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# Childfree and Islamic Values: Exploring Motivations, Impacts, and Social Implications

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#### **ABSTRACT**

This study explores the childfree phenomenon from an Islamic perspective, focusing on the reasons, impacts, and socio-cultural implications of the decision not to have children. Childfree, which is increasingly popular in Indonesia, is influenced by economic, mental, cultural, and environmental factors. Although Islam does not explicitly prohibit childlessness, Islamic teachings encourage having children as part of the purpose of marriage and human nature. This study uses a qualitative method with document analysis from accredited journals published in the last five years. The results of the study indicate that childlessness is contrary to Islamic principles that emphasize the importance of offspring as a gift and mandate from Allah. However, in certain conditions, such as health problems, childlessness can be considered a permissible choice. This study also identifies the impact of childlessness on family structure, social norms, and demographics. Policy recommendations include increasing public awareness of the diversity of life choices and psychological support for individuals who choose to be childfree. This study is expected to be a basis for further studies on the childfree phenomenon in social and religious contexts.

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

Childfree is popular in developed and developing countries after entering the 21st century [1]. Childfree refers to a decision taken by a person or a married couple not to have children [2] [3]. This choice emerged in a complex social and demographic context, reflecting significant changes in the mindset and dynamics of families in Indonesia [4]. Based on data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS), the birth rate in Indonesia in 2020 was 4.69 million and continues to decline every year until 2023, when the birth rate in Indonesia becomes 4.62 million. This decline reflects changes in the preferences of Indonesian families who are starting to prefer small families or even not having children at all, which shows a shift in views on traditional family structures [5]. Research conducted by Ahmad Fauzan (2022) explains that a person's reluctance to have children is because they choose their freedom over becoming a mother. They consider the peak of happiness in marriage to be a life without children [6]. Childfree can also be caused by fear of inability to educate children, better career achievements, or other reasons based on emergencies [7]. Meanwhile, the reasons that are developing in society for choosing childfree, according to the results of Siswanto's research (2022), are: personal, medical or psychological, economic, philosophical, and environmental reasons. Furthermore, the reasons why followers of the Childfree Life Indonesia community chose to be childfree were found, namely: busy with careers, trauma from childhood, do not like small children, and in accordance with the reasons that are developing in society about childfree [2]. In the normative approach of the Qur'an and Sunnah, it can be seen that having children is a recommendation in Islam, not an obligation [8] [9]. So that childfree is not included in the category of prohibited acts, because every married couple has the right to plan and organize their household life, including having children [10]. However, the choice to be childfree can be said to be an unwise choice because in Islam, children are seen as a gift that must be appreciated, because children are a gift from Allah SWT [11]. Every human being who is given the mandate to become a parent must carry out this role well and totally [12]. The Qur'an has also explained



the various positions of children, including: children as comforters (Q.S. al-Furqan [25]: 74), children as decorations of the world (Q.S. al-Kahf [18]: 46), and children as a test or slander (Q.S. at-Taghabun [64]: 15. Thus, the presence of offspring from a marriage can be considered as a complement to a family [6] [13].

Having children or offspring is one of the wisdoms of marriage prescribed by Islam as a means of maintaining and nurturing hifdzu al-nasli [14]. Apart from preserving offspring (nasl), marriage also has an important role in forming a generation that is quality and devoted to Allah [15] [16]. This is in accordance with Hasan as-Sayyid Hamid Khitob's explanation in the Book Maqasid an-Nikah wa Atharuha, namely that among the main goals of marriage are expecting children, increasing the number of descendants of the Prophet Muhammad's people, protecting one's genitals, and maintaining one's lineage [17]. Research result Rachmania (2024) also explained that from an Islamic perspective, it is not recommended to be childfree. In the Qur'an, hadith, and concepts in Islam, humans are encouraged to have children because of the various benefits towards the welfare that can be achieved from it [18]. The various benefits of having children have been explained from an Islamic perspective. However, according to the results of Siswanto's research (2022), currently, there is still a Childfree Life Indonesia community that chooses to be childfree [2]. Therefore, researchers are interested in conducting research on the dominant attitudes and perspectives towards individuals who do not have children in contemporary Islamic society, as reflected in academic journals.

#### 2. METHOD

This study uses a qualitative research method with document analysis and data collection techniques. Data collection uses several document selection criteria, namely: documents published in the last five years, documents that have a childfree theme, and documents that come from accredited journals searched through Google Scholar. Data collection procedures, namely: 1) searching for documents according to predetermined criteria, and 2) collecting documents that have been obtained. Furthermore, the data is analyzed through a thematic analysis approach and the development of a coding framework.

#### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1. Result

**Table 1. Research Findings** 

No.	Document	Theme	Islamic Perspective
110.	Characteristics	Theme	istanic Terspective
1.	Childfree in Islamic Perspective (Journal of Sharia & Law, Vol . 3, No.2, August 2021)	Definition of childfree. Childfree in the Islamic perspective.	Childfree is an act that is not prohibited because textually there is no verse that prohibits the choice of childfree. However, childfree is said to be an unwise choice because children are a gift that must be appreciated.
2.	The Childfree Phenomenon in Marriage from an Islamic Law Perspective (Yustisi, Vol . 10, No.1, February 2023)	The childfree phenomenon from an Islamic perspective.	There is not a single verse in the Quran that prohibits the freedom to choose children. Having children is encouraged and not obligatory in Islam. However, it is important to note that children are viewed in Islam as a gift to be appreciated, because they are a gift from God. The presence of children as one of the goals of marriage is a manifestation of God's love for humanity, because their presence can contribute to family harmony if the parents are physically and mentally ready.
3.	Analysis of the Childfree Phenomenon in Society: Study of Takhrij and Hadith Commentary with an Islamic Law Approach (Gunung Djati Conference Series, Vol. 8, January 2022)	The hadith text recommends increasing offspring. Takhrij hadith recommends increasing offspring. The quality of the hadith recommending increasing offspring. Hadith advice recommends increasing offspring.	Childfree is considered makruh, which can shift to mubah if there is an 'illat, according to the perspective of Islamic law.
4.	Childfree in Islamic Perspective: Solution or Controversy? (Women and Family Journal,	Childfree as a solution. Childfree as a controversy.	There is no text in the text that explains the prohibition of childlessness. However, according to the hadith and verses of the Koran, childlessness is something that is not in accordance with the words of the Prophet Muhammad. Apart from that, if a couple chooses to be

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	Vol . 4, No.1, July	Childfree as a	childfree, then the virtues obtained from having a child		
	2023)	stereotype.	will not be felt either in this world or in the afterlife.		
5.	The Childfree	Analyzing childfree	The decision to be childfree has become the right of		
	Phenomenon in Islamic	from an Islamic	every couple, with several strong reasons for not having		
	Perspective	perspective, an effort	children, but the evidence in the Koran and the Prophet's		
	(Mauriduna, Vol 4,	to find the law on	hadith opposes it.		
	No.2, November 2023)	childfree through the	Childfree decision. One of the purposes of marriage is		
		arguments of the	to have		
		Qur'an, hadith, and	descendants and continue the next generation of the		
		Islamic jurisprudence.	people; if this childfree decision is not		
			related to Sharia reasons, the law does not permit it.		

The term childfree comes from the feminist movement. They argue that childfree is a woman's authority to control her body and determine her life path. Childfree is a term for a group of people who have a strong desire not to have children based on their own choice [12]. Someone who chooses to be childfree does not want their life to be affected by the presence of children [8].

Childfree became a trend in Indonesia in 2020, when several public figures decided not to have children. However, for Indonesian society, being childfree is not normal. Childfree continues to reap pros and cons in society. Controversies that often occur related to childfree decisions include: social pressure caused by societal expectations that normally every couple should have children, discrimination by the surrounding environment, fear of losing inheritance, and the emergence of negative stigmas against women who do not play roles according to gender roles [19].

In society, children are viewed as a gift from God that must be cared for. Women are often expected to have children after marriage, even though the decision is against their wishes. Some people may be happy when they have children in their marriage, but some may feel that just the two of them are enough with their partner. People who choose to be childfree consider that children are a big and difficult responsibility and burden. Educating children is not an easy thing. Therefore, the choice to be childfree is seen by some couples as a solution to the problems they experience. A study conducted by Kemeny (2003) found that couples who choose to be childfree are those who are highly educated and live in urban areas [20]. Various factors influence married couples to choose childfree, including:

## a. Economic factors

Couples who choose to be childfree have concerns about not being able to support their children. They consider financial maturity to be very important. This is because the many living needs of children, starting from costs when still in the womb, to future savings for children, are feared by childfree couples to be a burden on their marriage. Having children is not just about giving birth, but also having to be prepared to create quality children, so that it requires quite a lot of money to get a decent education [21]. Therefore, childlessness is considered a solution to their economic problems.

## b. Mental factors

Mental health is the basis of happiness. Couples who choose to be childfree have fears related to their mental state when they later face all the problems regarding children. For example, they are afraid of the pregnancy process, afraid of not being able to educate their children properly, and afraid that their children will be born with disabilities. The worries and despair of parents who have children with disabilities can be considered stressors. The anxiety that occurs in parents who have children with special needs can affect their mental state, so that it can cause stress and affect the parents' thinking ability [22]. There are also couples who choose to be childfree due to trauma from childhood parenting and toxic families. Children who grow up in toxic families will feel unloved, experience anxiety, lack self-confidence, and have difficulty managing emotions, which affects their social development [23] [24].

# c. Personal factors and personal experiences

Some couples who choose to be childfree believe that the presence of children can hinder their careers and disrupt their lives, so they feel uncomfortable with the presence of children. They believe that the time that should be used for work must be interspersed with caring for children [25]. Another reason is that they are afraid of not being able to be good parents because they have had trauma in their childhood.

# d. Cultural factors

Indonesian culture, which considers the presence of children important, makes married couples burdened with questions about children. Questions about children are usually conveyed to parents during family events or events with colleagues.

# e. Environmental factors

The reality in the surrounding environment about parents who cannot take responsibility for their children makes someone afraid to have children. They are afraid of becoming parents like that. Overpopulation is also a reason why someone chooses childfree, because it can cause environmental



degradation and cause many new problems such as the expansion of land needs for settlements, increasing amounts of waste and garbage, poverty and hunger, unhealthy air, and even the extinction of animals and plants due to the high human needs that must be met. Someone who chooses to be childfree considers that the presence of children can add to the burden on the earth due to overpopulation. High birth rates can result in increasingly damaged nature because the Earth is no longer able to accommodate humans [26]. So, childfree is used as a solution by some people to save the world from more severe damage.

#### f. Medical factors

Someone who has health problems uses childfree as a solution. They are worried that having children can interfere with their health or even interfere with the survival of themselves or their children later.

On the other hand, feminists have several reasons for choosing to be childfree. Some of the reasons they give are: personal problems or emotional and mental conditions, feeling unable to support children, and a person's philosophy or life principle that believes that this world is not fit for children to live in. Some women who choose to be childfree believe that having children can disrupt their routines and hinder their careers. Childfree, which is motivated by fear of inability to educate children, focus on careers, or other factors, can actually be solved. Islam has taught how to have the best marriage as exemplified by the Prophet Muhammad. The concept of Islamic parenting has also been explained in the Qur'an, such as in the story of the Prophet Muhammad in educating his daughter (Fatimah az-Zahra), the Prophet Ibrahim to the Prophet Ismail, the Prophet Yaqub to the Prophet Yusuf, and the story of Luqman who was an ordinary person but was able to educate his child in a way that was approved by Allah SWT. The Prophet Muhammad also ordered Muslims to educate their children to become a Rabbani generation by paying attention to the quality of children so that they become pious children. The fear of having children can also be overcome by prayer, so that you are blessed with children who can be a comfort to the heart and outlook.

The childfree phenomenon is in stark contrast to Islam. Islam is a religion of Rahmatan Lil Alamin, which regulates all matters of life. In Islam, the existence of children is the authority and will of Allah SWT in the process of creation. Parents who are entrusted with children by Allah must be responsible for taking good care of them. Having children in the family is the goal of sharia (maqāṣidsyari'ah) in its five aspects: religion (hifdz al-din), soul (hifdz al-nafs), reason (hifdz al-'aql), offspring can be cared for (hifdz al-nasl), and wealth (hifdz al-mal), making the wheel of life continue to turn.

In Islam, childlessness is contrary to the purpose of marriage as stated in QS. An-Nahl verse 72, which explains that Allah regulates and provides sustenance to his servants, so that economic reasons do not need to be used as a reason to choose childfree. Getting married and having children without preparation is not something that should be done. Moreover, it can cause many disputes and arguments that end in divorce; however, it does not mean that taking a childfree decision to live without children is something that can be justified. The Prophet Muhammad SAW ordered his people to have children because there are many advantages when having children, including: 1) Getting blessings in the world and the hereafter, 2) As a charity, 3) Increasing piety, 4) Getting intercession, and 5) Getting a high degree in heaven. It can be concluded that having children is a gift because, by having children, there are many advantages that can be obtained by their parents in the future. Parents can build a pious Islamic generation and not cut off offspring so that they can pass on knowledge, wealth, and other goodness [15]. The purpose of marriage, as prescribed by Islam, is to have children, which is also in accordance with the word of Allah SWT in QS. An-Nisa verse 1. In QS. Ar-Ra'd verse 38 explains that having children is human nature since before the apostleship of the Prophet Muhammad SAW. Based on the interpretation of Imam Ibn Kathir and Imam Al-Qurtubi, it is clear that marriage and having children are human nature in the world. The concept of offspring as one of the goals of marriage can also be seen in QS. An-Nahl verse 72. In QS. Ali -Imran verse 14 explains that having children is a noble and rewarding thing. Based on the word of Allah SWT, it can be understood that having children is human nature that must be appreciated, because it can be a field of worship that brings happiness in the world and the hereafter. The choice not to have children (childfree) for any reason is contrary to the purpose of marriage, as recommended in the verses of the Qur'an mentioned above. The presence of children is the authority and will of Allah SWT through the process of creation, and parents are only a means of the birth of children into the world. Every parent must be responsible for their child in QS. An-Nisa 4:9 explains the recommendation to multiply offspring. This must be accompanied by providing attention, education, and good welfare for the child. As an effort to optimize this, it is permissible to regulate the birth spacing of children, but not to the point of choosing childlessness. Although textually there is not a single verse that discusses the prohibition of childlessness, in substance, QS. An-Nisa 4:1, QS. Ar-Ra'd 13:38, and QS. An-Nahl 16:72 recommends having children from a marriage to achieve a sakinah, mawaddah, and rahmah marriage.

In the hadith narrated by Imam an-Nasa'i No. 3175 in the book of Sunan an-Nasa'i, the Marriage chapter, it is explained that the recommendation is to marry a woman who is fertile and loving, because Rasulluah was proud when his people had many children. To find out the quality of the hadith, it is necessary to check its authenticity first. A hadith is said to be authentic if it meets the following conditions: 1) the sanad must be continuous; 2) the narrator must be fair and habitual (strongly memorized); and 3) the hadith matan has no adasyadz (irregular) and no 'illat (flaws). There are seven narrators and sanads of hadith narrated by Imam an-Nasa'i No. 3175 regarding the recommendation to increase offspring. All rawi in this sanad line can generally be considered fair and habitual. The matan hadith does not have syadz and illat, and the sanad is continuous or ittishalus-sanad. Therefore, the quality of

Imam an-Nasa'i hadith No. 3175 is hasan li ghairihi but authentic in meaning. Other hadiths that are in line with the hadith narrated by Imam an-Nasa'i No. 3175 include the hadith narrated by Imam Abu Daud No. 94, 95; Imam Ahmad No. 7283, 7835, 7481, 8776, 7204, 7129, 6981 (As-Suyuthi et al., 1998). All the matan (editors) of this hadith have slight differences. However, these differences do not distort the meaning and intent of the content of the hadith text, but complement and strengthen each other. Hadith narrated by Imam Bukhari and Imam Muslim which means "O Allah, give him wealth and give him (the number of) his children. And bless what You have given him" is also one of the reinforcements of the hadith narrated by Imam an-Nasa'i regarding the recommendation to have more children [7].

Getting married and having children in the sense of having children is a subject that is highly emphasized in Islamic teachings. According to the perspective of Islamic law, the recommendation to have children in marriage is not considered obligatory. However, the Prophet Muhammad SAW strictly forbade refusing the presence of children in married life, so that childfree can be considered as something that can be seen as makruh (disliked). Although Islamic jurisprudence scholars have different opinions on this matter, basically, the desire to get married and have children is a natural human desire, so if you refuse to have children, then it can be said to be unnatural. In the maqasid syari'iyah QS. Ali 'imran verse 38, namely:

- a. Hifzh al-din (maintaining religion): In addition to having children, marriage is also a means to perfect religion.
- b. Hifzh al-nasl: carrying out continuity together to create peace and avoid pressure from each other.
- c. Hifzh al-daulah: maintaining the honor and welfare of society, which aims to create happiness, love, affection, and peace for all its people.

Islam provides flexible settings for childfree options. The legal status of makruh childfree can become mubah (permissible) because of 'illat (cause), if the decision is chosen to avoid much greater harm, such as the condition of a woman's uterus being weak so that if she is forced to conceive and give birth it can threaten the survival of the prospective mother and future baby. Another disadvantage can also be a medical problem that causes the mother not to be allowed to have children because it can threaten the life and mental health of the expectant mother.

In general, the concept of childfree is contrary to Islamic law. Islamic Sharia has explained various things related to the recommendation to have offspring as stated in the Al-Qur'an, hadith, and Islamic jurisprudence. Married couples are allowed to choose not to have children if having children could endanger their lives. There are several methods specifically for married couples who want to arrange the birth spacing of their children for the welfare of parents and children, and are permitted for a wife who has strong reasons to avoid pregnancy. Many ways to avoid pregnancy have been studied in Islamic jurisprudence, including:

- a. Not inzal: spilling sperm in the uterus.
- b. Avoiding Jima: not having sexual intercourse.
- c. 'azl: releasing sperm outside the vagina.
- d. Removing the reproductive system or the uterus.
- e. Using contraception to prevent conception.

# 3.2. Implications

This study shows that the reasons behind someone choosing to be childfree are related to concerns about their ability to raise children. The choice to be childfree that someone chooses can have an impact on their mental and emotional health. Someone who chooses to be childfree can feel pressured by social and cultural expectations, but they can also still find happiness according to their own preferences.

In a family environment, the choice of childlessness can cause tension or change in family relationships, especially if other family members have different views on the importance of having children. Therefore, families who choose to be childfree need to manage social expectations and pressure from the surrounding environment. They must face social stigma and overcome various traditional views on family structure.

The childfree phenomenon reflects a shift in social views on family and offspring. This can affect social norms and policies related to the family, as well as broaden understanding of the various forms of families that exist in society. The decline in birth rates due to the increasing number of couples choosing to be childfree can have an impact on demographic and economic structures. Thus, communities need to adjust social and economic policies to address potential labor shortages and changes in the need for social services.

Governments and educational institutions need to raise awareness about the diversity of life choices. Educational programs can help reduce stigma and support individual decisions by providing the right information and necessary support. Families should also be wiser and provide social and psychological support in dealing with the differences in life choices of each person.

The researcher hopes that there will be further research that is more in-depth to understand the experiences and perspectives of individuals who choose childfree, for example: conducting comparative studies between countries to see how social, cultural and policy contexts influence the childfree phenomenon; investigating the impact of childfree on demographic, economic, and social welfare structures in more depth; examining the effectiveness of educational programs and awareness campaigns regarding childfree.

# 3.3. Limitation

The use of document analysis methods and thematic analysis approaches is not enough to capture the complexity of the childfree phenomenon. This study relies on document analysis published in the last five years from

accredited journals, which can affect the diversity and depth of the data available. The methods used also ignore qualitative data that may be more relevant, such as in-depth interviews with individuals who choose to be childfree, which can provide a clearer perspective. This study also does not fully consider broader contextual variables, such as regional differences, social class, and family dynamics in Indonesian society.

# 4. CONCLUSION

This study confirms that the childfree phenomenon, although increasingly popular in Indonesia, is contrary to Islamic principles that advocate having children as part of the purpose of marriage. From an Islamic perspective, children are seen as a gift and a mandate from Allah that must be appreciated and cared for well. However, in certain conditions, such as health problems or threats to life, childlessness can be considered a permissible choice. This study also identifies that the decision to be childfree is influenced by various factors, including economic, mental, cultural, and environmental, and can have an impact on family structure, social norms, and demographics. The implications of this study are the need to increase public awareness of the diversity of life choices, as well as psychological and social support for individuals who choose to be childfree. The government and educational institutions need to develop programs that support a broader understanding of this phenomenon, while still respecting religious and cultural values. This study opens up opportunities for further studies, including comparative analysis between countries, the impact of childfree on demographic and economic structures, and the effectiveness of educational programs and awareness campaigns about childfree. Thus, this study is expected to contribute to understanding the childfree phenomenon more comprehensively, both from a religious and social perspective.

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