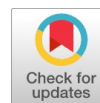


# Exploring the Influence of Appreciation and Effective Communication on Marital Happiness Among Working Childless Individuals

Yogita Shrivastava, Anviti Gupta



**Abstract:** Marital happiness reflects the individual's subjective evaluation of one's well-being or satisfaction within the context of the marriage relationship. Although having kids is often considered a factor in determining the happiness of married couples, the current research aims to explore the influence of appreciation and effective communication on the marital happiness of childless married individuals. This research paper investigated happiness among childless individuals and the role of gratitude and effective communication in cultivating happiness within their marital relationship. The paper also examined the role of relationship duration (years of marriage) on marital happiness. For this purpose, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 individuals who were childless. Through thematic analysis, six major themes and 11 sub-themes emerged. It was found that there are individual differences in showing appreciation; however, the subtle ways of demonstrating appreciation, as well as proficient communication from the other partner, shaped the overall happiness within the marital partnership. Despite the emotional and social problems faced by these individuals, the positive and constant support upheld their relationship in thick and thin. Variation was found in the expression of appreciation and communication among partners. By examining the lived experiences and perceptions of childless couples, this research highlights the importance of gratitude and effective communication in fostering long-term satisfaction. It would also provide practical strategies for cultivating thriving relationships in contemporary society, offering valuable insights into achieving happiness in relationships, regardless of whether one has children or not.

**Keywords:** Appreciation, Effective Communication, Gratitude, Positive Psychology, Marital Happiness, Marital Satisfaction.

## I. INTRODUCTION

According to the PERMA model, positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishments are the building blocks of happiness, and having meaningful relationships is fundamental to achieving this happiness. Relationships amplify joy, laughter, a sense of belonging, and pride in achievements [1]. Close associations with people

provide unwavering support and help as an espousal pull through difficult times.

It is also established that an individual's happiness is interdependent on social relationships [2], and a relationship with a cordial partner is highly associated with individual happiness [3].

It is said that children are the bonding factor in marital relationships. People who have children tend to be happier than those who are childless [4]. There is a strong societal belief worldwide that having children enhances the well-being of parents, especially women. In our Indian tradition, couples are often expected to conceive within the first year of their marriage. Indian movies and dramas frequently glorify parenthood. According to some research, there are several childless people, especially women, who face discrimination due to childlessness [5].

Researchers have investigated the various consequences of childlessness on societies and lifestyles, finding that those affected tend to experience lower life satisfaction [5]. However, contradictory results have also been reported [6]. It has also been established that child-rearing may limit or interrupt the breadth of communication between couples. While childlessness may prove stressful or grim, couples can make both internal and external efforts to improve the quality of communication with their companions and to receive support from family and friends who understand their condition. They achieve this by avoiding conflict, engaging in more discussion, and consulting with others [7]. In this context, the current study aimed to uncover the subtle ways in which appreciation and effective communication contribute to greater happiness. This study aimed to unfold the ways of cultivating healthy relationships in contemporary society.

## II. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

### A. Appreciation

Appreciation can be defined as understanding the value and importance of anything, whether an event, a person, a conduct, or an object, and having a positive emotional connection to it [8].

"The term appreciation is used interchangeably with gratitude, which is described as a feeling of thankfulness and recognition of the worth of a person, situation, or occurrence [9]. In marital relationships, appreciation arises from the positive qualities of a partner as well as from the care, effort, and concern that the other partner shows for the relationship. Research has shown that receiving appreciation, expressing it, and verbally expressing gratitude are protective factors for

Manuscript received on 27 May 2025 | First Revised Manuscript received on 07 June 2025 | Second Revised Manuscript received on 21 August 2025 | Manuscript Accepted on 15 September 2025 | Manuscript published on 30 September 2025.

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# Exploring the Influence of Appreciation and Effective Communication on Marital Happiness Among Working Childless Individuals

relationship satisfaction [10]. The benefits of appreciation in romantic relationships have been identified, regardless of gender, relationship duration, and cultural background [11]. Happiness is primarily influenced by life satisfaction, and, conversely, positive emotions can help individuals build their level of well-being and life satisfaction [12].

## B. Effective Communication

Communication plays a vital role in any relationship. Communication, both verbal and nonverbal, not only helps satisfy one's needs but also fosters a sense of bonding between partners [13]. Effective communication involves not only expressing emotions but also listening and understanding the perspective [14]. Another essential aspect of healthy communication is the ability to handle conflict constructively.

## C. Relationship Happiness

Relationship happiness is widely recognized as a universal measure of relationship quality. In literature, it is often used interchangeably with terms such as relationship success, well-being, adjustment, and satisfaction [15]. It is a subjective evaluation based on an individual's perception of their relationship. Studies have shown a significant correlation between relationship duration, well-being, and overall relationship fulfilment [16].

## D. Childless Person

A childless person refers to someone who does not have children, either due to biological reasons or by choice. According to the World Health Organization (1991), childless women are women who are reaching the end of their reproductive lives without giving birth or having children [17]. Depending on personal goals, childlessness can enhance life satisfaction for some individuals, while it can decline it for others [18].

## III. THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING

The theoretical underpinning provides the base for conceptualising how appreciation and effective communication contribute to marital happiness among working childless couples. This study is based on the following key theories.

### A. Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964)

According to this theory, reciprocal exchange where people want to maximize rewards and minimizing costs plays a crucial role in the maintenance of any relationships [19]. Appreciation and effective communication serve as positive reinforcements in marriage, increasing marital satisfaction by fostering emotional security and mutual respect.

### B. Equity Theory (Adams, 1965)

According to equity theory, perceived fairness in the relationship, as perceived by both partners, helps achieve satisfaction and happiness [20]. Appreciation and good communication bring a sense of balance and can contribute to a feeling of being valued and emotionally fulfilling for both partners. One possibility is that the absence of children brings additional sources of emotional connection, communication, and appreciation between couples.

### C. Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1969)

This theory stressed the importance of stable emotional ties in adult relationships [21]. To promote emotional intimacy and reduce marital stress, the bonds can be strengthened through effective communication and mutual admiration. This is particularly important for those without children, who often greatly depend on one another for emotional support.

### D. Theory of Marital Stability (Gottman, 1994)

The significance of positive communication patterns in maintaining marital happiness is emphasised by Gottman [22]. Constructive conflict resolution can be achieved by appreciation and effective communication between couples, preventing negative spirals that could lead to dissatisfaction and separation.

## IV. METHODS AND MATERIAL

### A. Research Design

We sought to understand the role of appreciation and effective communication in cultivating happiness among childless couples, as well as whether the duration of the relationship affects their perception of happiness. To understand the experiences of participants, an exploratory (qualitative) research design was used. Using the thematic analysis approach developed by Braun and Clarke [23], themes were extracted from the data. It enabled a more in-depth and comprehensive examination of the entire dataset.

### B. Participants

A total of 12 childless individuals were interviewed using a snowball sampling approach. Persons of more than 35 years of age, five years of marriage, and both working were included in the study.

### C. Instrument

The researchers developed a Semi-structured interview schedule based on previous literature and subject expertise. To collect participants' sociodemographic and professional details, a background information questionnaire was developed. The interview guides for gratitude, appreciation, and communication consisted of 12 open-ended questions.

### D. Interview Process

Participants were contacted via phone calls and asked for permission and consent to record their responses. They were shortly informed about the study. Then, interview sessions of approximately 30-45 minutes were conducted either in person or via video calls, depending on the respondents' availability. Interviews were conducted in Hindi and English. Responses were recorded using an audio tape, and the researcher kept a notebook, jotting down the crucial points during the session.

### E. Data Management

The interviews conducted in Hindi were transcribed and translated using a simple transcription method by the first author. To maintain the anonymity of respondents, we use their initials instead of their full names. The authors made sure to write down precisely what was said in the audio recording, including any emotions like laughter or excitement,



interruptions, pauses, how the words were said (intonation), and when people talked at the same time (simultaneous talk).

## F. Data Analysis

Using a thematic analysis (inductive method), codes were identified, themes were organised, and data patterns were drawn. Coding of the data started immediately after the first few interviews, and a codebook was developed. The transcripts were closely read and reread by the authors to familiarise themselves with the data. In this paper, we tried to find out happiness among childless couples and the role of gratitude, appreciation, and effective communication in cultivating happiness within them, through the reflexive

approach in which themes were produced by arranging codes around a relative fundamental commonality, or "central organizing concept that the researcher deduced from the data Braun & Clark, (2006) [23].

## G. Participants Characteristics

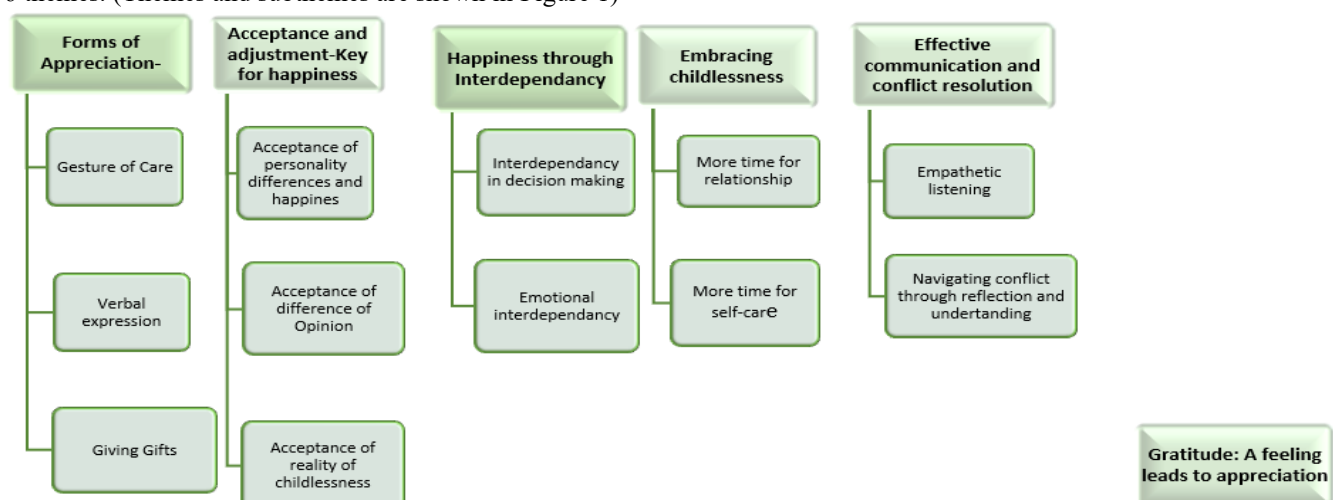
The working childless individuals were an integral part of the study. Most participants were above 38 years old, with a mean age of 45.33 years. Most respondents were from higher socio-economic backgrounds and resided in urban areas. Two were couples, and the rest were individuals. The characteristics of the participants are shown in the following table.

**Table-I: Characteristics of Respondents**

	Respondents	Gender	Age	Education	Occupation	Socio-economic status	Years of marriage	Reason
1	AG	Female	55	PhD	Professor	HSC	37	Biological
2	AG	Male	75	Double masters	Academics	HSC	37	Biological
3	MB	Female	42	MA, MEd	Private sector	Middle	15	Biological
4	AB	Male	45	M.Com	Private Sector	Middle	15	Biological
5	SS	Female	38	PG	Entrepreneur	HSC	10	Busy with my career, so I could not have
6	MB	Male	49	PG in finance	Aviation sector	HSC	8	Late marriage, so I don't have
7	TM	Female	39	MPhil, PhD, Post Doc	Assistant professor	HSC	6	Busy with my career, so I could not have
8	TK	Female	39	MSc	Dietician	Middle	8	Biological
9	MG	Female	38	PhD	Assistant Professor	HSC	6	I was busy with career building.
10	MP	Male	42	Post Graduate	Govt Servant	Middle	15	Biological
11	BC	Female	44	Post Graduate	Entrepreneur	HSC	6	Biological
12	ST	Female	38	PhD	Psychologist	Middle	12	Biological

## V. RESULTS

The interviews were read and reread multiple times, and on that basis, codes were prepared, grouping 12 sub-themes under 6 themes. (Themes and subthemes are shown in Figure 1)



**[Fig.1: Mapping of themes and subthemes from Respondents]**

### A. Different forms of Appreciation

Appreciation plays a significant role in marital satisfaction and happiness. It is the backbone of any relationship, and the beneficial effect of appreciation is evident.

This has been evident in both the recipient and the expression, as well as in childless couples. Almost all individuals



## Exploring the Influence of Appreciation and Effective Communication on Marital Happiness Among Working Childless Individuals

admitted that they and their spouses appreciate each other not only in the form of praise but in various ways, and spouses also feel appreciated when their partners do so. There were individual differences in expressing appreciation and gratitude. Some of the common responses are discussed in the following subthemes

### i. Gesture of Care

Most participants reported feeling appreciated when their partner shows care, helps with household chores, and expresses love and affection through hugs and cuddles. Although one of them thought that her husband should vocalise his appreciation, she also acknowledged the care he had shown.

*"As a grown-up, I understand his way of appreciation by the deeds, action, care, love, guidance. Sometimes he also scolds, but I find it kind of support & appreciation"* (AG-F).

The above respondent admitted that at the beginning of her marriage, she enjoyed hearing words of appreciation. Still, as time passed, she can now understand the form of appreciation her husband shows her.

A spouse who shared the same response offered a similar thought on the way to appreciate.

*"We appreciate each other, but our ways are different. She voices appreciation, my appreciation is expressed in the form of love and extra care, in the form of looking after every need she has and protecting her from any hurt, but she is different; she speaks out and verbal in saying things and appreciation"* (AG-M).

Respondent also said that, although she appreciates the qualities of her husband, verbal appreciation is not necessary for that.

*"I appreciate the patience, responsibility and sacrifices made for me, but for me expressing gratitude verbally is not that much needed. Little expression but actions, hugs and cuddles make me happy and feel good about him."* (TM-F)

*"I am not expressive, but for me, care is the form of love and appreciation."* (MB-M)

### ii. Verbal Expression.

Regardless of gender, for some respondents, verbal expressions of appreciation were important. Two individuals said they like to verbalize their gratitude, and in the initial phase, they expected the same from their partner, but as time elapsed, they understood that their partners are not vocal but are caring towards them

*"I do appreciate verbally, but he never uses words, and this is one area of complaint. You feel good when you hear words. It raises self-esteem and strengthens a bond."* (AG-F)

*"I do appreciate verbally, use words to appreciate. He does not talk much and is not expressive, but his appreciation I can find in his actions."* (AG-F)

On the other hand, one male respondent noted that his wife is vocal, but for him, assisting her is a form of appreciation.

*"We do appreciate each other, she is more vocal, upfront, but I think helping in household chores and taking care are a form of my appreciation."* (MB-M)

### iii. Giving gifts

Although they do not often discuss gifts, according to one participant, she feels appreciated when her spouse brings gifts, and in her view, it is one spouse's way of expressing gratitude. A gift, however trivial, can bring happiness.

*"He used to give gifts to me on anniversaries for 10 years, but now at least he brings flowers and tries to make me happy"* (MB-F)

## B. Acceptance and Adjustment- Key to Happiness

Acceptance involves considering and accepting both the positive and negative aspects of others and oneself. This realization certainly brings understanding and courage to adjust. Relationships are all about acceptance and adjustment, whether with self or others. The same thing is reflected in our conversations with individuals who do not have kids.

Childless couples often accept that there are differences in opinion and personality, as well as variations in how they express gratitude. However, if one wants to live with that person or make harmonious adjustments in married life, compromises are necessary.

### i. Acceptance of Personality Differences and Adjustment

Two of our respondents had similar personalities, but the rest had partners of different types, and they accepted this as a fact, making it easy to adjust over time.

*"I tried to adjust more than he adjusted to me. I always thought that in a relationship, there is no second chance. If you have a relationship, you must make it work. He always sees logic in any situation, and finally, to resolve it, I keep mum. It was 34 years ago. After so many years, he started to say sorry and try to make it up, gradually we learn to adjust in a relationship,"* (AG-F).

One of the female respondents said that although she gets angry more often, her husband always takes the initiative and tries to adjust to her.

*"He always takes the first step in resolving problems, though I get upset more than he does. In my case, he is talkative; how hard it is, he cannot sleep without talking to me."* (MB-F)

### ii. Acceptance of Differences of Opinion and Adjustment

Individuals who value each other's perspectives find marriage to be a happy union; this opinion is reflected in our respondents

*"How respecting each other is the foundation of everything, each person is important in a relationship. Not having selfish intentions and respecting each other's perspective makes us more comfortable and happier."* (MB-M)

One of the respondents noted that it is sometimes impossible to resolve conflicts due to extreme differences in opinion. Therefore, forgetting things and forgiving a partner becomes the key to adjustment and happiness. While two respondents said that they practice forgiveness if differences of opinion persist. Almost everyone agrees that during intense arguments, discussion



is rarely helpful, so it is essential to understand and take a step back.

### iii. Acceptance of the Reality of Childlessness and Adjustment

Some people have tried their best to have children but have not succeeded. After trying for so many years, they eventually accepted the situation, but this does not mean they do not feel a void. But acceptance gave them the courage to look after their partner and themselves as a whole

*"At the beginning, we used to feel a vacuum, but now we make compromises and all is going well. It is not possible to be sad always in the absence of kids. Each other's support is important"* (MB-F)

*"Now we must accept that we have no children. We do feel sad, feel the vacuum, and we get upset. But both of us are for each other, we promise to be there for each other, and that gives us strength."* (AG-F)

## C. Happiness Through Interdependency

Dependence results in perseverance in interactions and duration in relationships, and dependence is the state of depending on a partner to fulfil essential requirements [24]. In our study, respondents agree that though they are free to make their own decisions, both are dependent on each other for their professional and personal growth. Regardless of gender, they said that due to their spouses, they can work freely and help each other in their personal and professional growth.

### i. Interdependency in Decision Making.

Decision-making is a crucial part of life, and in our study, we found a collaborative nature to decision-making processes, where both parties discuss the issues, attempt to find solutions, and seek help to make informed decisions.

*"We support each other's professional decisions. When I decided to quit my job and follow my passion, she supported me and assured me that all finances would be managed."* (MB-M).

### ii. Emotional Interdependence

When a partner receives emotional support from their spouse and is emotionally available to them as well, both feel happiness and contentment. According to the Respondents, their partners' emotional support helped them a lot.

*"I went through ups and downs throughout life, and he was always emotionally supportive to me. He always stood by me and helped me to grow. He helps with all the problems and adjustments in the family while undergoing the chaos of not having kids. Emotionally, he never left me alone. We go everywhere together, to parties, friends, and social gatherings; he never goes for an outing without me."* (AG-F)

*"He listens to me and listens more than I do. We support each other very well. When he gets nervous and worried, I try to boost his mood and give him courage, and he also consoles me when I get upset"* (MB-F)

## D. Embracing Childlessness

Not having kids of their own, though wanting them desperately, can cause significant mental trauma for a person. At the same time, the decision to choose not to have children challenges societal norms and traditional expectations about

family and parenthood. Although they face issues, they also said that not having kids has its positive side. The following subthemes discuss some common responses.

### i. More Time for Relationship

Often, couples' communication revolves around children, and conflict arises as a result, especially for mothers who do not spend time with their spouses, which can lead to dissatisfaction.

*"As there are no kids, no argument and discussion on that topic, our mind easily gets diverted,*

*And we can work a lot. If you cannot give 100%, then there's no point in having kids. Now we can devote our time to our relationship."* (MB-M)

### ii. More time for self-care

For Indian parents, parenthood comes with great responsibility: to raise, educate, and provide higher education, among other things. One of the respondents said that although she had tried many times to have children, she had now started to see the positive side. She spends money on herself, even asking her husband for gifts, as there is less worry about saving it for their children.

*"We compromised with whatever we have. Now we think we must lead our life*

*without kids, so no worry to save money for the future, we spend on ourselves and can take care of each other."* (MB-F)

## E. Effective communication and conflict resolution

Communication plays a vital role in the happiness of relationships for both childfree and childless individuals. According to respondents, listening, reflecting, resolving conflicts, and compromising are helpful communication skills that impact relationship happiness.

### i. Empathetic listening

Listening empathetically fosters trust, which in turn leads to happiness in marriage. Our respondent agrees that their spouse should listen to their perspective and help resolve both personal and professional conflicts.

*"Whenever I am in trouble in the office or with any other people, I tell him to please*

*listen and be ready to listen, listens empathetically and solves my problem when I request help in resolving issues better, and listens actively, though he is not an active listener"* (AG-F)

On the other hand, respondents who were unhappy in their relationships acknowledged that, from the beginning, their husbands had avoided listening to them and couldn't understand their perspective, which was the central issue of dissatisfaction.

*"There was a communication problem from the first day. He never opened up to me. We*

*hardly get time to sit together and speak. At the time of conflict, he never listens to me and never tries to understand my perspective, always thinks about others"* (TK-F)

### ii. Navigating Conflict Through Reflection and Understanding.

Our participants acknowledge that conflict is an inherent part of life. In the process, they

# Exploring the Influence of Appreciation and Effective Communication on Marital Happiness Among Working Childless Individuals

learn valuable lessons by taking time to cool down, actively listening to different perspectives, and recognising recurring mistakes. Most of them talked about things after they cooled down.

*"Once there was an argument, then we discussed it after a cooling time, and after listening, I realised that I am making the same mistake again" (MB-M)*  
*"When there is disagreement, we never keep it in mind; we resolve it with understanding . We give each other a cooling period. He then comes back to me and we discuss" (SS-F)*

## F. Gratitude: A Feeling that Leads to Appreciation

Gratitude is described as a feeling of being thankful for one person, circumstance, or event, and being aware of its value (Berger, 2000). Discussion with the respondent revealed that partners often appreciate and overlook any flaws in their partners due to the positive aspects of their relationships, as well as the efforts they make and the care and concern they show, which reflects their gratitude towards them.

*"In a relationship, I feel grateful as I feel comfortable with being with my husband, feel blessed and fulfilled to be in a marriage as he was always supportive of my decision of not planning for kids, though he wanted to have." (TM-F)*  
*"In some cases, he is authoritative, but only because of him am I alive. I underwent treatment for 20 years, and went to the baba, the temple, everywhere. Even once I was admitted to the ICU due to some treatment, and at that time my husband decided, 'No more suffering!'. He always stood by me and helped me to grow. He also helped me in developing my career. I always feel grateful for having him as a partner. (AG-F)*

## VI. DISCUSSION

The present study explored the nuanced dynamics of appreciation and communication in marital happiness among working childless individuals, while also examining the role of relationship duration. Thematic analysis of participants' narratives revealed that appreciation, acceptance, emotional interdependence, and effective communication significantly contribute to sustaining happiness in childless marital relationships.

### A. Forms of Appreciation and Marital Happiness

Appreciation emerged as a crucial theme influencing the quality of relationships and overall well-being. The findings support earlier research highlighting appreciation as a key mechanism for fostering emotional bonds and psychological well-being [25]. Participants consistently emphasized that genuine, action-oriented appreciation fostered emotional intimacy. Many female participants described how their spouses' involvement in household responsibilities, decision-making, and emotional support during difficult times made them feel appreciated. Male participants also reported feeling valued when their partners showed concern and care, especially during emotionally challenging situations.

This mutual acknowledgement often manifested not just through words, but also through tangible support and presence, which aligns with prior findings that non-verbal

acts of kindness and attentiveness usually carry more emotional weight than verbal affirmations [24]. Appreciation thus appeared to serve a dual function, enhancing emotional security and reinforcing reciprocal care within the marriage.

Furthermore, in contrast to some stereotypical assumptions regarding childless marriages being emotionally hollow, participants reported feeling even closer due to their shared journey, much like Bastian and associates' observation, where they found that when team members shared an adverse experience, it led to increased supportive interactions between them [26]. Thus, the shared adversity prompted couples to be more emotionally responsive and appreciative of each other's efforts in navigating societal pressures.

### B. Acceptance and Adjustment

Acceptance was another prominent theme. In close interpersonal relationships, acceptance is often equated with unconditional positive regard—a willingness to embrace a partner's flaws and imperfections [27]. Participants in this study reiterated this idea, stating that personality differences and disagreements were seen as natural aspects of any relationship. The ability to accept each other as they are enables greater emotional flexibility and reduces interpersonal tension, fostering deeper satisfaction.

These findings align with those of Kappen et al. (2018) [28], who found that higher acceptance is correlated with greater relationship satisfaction. In this study, acceptance paved the way for better adjustment. When individuals acknowledged their partner's limitations and accepted their circumstances, particularly the inability to conceive, they found it easier to adapt and maintain marital harmony.

Such psychological adjustment was further supported by an empathetic understanding of each other's emotional pain, especially regarding childlessness. This mutual comprehension, born from acceptance, appeared to strengthen their emotional bond and contributed positively to relationship satisfaction.

### C. Interdependency and Emotional Reciprocity

Another compelling theme was interdependency. Participants described their relationships as deeply intertwined, with decisions and life choices reflecting a high degree of mutual reliance. This dynamic is consistent with the interdependence theory of Kelley & Thibaut [29], which posits that relationship satisfaction and commitment are outcomes of mutual dependence and shared goals.

Participants emphasized a strong sense of "teamwork," where both partners sought outcomes beneficial for each other, reflecting a win-win mindset. Their experiences align with those of Sels et al. (2016) [30], who found that emotionally interdependent couples report higher levels of relationship satisfaction. Notably, childlessness, in this context, became a bonding factor. Rather than distancing them, it brought them closer, as both partners were navigating the same emotional landscape.

Additionally, the couples in this study often mentioned shared decisions regarding remaining childless. Their collective stance against societal expectations reflected a level of mutual respect and understanding that enhanced



marital happiness. These findings also support the notion that when couples align in their life choices—despite societal resistance—it results in stronger partnerships [31]

#### D. Embracing a Childfree Life

Contrary to prevalent assumptions that childlessness leads to chronic dissatisfaction or emotional distress, this study observed a more nuanced reality. While many respondents admitted that the initial phase of infertility or voluntary childlessness was difficult, over time, they discovered alternate sources of meaning, such as marital companionship, financial stability, and self-care. This aligns with Abramowska-Kmon et al. (2023) [32], who assert that many childless adults successfully build fulfilling lives through alternative roles in marriage, friendship, and careers, using these as a coping mechanism.

Interestingly, participants described a sense of relief and emotional closeness that emerged from not having children. The ability to spend quality time together, focus on each other's needs, and prioritize shared goals without the demands of parenting contributed to their well-being [33]. This perspective is supported by the findings of Asimwe et al. (2022)[4], who highlighted the role of acceptance and spiritual coping in managing childlessness.

#### E. Communication as a Pillar of Relationship Satisfaction

Effective communication has been identified as a foundational pillar of marital happiness for childless individuals. Prior research recognizes communication as a critical determinant of relational quality [34]. In this study, participants particularly emphasised the importance of empathetic listening and reflective dialogue.

Many respondents noted that the absence of children allowed for more focused spousal communication, potentially circumventing the parental communication barrier observed in families with children [35]. Participants stressed that when both partners were emotionally attuned and practised active listening, misunderstandings were minimised, and emotional intimacy deepened.

This was especially crucial for female respondents who often bore the brunt of societal pressure and familial expectations. Having a supportive spouse who communicated patiently and non-judgmentally helped them navigate emotional lows and reinforced their marital bond. Conversely, a lack of open dialogue was linked to dissatisfaction and emotional distance, reinforcing the importance of ongoing, empathetic communication in sustaining happiness.

#### F. Gratitude as a Reinforcement of Appreciation

The participants' narratives also underscored the interlinking of appreciation and gratitude. Drawing from Fagley [24] and Tudge, appreciation strengthens relational satisfaction. Respondents conveyed immense gratitude for their spouse's support, especially during emotionally trying periods. They noted that this gratitude often made them more forgiving of their partner's flaws and more inclined to reciprocate kindness.

Gratitude served as an emotional buffer, mitigating the impact of potential conflicts and fostering a more positive relational climate. It cultivated a cycle of mutual respect,

which in turn contributed to a stable and nurturing marital environment.

#### G. Relationship Duration and Marital Attitudes

Interestingly, the study found differences in perceptions of childlessness and marital satisfaction based on the duration of the relationship. This supports the study by Træen & Kvalemm [36], which proposed that over time, more realistic expectations, deeper emotional connections, and refined communication skills may develop between the couple, leading to a more positive outlook on marriage and a more substantial commitment to the relationship [36]. Couples who had been married for 5–7 years appeared more open, adaptable, and less distressed about not having children. In contrast, those married for over 15 years seemed to have undergone a transformative journey—from grief to acceptance—resulting in deepened emotional ties. These findings suggest that time can be a healing factor, facilitating greater acceptance and appreciation over the years.

This time-bound variation highlights the dynamic nature of marital relationships and suggests that consistent appreciation and communication can foster resilience and satisfaction, even in the absence of children.

### VII. CONCLUSION

This study sheds light on how appreciation and communication influence marital happiness among working childless individuals. It reveals that appreciation—mainly when expressed through actions—and effective communication are critical elements in maintaining emotional intimacy and relationship satisfaction.

Despite societal pressures, couples found strength in mutual support, acceptance, and gratitude. Appreciation served as a motivational and bonding tool, while communication ensured understanding and emotional connection. Participants reported that practicing empathy, listening attentively, and offering emotional validation played vital roles in fostering a happy marriage.

The role of relationship duration further added complexity, suggesting that over time, couples often transition from distress to deeper companionship. These findings imply that fostering appreciation and communication skills can help childless couples build resilient, fulfilling relationships.

#### A. Limitations and Observations

Several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the study sample consisted of educated, working individuals, which limited the generalizability of the findings to other socioeconomic groups. Second, the focus was confined to the marital domain, while other aspects such as extended family and community dynamics were not explored. Third, the subjective nature of qualitative responses means that social desirability bias or personal interpretations could have influenced the data.

During data collection, researchers observed hesitancy among potential participants, mainly from male partners, highlighting the sensitivity of the topic. Recruitment challenges further indicate that societal stigma surrounding childlessness remains a barrier to open discussion.



# Exploring the Influence of Appreciation and Effective Communication on Marital Happiness Among Working Childless Individuals

This in-depth analysis enriches our understanding of how appreciation, gratitude, communication, and acceptance interact to shape the happiness of childless working couples. Future research can explore these themes in diverse socio-cultural settings and longitudinal contexts to offer broader insights.

## DECLARATION STATEMENT

After aggregating input from all authors, I must verify the accuracy of the following information as the article's author.

- **Conflicts of Interest/ Competing Interests:** Based on my understanding, this article has no conflicts of interest.
- **Funding Support:** This article has not been funded by any organizations or agencies. This independence ensures that the research is conducted with objectivity and without any external influence.
- **Ethical Approval and Consent to Participate:** The content of this article does not necessitate ethical approval or consent to participate with supporting documentation.
- **Data Access Statement and Material Availability:** The adequate resources of this article are publicly accessible.
- **Author's Contributions:** The authorship of this article is contributed equally to all participating individuals.

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