

Childfree and Human Sustainability: Consensus in the Effort to Form a Harmonious Family

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Abstract

The desire of married couples to not have children after marriage, known as childfree, is starting to spread in Indonesian society. One reason cited is the concern that an increasing human population may lead to further environmental degradation where humans reside. On the other hand, this view is countered by some who base their argument on religion, stating that religion commands humans to form families with the aim of having offspring. Meanwhile, the perception of marriage in most societies is seen as an effort to build a harmonious family. This research employs qualitative methods to describe events, people's behavior, or a particular situation in detail and deeply in narrative form. The harmony between birth and human survival can be achieved by consciously building a harmonious family, whether or not to have children within a family is the choice of each couple. There is no obligation requiring every family to have children.

Keywords: *Childfree, Population Trends, Harmonious Family*

A. Introduction

Marriage without children, or childfree, is a relatively new phenomenon spreading in Indonesia, notably highlighted after one YouTuber, Gita Savitri, brought this phenomenon to the forefront of society. Gita cites financial, health, and cultural reasons, ultimately manifesting the belief that "it is not an obligation to have children" as her basis for choosing childfree. Another public figure with a similar viewpoint on childfree today is Cinta Laura Kiehl. Cinta chooses childfree due to concerns about overpopulation, stating that the Earth is already too crowded. She offers adoption as a solution to not adding to the Earth's burden through procreation. The issue of the number of children is not merely a personal matter; as long as one can provide for them, they may have as many children as they wish. The global population affects the sustainability of the environment, socio-economic problems, and other issues. There are moral responsibilities to consider. Furthermore, the existence of the childfree phenomenon fundamentally reflects a shift in societal

perceptions of marriage, from an inherently institutional nature to solitary partnerships.

Observing the decline in population in developed countries has yielded various diverse impacts. For instance, in Japan in 2017, the population aged 65 and above comprised 27.7 percent, while only 12.3 percent were below 14 years old. This means there are more elderly individuals compared to children. Such a situation raises concerns about the future population.

The ideal family structure, with the majority of society agreeing that the presence of children in a family is a "must." Peaceful families generally tend to reject the concept of childfree, as they think ahead to their old age. As expressed by Buya Yahya, the rejection of childfree is a belief that having offspring is inherent to human nature, and even if someone chooses childfree, they should be prayed for, advised, and pitied.

The debate between supporters and opponents of childfree, using arguments of overpopulation and religion, needs to find common ground between them. Additionally, to ensure clarity in the connotation of a harmonious family, especially after the emergence of the childfree phenomenon, whether a family without children can be considered a harmonious family should be clearly defined. This will undoubtedly spark lengthy debates. However, here we will try to outline the main issues of Childfree and Human Sustainability: Consensus in the Effort to Form a Harmonious Family.

B. Discussion

Childfree: Between Religion and Human Population Trends

In Islamic law, there are no Quranic verses or hadiths that explicitly mandate every married couple to have children. However, having children is considered an act of worship to achieve the pleasure of Allah and to continue the Islamic generation. On the other hand, there is also the view that marriage and having children are not obligatory in Islam. Islamic law does not require every married individual to have children. However, most Muslims choose to marry and have offspring because they consider it a parental responsibility in Islam. Thus, the decision to voluntarily choose childfree without strong reasons such as medical conditions or other requirements remains a subject of debate within Muslim society. In the context of Muslim society, the debate about child freedom is also related to social norms and cultural values that have developed within society. Some people see childfree as an act contrary to Islamic norms and traditional values that value large families and increasing offspring. Childfree becomes a highly contradictory phenomenon when

seen in the context of the high cultural esteem in Indonesian society, where having children is believed to bring blessings.

Childfree is a term that emerged around 1972. The meaning of Childfree indicates someone's reluctance to have children. This reluctance exists even though the individuals involved have biological and economic capabilities. Childfree not only allows someone to not have biological children but also to choose a life without children. According to Dykstra and Hagestad, childfree is defined as those who do not have biological children or living adopted children. Childfree is defined in literature as the decision, desire, and plan to not have children. This definition acknowledges women's right to choose and not feel a loss for not having children. Rudolf Santana mentioned several reasons why a woman rejects pregnancy, including high living costs, not wanting to become a single mother, worries about reduced sexual life, the painful childbirth process, concerns about the body not being attractive anymore, not wanting and not being able to take care of children, and focusing on pursuing a career. Maria Bicharova and Irena Lebedeva mention several reasons for choosing childfree, including psychological and economic factors, which are the main reasons women choose childfree. In an article written by Susan Stobert and Susan Kemeny, childfree is described as a strong personal choice for a group of people to not have children. This group prefers to use the term childfree rather than childless to indicate a choice not to have children, as the term childless itself implies losing something desired.

From the above discussion of the meaning of childfree, several reasons why people choose not to have children can be broadly classified. First, personal reasons, usually arise from an individual's emotional state due to family conditions, encounters, education, employment, and others. Second, psychological reasons, which relate to the mind, feelings, and motivations. Individuals who choose childfree usually do so due to factors such as trauma, fears, and anxiety about certain things, such as fear of becoming a parent. Third, economic reasons; when having children, the needs and responsibilities of caring for children will increase. Such as providing nutrition, education, and health care, all of which require high costs. Fourth, philosophical reasons; they believe that happiness does not only come from having children but many factors can bring happiness. Fifth, environmental reasons. This reason becomes the basis for couples who consider today's environment unsuitable for children to grow up in, and the increasing population

will create many problems in the future. They say that letting the generations they give birth to today will only lead their descendants to live in misery.

In addition to the factors mentioned, parenting issues are one of the reasons why a husband and wife choose not to have children. Being a parent is a huge responsibility because parents play a crucial role in the well-being of their children, such as physical, moral, and rational responsibilities. Furthermore, parents also must nurture, guide, and educate their children. With the many tasks and responsibilities that parents have, most people are worried that they will not be able to provide the best for their children in the future. This concern is then used as a solution by couples who are worried about the problems of life and the responsibilities that will be undertaken as parents. Additionally, childfree is a form of modernization due to human rights emphasizing that every individual has the right to themselves as long as they do not disturb others. Therefore, women in this child-free phenomenon have the freedom to choose to conceive and give birth to a child or not.

The child-free phenomenon has a significant impact, such as threatening the demographic bonus in Indonesia. The situation is indicated by the presence of a productive age group decreasing compared to the number of non-productive age groups. This condition can result in additional burdens on the state in providing pension benefits to the non-productive age group. Most child-free couples make their choice due to the reasons of reducing overpopulation (Prasetyo, 2019). The United Nations predicts an increase in the population to 8.8 billion people by 2030. Meanwhile, in 2050, it is predicted to reach 9.7 billion people inhabiting the earth. This number will continue to increase every year. However, this does not mean that child-free is the only solution to the existing problems (Rahman, 2023). This is evidenced by research from the International Institute for Environment and Development in London conducted by David Satterthwaite. He stated that the problem is not the current population on earth, but the number of consumers and the nature or scale of consumption by the population in each region. In other words, overpopulation can be addressed when humans can change ongoing consumption habits.

Childfree: The Purpose of Marriage and Consensus in Efforts to Form a Harmonious Family

In the Quran, there are several verses related to the purpose of marriage. Among them are Surah Ar-Rum verse 31, Surah al-A'raf verse 189, then Surah an-Nisa

verse 1. Below, the explanations of each verse according to the commentators will be elaborated.

1. QS ar-Rum ayat 21

وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ أَنْ خَلَقَ لَكُمْ مِنْ أَنْفُسِكُمْ أَزْوَاجًا لِتَسْكُنُوا إِلَيْهَا وَجَعَلَ بَيْنَكُمْ مَوَدَّةً وَرَحْمَةً إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِقَوْمٍ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ

"And among His signs is that He created for you mates from among yourselves that you may dwell in tranquility with them, and He placed between you affection and mercy. Indeed in that are signs for a people who give thought."

The word "sakanū" originates from the word "sakana" which means calm, and tranquil after previously being shaken and busy. Starting from this word, the term "home" is interpreted as "sakan" because it is a place to obtain comfort and peace. Thus, the excerpt from the verse above means that Allah made each husband and wife feel tranquility and inclination towards each other.

The word "mawaddah" is derived from a word consisting of the letters "waw" and "dal" with a tasydid which means love and hope. Al-Biq'a'i argued that this word means a wide chest and an empty soul from something bad. This word carries the meaning of love, but it's love plus. Furthermore, Al-Biq'a'i also argued that "mawaddah" is visible love and also affects behavior. Like Al-Biq'a'i, Quraish Shihab stated that the word "mawaddah" contains the meaning of emptiness and spaciousness.

Some scholars consider the phase of "rafimah" in the husband and wife relationship to occur together with the birth of children or when the couple reaches old age. This is because "rafimah" is directed towards the one who needs mercy. Thus, "rafimah" is directed towards the weak. And weakness is strongly felt old. Both "mawaddah" and "rafimah" are indeed real gifts from Allah.

Regarding the words "mawaddah" and "rafimah," Mujahid and Ikrimah argued that "mawaddah" is a substitute for marriage (sexual relations), while "rafimah" is a substitute for children. According to them, marriage, as prescribed by God between a man and a woman of their kind, namely human beings, will lead to intercourse resulting in children and descendants. Intercourse is something natural in human life, just as having children is something common.

In Surah ar-Rum verse 21, Allah SWT established the provisions of life for husbands and wives to achieve a happy life, peace of mind, and harmony in married life. If that has not been achieved, they should introspect themselves, examine what they have not been able to do, and the mistakes they have made. Then they should determine the best way to reconcile and fulfill those deficiencies by the provisions

of Allah SWT, so that the intended purpose of marriage, namely tranquility, mutual love, and affection, can be achieved.

2. QS an-Nisa ayat 1

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اتَّقُوا رَبَّكُمُ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ مِنْ نَفْسٍ وَاحِدَةٍ وَخَلَقَ مِنْهَا زَوْجَهَا وَبَثَّ مِنْهُمَا رِجَالًا كَثِيرًا وَنِسَاءً
وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ الَّذِي تَسَاءَلُونَ بِهِ وَالْأَرْحَامَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ عَلَيْكُمْ رَقِيبًا

"O mankind, fear your Lord, who created you from one soul and created from it its mate and dispersed from both of them many men and women. And fear Allah, through whom you ask one another, and the wombs. Indeed Allah is ever, over you, an Observer."

The word "batsatsa" carries the meaning of spreading and distributing something abundant. This implies that the offspring born and raised occupy many places on the face of the earth. This verse informs that the human population initially originated from one couple, then from this couple, descendants were born until numerous couples would continue to increase if there was no intervention to stem that growth. This verse invites humanity to foster compassion among one another. This compassion is manifested through marriage so that they can have descendants. The increase of humans in this verse begins with Prophet Adam and Eve, which then continues to multiply in a continuous cycle.

To realize a harmonious family according to Islamic teachings begins with guiding the selection of the right spouse, with the main elements being strong faith and noble character. After marriage, husband and wife should understand their obligations to each other, and their respective roles in family life should be determined. The marital relationship that enables the blessing of offspring should be maintained to keep the connection with Allah, seeking protection from the temptations of Satan, so that righteous descendants may be obtained. Welcoming the birth of a child should also be guided, in maintaining the relationship between humans and Allah.

The sense of responsibility to Allah for the trust of offspring granted to the husband and wife who then become parents demands that parents guide their children towards a good life and righteous character, fulfilling the needs of their children's lives, both physically and spiritually, according to religious teachings. The relationship with children, characterized by responsibility and affection, to guide them towards righteousness, should enable parents to provide verbal advice, assist in their developmental needs, and be able to set a good example that fosters pride and stability in the family.

C. Conclusion

Childfree as one of the phenomena of the modern era presents a challenge that must be approached wisely, especially for those who choose to be childfree due to reasons such as financial or mental unpreparedness. Other justifications such as concerns about overpopulation cannot be justified either, because, on the other hand, population control must be balanced with the ongoing process of reproduction within families. If regeneration were to completely stop, it would lead to more serious issues in the future. The continuity of human life remains a point that must be emphasized because every individual born and naturally growing carries the function of reproduction. In addition to religious injunctions, socially, the need for children within a family symbolizes completeness, tranquility, serenity, and happiness. They are part of the family that will carry on life and lineage in the times to come.

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