



# **CHILDLESSNESS AS A PSYCHOLOGICAL PHENOMENON AND CHARACTERISTICS OF INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS IN CHILDLESS FAMILIES**

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## **Abstract**

This article examines the psychological essence of childlessness and the characteristics of interpersonal relationships in childless families. Childlessness is analyzed as a complex biopsychosocial phenomenon that affects spouses' self-esteem, gender identity, emotional well-being, and life meaning. The study shows that the absence of children may be accompanied by an existential crisis, emotional burnout, social isolation, and transformation of marital roles. Adaptive and maladaptive models of spousal interaction are identified. Particular attention is paid to the influence of sociocultural factors and psychological resources that contribute to the stabilization of marital relationships.

**Keywords:** Childlessness, interpersonal relationships, gender identity, self-esteem, existential crisis, emotional burnout, social isolation, psychological adaptation, maladaptive interaction, reproductive health.

## **Introduction**

### **БЕЗДЕТНОСТЬ КАК ПСИХОЛОГИЧЕСКИЙ ФЕНОМЕН И ОСОБЕННОСТИ МЕЖЛИЧНОСТНЫХ ОТНОШЕНИЙ В БЕЗДЕТНЫХ СЕМЬЯХ**

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## **Аннотация**

В статье рассматривается психологическая сущность бездетности и особенности межличностных отношений в бездетных семьях. Бездетность анализируется как сложный биопсихосоциальный феномен, влияющий на самооценку супругов, их гендерную идентичность, эмоциональное состояние и жизненные смыслы. Показано, что отсутствие детей может сопровождаться экзистенциальным кризисом, эмоциональным выгоранием, социальной изоляцией и трансформацией супружеских ролей. Выделены адаптивные и дезадаптивные модели взаимодействия супругов. Особое внимание уделяется влиянию социокультурных факторов и психологических ресурсов, способствующих стабилизации брачных отношений.

**Ключевые слова:** бездетность, межличностные отношения, гендерная идентичность, самооценка, экзистенциальный кризис, эмоциональное выгорание, социальная изоляция, психологическая адаптация, дезадаптивное взаимодействие, репродуктивное здоровье.

In modern psychology, childlessness is viewed not simply as a biological dysfunction, but as a complex biopsychosocial phenomenon affecting an individual's value system, social status, and the stability of the family system. From a psychological perspective, childlessness represents a disruption of the connection between a person's past, present, and future, leading to a crisis of self-awareness and a transformation of life's meanings.

Childlessness is a condition in which a married couple remains childless for an extended period, despite a desire to become parents [1, 2]. This phenomenon should be considered not only as a medical problem, but also as a socio-psychological condition that impacts self-esteem, the quality of interpersonal relationships, and the emotional stability of the spouses.

## **1. Gender Identity Crisis**

Childlessness significantly affects a person's fundamental understanding of their gender role.

Women often perceive the absence of children as an inability to fulfill their maternal function. In the Uzbek mentality, a woman's social status is largely



determined by her role as a mother. Unfulfilled motherhood is accompanied by low self-esteem, feelings of inferiority, guilt, and chronic emotional tension. For men, childlessness can be perceived as a threat to the archetypal image of the family's progenitor and head. This is accompanied by latent aggression, emotional withdrawal, decreased self-confidence, and a lack of initiative in marital relationships.

## **2. Existential vacuum and loss of meaning in life**

According to V. Frankl's concept, one of the fundamental motives of human existence is the search for meaning in life [3]. For many spouses, the birth and upbringing of a child is the most important source of this meaning.

When it is impossible to become parents, spouses face questions such as: "Why do we live?" and "Who will inherit everything we create?" The existential vacuum that arises in the context of childlessness is accompanied by a decrease in motivation, a loss of interest in the future, depressive experiences, a feeling of inner emptiness, and a tendency toward social isolation. These changes indicate a disruption in the system of life meanings and a decline in psychological resilience.

## **3. The Psychosomatic Mechanism of Childlessness**

Chronic stress associated with the experience of childlessness has a negative impact on the neuroendocrine system. Elevated cortisol levels disrupt hormonal balance and can reduce the body's reproductive capacity.

Thus, a vicious circle is formed: emotional stress intensifies reproductive difficulties, and the lack of a desired outcome further deepens the psychological crisis [3]. Unexpressed experiences often manifest as insomnia, chronic fatigue, somatic pain, and anxiety.

A childless family represents a unique socio-psychological system in which the traditional family triad of "husband-wife-child" is absent. This leads to a concentration of emotional tension exclusively within the marital dyad.

## **1. The Phenomenon of the "Psychological Dyad"**

In families with children, the child often serves as a buffer, mitigating the emotional tension between the spouses.[4] In a childless family, all attention is focused on each other.



**This can manifest itself in two extreme forms:**

Symbiotic relationships characterized by excessive emotional dependence; conflictual relationships accompanied by frequent mutual complaints and irritation.

Even minor everyday difficulties begin to be perceived as serious sources of tension.

**2. Transformation of marital roles**

Unfulfilled parental feelings can be unconsciously transferred to the spouse. As a result, the wife begins to assume a maternal role towards her husband, while the husband adopts the position of a protective father.

This role inversion reduces romantic and sexual attraction, which negatively impacts the emotional intimacy of the spouses [5].

**3. Medicalization of communication**

Over time, a significant portion of the spouses' communication focuses on medical examinations, test results, and treatment methods. As a result:

- the number of topics unrelated to the problem of infertility decreases;
- spontaneity of communication is lost;
- intimate relationships begin to be perceived as an "obligation";

emotional fatigue increases. 4. Emotional Burnout

Long-term treatment, alternating between hope and disappointment, leads to emotional exhaustion. Spouses begin to perceive each other not as a source of support, but as a reminder of an unresolved problem. This contributes to the formation of psychological distance and alienation.

**5. Social Isolation**

To avoid painful questions from others, spouses limit contact with relatives and friends. This increases feelings of loneliness and reduces the availability of social support.

In Uzbek society, the problem of childlessness takes on particular psychological significance. Traditional notions of family, relatives' expectations, and social pressure increase the emotional burden on spouses.



Questions like "When will we have children?" or "When can we expect grandchildren?" are perceived as psychologically traumatic. As a result, the family tends to isolate itself, avoids social events, and limits interpersonal interactions. An adaptive model of interpersonal relationships in a childless family is characterized by mutual emotional support and empathy between spouses, their willingness to work together to overcome emerging difficulties, openly discuss their own experiences, maintain common interests, and support self-esteem without associating it solely with the presence or absence of children [5].

A maladaptive model of interpersonal relationships in a childless family manifests itself in mutual accusations between spouses, latent or overt aggression, emotional distancing, excessive focus on the medical aspects of the problem, and a gradual loss of intimate and spiritual closeness.

The stabilization of marital relationships in a childless family is facilitated by a high level of psychological culture between spouses, developed communication skills, mutual empathy, shared spiritual values, and participation in joint creative, professional, or social activities. Also of significant importance is the attitude that a child is considered an important, but not the only, asset of marriage, as well as timely seeking qualified psychological help [6]. Childlessness is a complex psychological phenomenon that affects deep personality structures and marital relationships. It impacts gender identity, self-esteem, life meaning, and the emotional state of spouses. In childless families, interpersonal relationships are characterized by increased emotional tension, role transformation, medicalization of communication, and the risk of social isolation.

At the same time, the presence of emotional support, constructive communication, shared values, and professional psychological assistance contributes to the successful adaptation of spouses and the maintenance of harmonious relationships, regardless of the presence of children.

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