BECAUSE A MAN IS JUST A BONUS: A QUALITATIVE STUDY ON WOMEN WHO DECIDE NOT TO MARRY

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ABSTRACT

Indonesia is a collectivist country that adopts their traditional law called *adat* as part of their system besides constitution and Islamic law. Adat has sets of rules for marriage and much of the time, Indonesian are confirmed to the rule. But the survey shows that there is evidence of a woman who decided not to get married despite *adat* rules. Thus, this study explores the reason women who decided to not marry using a phenomenological approach to capture their experience leads to the decision. The study found that family is the main reason for their decision. They experience their parents' divorce and demanding family whose follow *adat* rule and suppress them to marry. Therefore, both participants decided marriage is not for everyone and not the only source of happiness.

Keywords: adat, collectivist, culture, marriage

INTRODUCTION

Great Dictionary of the Indonesian Language (KBBI) describes marriage as a bonding (contract) carried out in accordance with the provisions of law and religious teachings [1]. Marriage is a social institution of two or more people who are committed to having a relationship, in which a sexual activity in that relationship is legal and the offspring from the relationship is a part of their responsibilities [2]. Indonesian law based on the Constitution No. 1 the year of 1974, stated that marriage is a personal bond between a man and a woman as husband and wife that aims to construct a happy and eternal family based on the belief in One and Only God [3]. Therefore, marriage is a social bond between a couple that is approved by the law.

Like most Asian cultures, Indonesia is also a collectivist country that exercises interdependent self-construal, which is relating themselves more to collective relationships and identifying self as someone who serves a role and social relationship [4]. Indonesia has sets of rules and local law, named *Adat* [5]. *Adat* has an important role in the system and life structure of Indonesia [6]. Because the majority of citizen is Muslim, Islamic law also have an important role in social life regulation [7]. Thus, as collectivist citizens, Indonesian have three factors that guide them in their life, which are the constitution, *adat*, and Islamic law for Muslims.

Conformity, obeying the law, having supervision from social structure, and having social hierarchy are very important for a collectivist society [4]. Because living together in harmony is a very important matter for collective society. *Adat* has sets of a system that gives an individual their group responsibilities, social and economical relationship expectancy including some rules for marriage, inheritance, land-owning, and conflict resolution [5]. So, we can conclude that *adat* can be described as a set of rules that accommodate Indonesian to live in harmony as a part of a collective society.

Ida Ruwida, a sociologist in Indonesia [8] reveals that culture is one of the factors that influence the marriage trend in Indonesia. Mariage is also part of *adat* [9]. Usually, a woman is recognized by their marriage status [10], there is also an ethical influence that sees their lineage existence as affected by their descendants [11], [12]. Then beside the cultural influence, religion also influences marriage trends [13]. Not only from the socio-cultural side that demands woman to marry, social hierarchy consider marriage as a special occasion, because in marriage a man ensures the life of a woman.

The marriageable age in Indonesia is 21 years old at minimum for a woman and 25 years old at minimum for a man based on *Badan Kependudukan dan Keluarga Berencana Nasional/BKKBN* (National Population and Family Planning Agency) [14]. However, *Badan Pusat Statistik/BPS* (Central Bureau of Statistics) reveals that the median age of first marriage of a woman who has marriage experience at the age of 25-49 years old is 20.6 years old [15]. Marriage in Indonesia has a very strong bond with the *adat* system which has sets of rules, like marriageable age, productive and reproductive roles of a woman [16], [17]. In fact, there is a woman who has a good career who decided not to get married at all. In an urban area, the family structure already has significantly changed with the increase of women that delay their marriage until past their 30 years old of age [5]. This delay has some reasons, first, there is uncertainty in the economic condition in the future, second, there are differences in religious background, and third, there are changes in the value of benefits and attractiveness of marriage [18], [19].

BPS data reveals that the number of single people is increasing every year and young people who decided to marry are decreasing [15]. Meanwhile, Indonesian citizen is a collectivist society that upholds marriage rules. Jones [19] also stated that social control in Indonesia is stronger than the other South Asian country. A study by Indri Wulandari et al [20] and Pratama & Masykur [21] also stated that some women in Indonesia decided to not marry and that decision has a positive effect on them. Therefore, there are two questions that are explored in this research 1) the meaning of marriage for a woman who decided not to marry and 2) the meaning of the decision of not to get married for a woman who decided not to get married.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a qualitative phenomenology approach. The data was gathered using an in-depth interview technique. The interview is used to explore the participants way of thinking about their decision to not marry based on their life experiences.

Purposive sampling is used to choose participants with criteria (1) a woman who decided not to marry or woman who is not married nor has a marriage plan, (2) early adulthood, 20-30 years old [22]. The researcher distribute a survey to gather participants on social media Instagram which contain the question "*Is there someone among you or your close circle who decided to not marry?*". From the survey, two participants agree to join the research.

The first participant is NA, 22 years old. She is a second child and has one sibling. When the research was conducted she is in an undergraduate program at one of a state university in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. The second participant is AD, she is 27 years old. She works as an employee in an agency in Jakarta, Indonesia.

Thematic analysis was used in this research. It is due to thematic analysis provided the researcher finds a pattern of the theme that scatter in the data [23]. After finding the pattern, the second step is to classify or code the pattern by giving a label, definition, or description.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The research found that there are two main categories from the result of participants' exploration. There are the meaning and the reasons to decide not to marry. In the meaning of marriage, category participants reveal some major reasons, which are cultural demands, their view of commitments, and their view that marriage has to be equal.

Marriage meaning

Culture

Both of the participants stated that in Indonesian culture marriage is a view as an obligation. Marriage is an obligatory demand for a woman who lives in a collectivist society in Indonesia. Single women will have a negative label as someone who hasn't "sold" yet [24].

AD adds that marriage is a demand to build a family reputation. Family structure is also one of the factors that define marriage as a demand. Being the only woman in the family makes the burden of marriage heavier. AD believes that family reputation is when a father manages to marry off his daughter, especially the only daughter in the family. Meanwhile, NA stated that marriage has to be done based on what the person wants based on happiness or a pleasant feeling because of it.

> *"...for me, from what I see... if you have a daughter, especially the only one daughter, the pride of a father, especially in Java is when marrying off her only one daughter.. so I see it like that, more into (family) reputation..."*(AD)

> *"...because I think, if we doing something, it has to be fun, if it is not making happy, then for what we are doing it?..."* (NA)

Commitment

Marriage is viewed as a commitment by a couple. It means that they have to accept the way of thinking and their life goal of each other and promise to go through their life together. Commitment can safely build when each couple has an effort to compromise, for example doing a prenup or premarital agreement.

> *"...but we have to compromise, two people's families, so I think it could be fun if I can meet someone like that and can accept each other thinking..."* (AD)

> *"...so I view marriage as a... I see it as a commitment that decides by two people in a relationship.. like.. promised to.. okay, until whenever in this relationship is just the two of us here..."* (NA)

> *"...when we want to marry, okay, there is a compromise, but for example, as long as there is a prenup. If there is no prenup, how is it going to be?..."* (NA)

Equal

The analysis result reveals that the participants believe marriage is made to be equal between two individuals. Equal in terms of education and knowledge. Education here means that partners have the same knowledge level, so they can communicate effortlessly in their everyday life. Knowledge is used to be a bridge to build positive communication that aims to build a lively life.

> *"...Like a career, education has to be equal, if not equal, at least have the same level of knowledge level. Because if not, what is it for, then? What we will talk about?..."* (AD)

> *"...ah if he just becomes a burden in my life, then no.."* (NA)

The reason for deciding to not marry

There is some reason why the participants decided not to marry during the interview. The reasons can be divided into internal factors and external factors. The internal factors influence more for their decision. The internal factors consist of having a bad experience in a marriage, like a parents' divorce. Then, the families are very demanding, which makes participants feel that their movement is limited. The external factors are the world resources are limited day by day and the divorce that the participant sees among her close circle.

Internal
Parent divorce

NA's parents had to go through a divorce. Based on the divorce, NA believes that marriage is not for everyone. She stated that marriage is not the only way to reach happiness, because many other things can make her happy. NA also said that in a marriage dynamic there is a lot of inequality.

> *"...from my personal experience, honestly my parents are divorced, so I view that marriage is not a profitable investment... I mean.. people always say that marrying is meeting someone nice, same religion, happy, have children. Ya, my parent has the same religion, both of them are nice and smart, but something just feels off from them. I can not see them as a parent, but I see them as two adults who failed their marriage..."* (NA)

Family expectancy

The family have a big role in the participants personal life and become one of the reasons for their decision not to marry. Having a very demanding family makes them feel sick and limited to doing anything. Family rules and obligations to fulfill their expectancy make participants feeling not free. It made them full of consideration and become overthinkers. The expectancy and demand make AD not interested in the marriage concept because there is a big chance that AD will interact with more obligations as a life partner and the demand will become heavier.

> *"...like we have to think about other, and sometimes there are some boyfriends who have a lot of demands..."* (AD)

Have the different values of self and religion

Another strong factor as the reason participants choose not to marry is because they see that religious rules of marriage are too rigid. In Islam, marriage demands a wife to be submissive. Meanwhile, participants have their own will.

> *" ...like.. ah… (do) this violates woman nature, violate wife nature.."* (AD)
>
> *"...so I view that the marriage concept in Islam is not the same as what I believe and what I learned. So, I don't believe it. To simplify it, why me as an independent woman, who can produce my own money, can live on my own, but in marriage, I have to be submissive with my husband?..."* (NA)

Career as priority

After experiencing the divorce of her parents, NA took her mother as a role model. She believes that a woman can reach their goals even without a man. This concept influences her priority to more focus on her career. When her career goal is reached, her other dream is easier to get.

> *"...since I was in grade 6 until today, I was raised by a woman who shows that you can get what you want without a man. You can support yourself, work, and become a smart woman. Do you want to get money? If you are smart, you have a job, you have an education, you are respected. A man is just a bonus.."* (NA)
>
> *"...and honestly my goal is wanting a career like this, like that. It is also one of my strengths. I mean, for example, I want to have a master's degree overseas, doctoral degree overseas, and it is impossible with my high education I only become a mediocre person at work, right?..."* (AD)

NA statement is also not that far from what AD set as a goal. AD said that her career is her priority. AD usually writes her wishes from five to ten years ahead and marriage is not included in her wish list until 40 years old. AD's biggest goal is to become independent so she can be free from her demanding family and have the power to do what she wants.

"...so how to always work and gather a lot of money, so I can get out from home.. honestly not run away from home, but to.. like not stay at home, if someone needs something I will go home. But more than that I want to live my own life without parental supervision..." (AD)

External
Other people's negative experiences of marriage

NA does not only have a negative experience with marriage from her parents, but this experience also happens to people around her. Seeing their failed marriage with her own eyes affected NA and make her not sympathize with the marriage concept.

"...but what I see surrounding me, is a lot of failed marriages. I mean people that close to me, either my friends or families..." (NA)

World resources that decrease as the day go by also become NA's consideration to not marry. The participant thinks that humanity has to be wiser to plan their birth when the world loses its source day by day. Children are not just born and grow on their selves. Become a parent, especially a mother demanded to care for and raise the children with the best quality of resources.
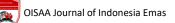
"... I feel that I want to be a mother who can nurture, I mean if we break down the definition of mother, a mother is someone who caring and everything. So, maybe I will just adopt than have to make effort to think I have to marry to have kids. Like environmental issues, this world source is decreasing and I feel if I force myself to marry and have children I won't make my kid's life better. Diseases getting crazier, like the world is chaotic, so why would I have to birth someone innocent and not choose me as a parent, to suffer like that, and later will justify why life is hard..." (NA)

Based on the interview with two participants who decided to not marry, family is the root of their decision. First, they have experienced their parent's divorce, which makes them view marriage as losing its essence. Someone who has high quality, like a good personality, equal education and knowledge, and a good career is no guarantee to have a long-lasting marriage and giving happiness. Secondly, demanding families make their children feel limited in their movement. Wulandari et al [20] reveal that freedom is one of the reasons that make a woman choose to be single. Because their freedom is not facilitated, participants can not express themselves as they are. Then they repressed this feeling, when they gain power they will create an unlimited place to express themselves.

Divorce and family demands suppress participants and make them want to get out of that situation. *"I have my own world and I have my own rule"* become an expression that can express their feeling. Both participants feel that every individual has their own needs and wants. They do not have to be obliged by rules or tradition. From their experience participants decided marriage is not an obligation. Marriage is not for everyone. They stated that other factors can make them achieve their happiness besides marriage. And happiness is a subjective matter for each individual. That statement is supported by Pratama and Masykur's [21] research that found a single woman experiences a positive effect, like feeling free and not burdened by family expectations.

The participants' choice is rarely chosen by the majority of Indonesian society because it contradicts with culture and *adat* of a collectivist group. Their choice is viewed as irrational. Irrational choices are able to happen because of some human weaknesses, like negative experiences and too much consideration that considers more of their superior opinion [25]. The participant choice is once again caused by divorce and family demands that are influenced by their *adat*.

One of the reasons that become a consideration of the meaning of marriage for the participants is equality. Equality is revealed as having the same personality and character,

knowledge, and life goal. Equality is a complex thing. There is some indicator of equal marriage, they are equal in the financial matter (equal divide of household expenditure), each couple has the same voice to decide a decision in the household, have an equal sexual relationship between need and passion is fulfilled for each individual, and feeling love and respect without underestimate partner [26].

Research shows that a single and will-marry person will more happy than someone who stays single [27]. But, when reaching thirty years old, the study stated that there is no difference between subjective well-being aspects between single who will get married or single who have not plan to marry. Subjective well-being is not the only aspect affected by marriage. There is no guarantee that an individual who marries will reach happiness. Marriage happiness depends on how much benefit a partner gets and how close they are with each of their life goals [27].

CONCLUSION

A younger adult woman who decided not to marry has any consideration, like the meaning of marriage and their career. Marriage should not just be based on tradition, but more than that. Building marriage has to be based on internal feelings, related to pleasant feelings and effort to always compromise for each other goals and dreams. The priorities are to become more independent and have power, so the needs can be achieved. A man is not a priority for the participants. The participant said "*a man is just a bonus*", in that statement participants underlined that woman does not have to always be submissive to a man.

The view of marriage in this study is scope from a modern point of view. More extensive research can be held by exploring information from the more conservative participants.
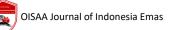
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Author's contribution

VGSP designed the research, conducted the interview, and analyzed the data. VGSP, FI, and NAP write, edit and review the final manuscript.

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