began distancing themselves from the stigmatizing community (Carnevale, 2007). They developed coping mechanisms, which were not only important but also necessary for them to avoid the adverse emotional and mental effect.

The informants had their ways of cutting the conversation like what Park (2002) called identity substitution. In her study among 22 childless individuals, Park (2002) found some of them would cut the conversation by simply telling others they could not possibly conceive a child. The informants also found other ways to avoid pressures and embarrassment, which was similar to women of other nationalities. As reported by Pedro (2014), women had other forms of escapism, such as shopping, extending work hours, taking more time to sleep, or resorting to anything that kept them busy. In other words, forced either by circumstance or simply by a personal decision, childless Filipino teachers in this study found ways to escape pressures and embarrassment.

Aside from escapism, the childless teachers were optimistic as one of their coping strategies. Filipinos are known for their deep spirituality (Abe-Kim, Gong, & Takeuchi, 2004; Hermannsdóttir & Ægisdóttir, 2016; Lagman, Yoo, Levine, Donnell, & Lim, 2014; Yalung, 2010). Since childlessness was involuntary for the informants, they were still hoping to have a child someday. A study affirmed this notion and added that childless women put their faith in God as a coping mechanism whenever they were stressed (Sharma, Subedi, Rai, & Upreti, 2015). We found it inspiring because even our female informant who had been married for 18 years was still praying for a child. Her situation is similar to those involuntary childless individuals who remain optimistic despite long years of infertility (Van Balen & Trimbos-Kemper, 1995). Thus, the hope of childless people remains high, coupled with their faith in God.

Surprisingly, very few of the informants were serious in getting counseling or medical help. They needed somebody to help them. According to Read et al. (2014), childless individuals need proper guidance when undergoing infertility treatment. If there is a wide dissemination of accurate information, medical help could be a significant factor for those childless couples, including the informants of this study to consider medical help.

Aside from their struggles and coping mechanisms, we were able to source out rich data from their insights and suggestions to other childless individuals and the academe in general. They were all in agreement with their availability and commitment to the teaching profession. Being childless was not a hindrance to their profession. Aside from the pressures from colleagues, most of their difficulties were mostly outside the classroom. They were happy to share that they were more available about their teaching profession. Not having huge responsibilities at home was an expected positive consequence. They had more time and energy

to advance their professional services. Hence, it is good to look at the brighter side of childlessness, specifically on the contribution of childless people to their families and society as a whole (Albertini & Kohli, 2009). Several studies found they were more generous to others as compared to those with children (Albertini & Kohli, 2009; Pollet & Dunbar, 2008; Tanskanen, 2015). In the case of the childless Filipino teachers, they poured out their availability and commitment to their chosen career. Without much research on childless teachers, this study could add to the body of literature as regards the affirmative contribution of childless teachers to the teaching profession.

Though the informants did not categorically say they were good teachers, their availability to do other tasks given by their superior was a clear advantage on the part of the latter. Childless teachers had more time to perform other tasks aside from teaching in the classroom because they had fewer responsibilities at home. Also, their commitment to their teaching profession could be an added value to their careers. Unquestionably, it could benefit the school, especially the students under their care.

Despite their strong desire to have a child, the informants were humble enough to accept the reality, but at the same time remaining positive about their situation. Being positive is one attitude among childless people (Koropecj-Cox & Pendell, 2007a), especially among women (Koropecj-Cox & Pendell, 2007b). Though this is difficult for involuntary childless individuals, they have no better option but to accept and to remain positive of their situation and to manage their emotions well (Hämmerli, Znoj, & Berger, 2010).

Happiness is one of the motivations of childless couples why they desire to have a child (Van Balen & Trimbos-Kemper, 1995). However, not having one should not be the reason not to be happy. It is one of the insights of the informants, as well as their advice to other childless couples. Filipinos are known to be happy people (SiokKuan & Juan, 2011), and in the case of our informants, this trait becomes an advantage. Happiness begins with acceptance. The informants accentuated this to encourage other childless couples to live a normal life. In a study among voluntary childless couples, Ramu (1984) found them having higher marital happiness compared to couples with children (CWC). Essentially, it would really depend on how childless couples looked at life from a positive stance.

### **Implications of the Study**

The findings of the study are essential pieces of information for childless teachers. School administrators may maximize childless teachers' availability and commitment to their profession. They can channel the energies of these teachers to be more productive in school. For other stakeholders in the academe, especially co-teachers, they may consider supporting these childless teachers by not causing much pressure on the latter.

The findings of the study are also a good source of information for students. Teachers can teach them about this phenomenon to make them understand that childless teachers live a normal life. It is neither a loss nor a curse to be in their situation. In addition, students could learn about commitment and availability in doing one's job. Furthermore, the findings could be useful for teachers to educate values to the students, especially regarding respect, acceptance, optimism, gratitude, commitment, and faith in God.

The strengths of this study are more on the sincerity of the informants, their new outlook on the world of childless Filipino teachers, and their suggestions to other childless individuals and society as a whole. This study not only widens our understanding of the lives of the informants but also opens other areas of interest to dig deeper into the world of childless Filipino teachers and that of other nationalities.

However, we recognize some limitations, like our bias, being a childless couple, as a methodological limitation, although we really tried to observe the protocols of a descriptive

phenomenological approach. It is important that we recognize this limitation because, in phenomenological research, the investigator must be transparent, including their biases (Janesick, 2011). Also, we are not able to show, based on the responses of the informants, how childlessness affects their dealings with children in school. Given this limitation, an investigation on whether teachers having children differ the way they handle students compared to those teachers without children could be good research to be undertaken in the future. Also, an in-depth study on people's perceptions and reactions towards childless couples could be another interesting topic that would paint a bigger picture of understanding this phenomenon. Lastly, this study does not make a comparison of the experiences between men and women, something that could also be worthy of consideration for future research.

## Final Remarks

This study highlights the struggles, coping mechanisms, and insights of Filipino childless teachers. The findings describe their struggles of embarrassment, incompleteness, and pressures from co-teachers and family members. However, optimism and escapism are their best coping mechanisms. They continue performing their school tasks despite societal pressures. They consider being childless a plus factor in terms of work commitment and economic advantage. They even advise other childless teachers to have a sense of acceptance of their situation. The results of the study may serve as an inspiration to other childless educators. Thus, not having a child is not the end of the world for childless teachers. It is a challenge and a way of life they are supposed to live as God wills it. Finally, we are positive that the findings would not mainly benefit the informants, but also other childless couples and other professionals, inside or outside of the academic milieu. They might consider their pieces of advice and insights to continue living a happy married life while at the same time being committed and effective in their work.

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