

The Childfree Phenomenon From The Perspective Of Ibn Qayyim's Maqasid Syariah And Jeremy Bentham's Utilitarianism: Assessing The Greatest Benefits And Happiness

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Abstract

The phenomenon of childfree, as couples choose not to have children, is growing and raising various social, moral, and religious issues. This study aims to discuss the childfree phenomenon from the perspective of Ibn Qayyim's Maqasid Sharia and Jeremy Bentham's utilitarian theory, focusing on the assessment of the greatest good and happiness. It examines Ibn Qayyim's understanding of childfree in relation to moral responsibility and the welfare of the family, utilitarianism's analysis of achieving individual and societal happiness, and the synchronization of the two theories in assessing the social and ethical essence of the childfree phenomenon. The method used is a qualitative approach with a literature review and normative analysis based on a review of Islamic law, moral philosophy, and utilitarian ethics. The results show that, according to Ibn Qayyim's Maqasid Sharia, the childfree phenomenon tends to conflict with the principle of maintaining the welfare and preserving offspring within the family, while utilitarianism assesses this choice from the perspective of the greatest happiness for the individual, although it needs to be aligned with the overall social impact. Synchronizing the views of both theories emphasizes the need for a balance between moral responsibility and individual freedom to achieve the public good. This research contributes to a multidisciplinary understanding of the childfree phenomenon within the context of Islamic law and modern social ethics.

Keywords: childfree, Maqasid Sharia of Ibn Qayyim, Jeremy Bentham's utilitarianism

Introduction

People who adopt a childfree lifestyle deliberately choose not to have children and avoid the role of parenthood. This term can be understood as a manifestation of human awareness of their right to determine their life choices, as well as a form of rejection of social norms that require having children. The childfree decision emphasizes human freedom without external pressure or coercion. In short, childfree is defined as a decision, choice, or principle made by humans not to have children. (Rahma et al., 2024).

The phenomenon of an increasing number of people choosing a childfree lifestyle can be observed through the emergence of various communities on various platforms that support this choice. This childfree phenomenon also correlates with the trend of a decline in the total fertility rate (TFR) in Indonesia, which according to data from the Central Statistics Agency decreased from 2.41 in 2010 to 2.18 in 2020. This decline of 0.23 occurred over the last decade.

Several provinces recorded relatively low birth rates, including Bali Province, which ranked fifth with a TFR of 2.04. For some people, childfree is seen as a lifestyle choice based on various personal reasons. This phenomenon is quite new and unfamiliar in societies that still hold fast to customs and culture, such as Balinese society. However, this culture creates a negative stigma towards childfree people, so that this lifestyle choice is often seen as controversial and frightening to the wider community. (Rahma et al., 2024).

Some of the reasons underlying a couple's decision to choose a childfree lifestyle are personal, including financial constraints, concerns about their inability to raise children optimally, traumatic experiences related to having children, and awareness of the number of children in the world who need more attention. From the perspective of maqasid syariah, the childfree choice is considered contrary to the main function of marriage, which is to preserve and develop offspring. (Saogi & Saputa, 2025) In the study of ethics and moral philosophy, Jeremy Bentham's utilitarian approach provides a relevant framework for assessment, focusing on actions that maximize the greatest happiness for the greatest number. Therefore, the decision to be childfree can be considered through the principle of common good, including considerations of resources and improving the quality of life of individuals and society as a whole. Discussing the childfree phenomenon through the perspectives of Ibn Qayyim's maqasid syariah and Bentham's utilitarianism provides a holistic approach to assessing the concepts of welfare and greatest happiness in a social and religious context, as well as contributing to the development of contemporary family law and ethics discourse. (Cornellia et al., 2022).

Methods

This study uses a qualitative method with a library study technique, which involves collecting and analyzing data from various library sources such as books, articles, journals, and documents related to childfree in Indonesia, as well as examining Islamic legal studies on Ibn Qayyim's Maqasid Syariah and Jeremy Bentham's Utilitarianism. The data used is qualitative data obtained from primary and secondary sources. Primary sources consist of key literature related to childfree cases, legislation, fatwas, and official legal documents. Secondary sources include supporting materials such as scientific articles, research reports, and relevant book references as supplements.

Results

The Childfree Concept

Childfree refers to the voluntary decision of married couples not to have children, either biologically or through adoption. This concept emphasizes a lifestyle free from the responsibility of raising children, allowing couples to live according to their personal desires without burden. Unlike the term childless, which also refers to the condition of not having children, childfree emphasizes the aspect of internal choice without external influence or coercion. Meanwhile, childless generally occurs due to external factors such as health issues, such as infertility or other medical conditions, which are not a personal choice. (Dahnia, 2023)

The childfree concept stems from personal motivations and is based on various non-medical factors, such as family dynamics, social views, lifestyle preferences, and economic conditions. However, this concept is often considered taboo due to a strong culture that views the presence of children as a source of fortune. Conversely, in East Asian countries such as South Korea, Japan, and China, childfree has become a more widely accepted social norm. (Nikma, 2024)

Communities that support the childfree concept consider this choice a necessity. They argue that this approach can have positive effects, including: 1) Reducing the rate of human population growth, thereby contributing to the conservation of natural resources, reducing environmental pollution, lowering unemployment rates, and reducing population density. In addition, people still have the option to adopt abandoned children if they want to have children; 2) Eliminating selfish attitudes from parents by removing the burden of responsibility for children who were not chosen to be born, which often burdens parents in terms of energy, time, and costs when they enter old age; 3) Reducing poverty levels because there are fewer dependents in the household; 4) Reducing early childhood mortality rates, as parents who are not yet ready to have children can avoid this risk. (Rindu et al., 2022)

Groups that reject the childfree concept argue that its negative impacts outweigh its benefits. These impacts include: 1) The inability to experience the joy of being a mother or parent; 2) The risk of family conflict if there is no initial commitment; 3) The loss of opportunities to receive rewards from righteous children; 4) The discontinuation of the nation's and religion's next generation, which can affect economic quality, community productivity, and human resources. This also means that there will be no regeneration of knowledge, morals, or other values in future generations; 5) Lack of gratitude for everything that comes in life; 6) The danger of loneliness and divorce, because children often play a role in binding marriages together; and 7) Violation of human nature, which is blessed with the gift of procreation. (Rindu et al., 2022)

Ibnu Qayyim Al-Jauziyah's Maqashid Syariah

Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah was a scholar from Damascus who made a significant contribution to Islamic scholarship through his works, which reveal his profound thoughts on maqashid al-shari'ah. According to Ibn Qayyim, Islamic law is based on the principles of wisdom and human welfare, both in this world and in the hereafter. The Sharia reflects absolute justice, compassion, benefit, and wisdom. Therefore, any aspect that contradicts justice, such as compassion that turns into cruelty, benefit that leads to harm, and wisdom that becomes futile, cannot be considered part of the Sharia, even if it is claimed to be so. Ibn Qayyim defines maqashid al-sharia as a collection of wisdom and benefit that Allah has revealed along with His Sharia for the benefit of mankind, based on universal justice and universal and perfect compassion. This wisdom and benefit are intended solely for the good and benefit of mankind, both in this world and in the hereafter. Ibn Qayyim also explains that every Islamic law inherently contains the values of justice, mercy, benefit, and wisdom. If a law does not reflect or deviates from these four values, then it cannot be classified as Islamic law. (Sutisna, 2021) In explaining the concept of maqashid al-syari'ah, Ibn Qayyim uses several terms, including:

a. Ta'lil Al-Ahkam

Ta'lil linguistically comes from the word 'allala-yu'allilu ta'lil', which is rooted in the root word al-'illu, meaning a second sip or suck. In terms of terminology, ta'lil al-ahkam focuses on the process of ijihad and istimbat, namely the extraction of Sharia law from its main sources. Ta'lil al-ahkam plays a key role in revealing the secrets and wisdom of Sharia, as well as being a means of applying Sharia law in various conditions, depending on the presence or absence of illat (cause) accompanying the law. In the rules of fiqh, the existence of a law is highly dependent on the illat that surrounds it. Unlike other maqasid thinkers, Ibn Qayyim, who followed his teacher Ibn Taymiyyah, believed in the universality of ta'lil, with the opinion that all Sharia laws have illat without exception,

whether they are muamalah, adat, or ibadah laws, even though not all illat and wisdom can be grasped by human reason.(Paryadi & Haq, 2020)

b. Daruriyyat al-Khams

According to Ibn Qayyim, the concept of Daruriyyat al-Khams, which forms the basis of maqashid syari'ah, is not limited to five aspects, but is broader. The main purpose of sharia is actually to strengthen servitude to Allah SWT alone. Therefore, Ibn Qayyim al-Jauziyyah developed the concept of Daruriyyat al-Khams into seven aspects, namely: knowing Allah thoroughly through His names and attributes, as well as loving and worshipping Him; upholding justice and avoiding traits such as injustice, arrogance, polytheism, and hostility; rejecting the deceit of Satan and obeying God's commands; having an attitude of honesty, patience, and gratitude; behaving modestly, civilly, and with noble character; protecting the environment and encouraging others to care about environment-based education; and strengthening unity while avoiding division.(Paryadi & Haq, 2020)

c. Jalb al-Mashalih wa Dar' al-Mafasid

This method is closely related to maqashid al-syari'ah in preserving the values of human welfare. As is well known, the most basic objective of the laws that have been revealed always prioritizes human welfare, both in this world and in the hereafter. Anyone who denies this fact is considered mistaken and their words are automatically rejected. Ibn Qayyim also said that everything that Allah has decreed is essentially good, especially since Allah would never call people to things that lead to harm and destruction.(Paryadi & Haq, 2020)

The determination of mashlahah and mafsadah is based on strong assumptions (dzon) that arise in the process of ijtihad by a mujtahid due to its relative nature and inability to be determined with absolute certainty (qath'i). A mujtahid is only able to analyze external factors and symptoms, while the true essence is known only to the Creator of the Sharia. Ibn Qayyim argues that the essence of mashlahah consists of four elements, namely pleasure and its causes, happiness and its factors, harm which includes pain and its causes, and hardship and its background. Based on this, a rule emerged stating that fatwas can change along with changes in supporting factors, such as time, place, conditions, intentions, and other specific situations, including changes that follow.(Paryadi & Haq, 2020)

d. Taghayyur al-fatwa wa Ikhtilafuha bi Hasbi Tghayyur Al-Azminah wa al-Amkinah wa Al-Ahwal wa Al-Niat wa Al-Awa'id

According to Ibn Qayyim, changes in law occur as a result of changes in fatwas, while changes in fatwas themselves are influenced by changes in the aspects surrounding the law. Basically, this theory is based on the essence of Islamic law, which is always oriented towards human welfare, because Islamic law was revealed to achieve legal justice, welfare, and virtue. Therefore, any legal provision or rule that is not in accordance with the principle of justice is considered contrary to Islamic law. Legal changes occur due to changes in welfare, which is a necessity in order for Islamic law to remain relevant and able to accommodate the dynamics of social issues. Welfare, as the core of maqashid al-sharia, undergoes changes in accordance with differences in time, place, conditions, intentions, and customs. This shows that these factors are the basis for legitimacy and valid reasons for legal change. In the book *I'lam al-Muwaqqi'in*, Ibn Qayyim states that "Changes

and differences in fatwas are caused by changes in time, place, conditions, intentions, and customs.” (Sutisna, 2021)

Utilitarianisme Jeremy Bentham

Jeremy Bentham was an English utilitarian philosopher, as well as an economist and legal theorist, who greatly influenced the reform of world thought in the 19th century. (Septiansyah & Ghalib, 2019) Jeremy Bentham, recognized as the founder of traditional utilitarianism, defined utilitarianism as a philosophy that judges the morality of an action based on its impact on the happiness or suffering of the people involved. In his work entitled “An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation,” Bentham argued that happiness is the only thing that has intrinsic value, and that the goal of morality is to achieve “the greatest happiness of the greatest number.” Bentham asserted that all actions, laws, or policies should be evaluated based on the extent to which they increase or decrease pleasure and suffering in society. (Rahman & Rifqi, 2023) It can therefore be seen that the focus of Bentham's idea is quantity or results produced.

Jeremy Bentham sought to find an objective basis for decision-making, which could be used as a generally accepted norm in the formulation of social policies and regulations. This objective basis was obtained by examining and comparing various existing policies, including their benefits and consequences. An action is considered ethical if it produces the greatest utility. Thus, an action can be judged ethically correct if the total utility it produces is greater than that of any alternative action. (Taufik et al., 2024)

Jeremy Bentham introduced the Hedonic Calculus method as a tool for measuring the quantity of benefit of an action or law. This method includes seven main variables, namely the intensity of pleasure or pain, the duration of the feeling, the certainty of its occurrence, the accuracy or proximity of its timing, the consistency of its results, the certainty that pleasure is not accompanied by pain, and the number of people who experience the pleasure. (Zu & Amal, 2024) Jeremy Bentham divided the principle of utility into two main parts, namely the “particular principle of utility,” which states that the correctness of an action is determined by the greatest benefit it produces, and the “general principle of utility,” which states that the standard for choosing an action is the action that can provide the greatest benefit to all parties. (Malook, 2024) Bentham stated that humans are naturally governed by two things: pain and pleasure. (Zu & Amal, 2024).

The principles of utilitarian legal thinking are, first, that the law must guarantee happiness for each individual first, and only then the happiness of the many. Second, that happiness or pleasure must be measured quantitatively, because according to utilitarianism, the quality of human pleasure is always the same. Third, to realize human and social happiness, legislation must fulfill four objectives, namely: To provide subsistence, To provide abundance, To provide security, and To attain equity. (Septiansyah & Ghalib, 2019)

Discussion

Childfree in the perspective of Maqashid Syariah Ibn Qayyim

a. Ta'lil al-Ahkam

Ibn Qayyim emphasized that Sharia law governing human behavior has rational and comprehensive causes (*ta'lil*), not only limited to aspects of worship but also covering muamalah. In analyzing the childfree phenomenon, an understanding of the *ta'lil* behind people's choice to live without children must be done thoroughly by considering the benefits and harms that arise. These considerations include economic,

psychological, and social aspects, so that the decision can be analyzed holistically in accordance with the principles of maqashid al-sharia. (Toriq Alqusni, 2025)

b. Dharuriyyat al-Khams

The concept of maqashid syariah according to Ibn Qayyim focuses on protecting five main aspects, namely religion, life, intellect, lineage, and wealth. In the context of choosing a childfree lifestyle, an analysis needs to be carried out to determine whether this decision endangers or protects these five aspects. For example, the aspect of lineage (nasab) is a major concern, because childfree rejects procreation, but this decision can also aim to protect religion and life from the burdens of life that humans are unable to bear properly. (Munawarudin, 2023)

c. Jalbul Masalih wa Dar' al-Mafasid

Ibn Qayyim's approach emphasizes that Sharia law must focus on achieving benefits (*jalb al-masalih*) and preventing harm (*dar' al-mafasid*). In the context of childfree decisions, an analysis needs to be conducted to determine whether this choice provides greater benefits for individuals or families, such as improved mental health and material conditions, while reducing harm such as social pressure and economic problems. However, it is also important to evaluate the potential harm that may arise in relation to procreation and generational continuity. (Munawarudin, 2023)

d. Taghayyur al-fatwa wa Ikhtilafuha bi Hasbi Tghayyur Al-Azminah wa al-Amkinah wa Al-Ahwal wa Al-Niat wa Al-Awa'id

Ibn Qayyim acknowledged that Sharia law is dynamic and can change in line with five main factors, namely time (al-zaman), place (al-makan), situation or condition (al-hala), intention (al-niyah), and customs (al-'adah). The childfree phenomenon, which has emerged in the context of modern social, economic, and cultural changes, must be analyzed by considering these factors. The intentions of people who choose to be childfree and the surrounding environmental conditions are important aspects in determining the relevant law, because a legal decision may be applied differently depending on the context. (Munawarudin, 2023)

Childfree from the perspective of Jeremy Bentham's Utilitarianism

The childfree phenomenon can be analyzed through Jeremy Bentham's utilitarianism theory, which emphasizes the principle of "the greatest happiness for the greatest number," namely seeking the greatest happiness for as many people as possible (Hananto, 2025). According to Jeremy Bentham, an action is considered good if it brings greater benefits in the form of happiness (pleasure) and at the same time reduces suffering (pain) quantitatively for society at large. In the context of the childfree phenomenon, this theory directs analysis towards the balance between the benefits and negative impacts of the decision not to have children, both from a human perspective and that of society as a whole. (Ridwansyah, 2023).

From a utilitarian perspective, the childfree movement is based on the idea of achieving collective well-being, so it is not considered wrong. The global population explosion has led to overcrowding and the potential depletion of limited resources, which could ultimately cause a crisis that would harm human life in the future. In addition, childfree contributes to reducing the number of children who are neglected due to their parents' financial and mental unpreparedness to care for them. Therefore, the childfree phenomenon has received a positive response from a utilitarian perspective because it provides benefits that are felt by many people and society at large. (Cornellia et al., 2022).

From a utilitarian perspective, which places great emphasis on concern for the interests of others, the childfree phenomenon can be considered logical and worthy of support. Within this framework, the issues of population explosion and the large number of children who are neglected due to their parents' mental and financial unpreparedness are the main concerns of those who choose to live without children. The utilitarian perspective encourages society to think more broadly and consider the common good. Although humans are essentially selfish, they are also social beings who adhere to altruistic values, as emphasized in utilitarian theory. Therefore, the utilitarian approach is highly relevant and rational in supporting the childfree phenomenon. (Cornellia et al., 2022).

Assessing the Greatest Benefit and Happiness

Ibn Qayyim viewed the maqasid al-shariah as the primary objectives of Islamic law, which prioritizes benefit and avoids harm, focusing on five main aspects (*dharuriyyat al-khams*): religion, life, intellect, lineage, and property. In the context of the childfree phenomenon, the decision not to have children must be analyzed in terms of its impact on these five aspects, especially on the aspect of offspring, which is very important in maintaining the continuity of generations, as well as the aspects of life and reason, which are related to psychological well-being and human rationality. Furthermore, Ibn Qayyim emphasizes the importance of legal change (*taghayyur al-ahkam*) that takes into account changes in time, place, situation, intention, and social customs (*adat*). Thus, the childfree decision can be accepted within the framework of maqasid if it can bring benefits and minimize harm in accordance with the current context. (Munawarudin, 2023).

The utilitarian approach developed by Bentham assesses an action from an ethical perspective based on its ability to maximize the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people. Within this framework, the childfree phenomenon is analyzed by considering the balance between the benefits gained by humans, such as financial freedom, mental health, and improved quality of life, and the potential negative social impacts, such as a decline in birth rates and consequences for population regeneration. If the total utility generated is positive, i.e., it creates more happiness and reduces suffering, then the action is considered ethical and contributes to the greatest collective happiness. (Cornellia et al., 2022).

These two theories can be synchronized in assessing the childfree phenomenon by focusing on the evaluation of the greatest holistic benefit and happiness that maqasid sharia provides a normative and ethical framework based on sharia objectives that emphasize the protection and benefit of the five pillars of life in a social and spiritual context. Meanwhile, utilitarianism provides a flexible, quantitative, and pragmatic approach to evaluating the social and human effects of the childfree practice, especially in terms of generating welfare and reducing suffering. In this way, childfree can be analyzed as a phenomenon that is not only assessed from a religious and normative perspective, but also from a pragmatic social and psychological dimension. Both agree that the decision to be childfree must result in real benefits and the greatest happiness for humans and society according to the situation and conditions.

Conclusion

The childfree phenomenon as a choice not to have children has raised complex social, moral, and religious issues. Through analysis from the perspective of Ibn Qayyim's Maqasid Syariah and Jeremy Bentham's utilitarianism theory, it was found that Maqasid Syariah emphasizes the importance of maintaining the welfare and preservation of offspring in the

family, so that the childfree phenomenon tends to contradict this principle. However, utilitarianism assesses the childfree choice from the perspective of achieving the greatest happiness for humans, taking into account the overall benefits and social impacts. The synchronization of these two views confirms the need for a balance between moral responsibility and human freedom to achieve the common good. This research contributes to a multidisciplinary understanding of the childfree phenomenon in the context of Islamic law and modern social ethics, by assessing this phenomenon holistically from the aspects of religious norms and social pragmatism to achieve the greatest welfare and happiness for humans and society.

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