Postponement of Marriage in Adulthood in South Pekalongan: An Analysis Through the Principle of Sadd adz-Dzari'ah

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Abstract

The postponement of marriage among adults has emerged as a significant social phenomenon in contemporary Indonesia, including in South Pekalongan District, Pekalongan City, Central Java. Although individuals have reached the age of legal and social adulthood, many deliberately delay marriage for reasons related to economic readiness, educational attainment, career development, psychological maturity, and shifting societal perceptions of marriage. While a measured postponement may allow for better preparation, prolonged and poorly justified delay carries the risk of substantial social and religious harm (mafsadah), including increased exposure to free association and zina, delayed family formation, psychological pressure, and the weakening of communal structures that depend on timely marriage. This article examines the phenomenon of adult marriage postponement in South Pekalongan through the Islamic legal principle of sadd adz-dzari'ah (blocking the means that lead to harm), with particular attention to the systematic formulation developed by Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah. Employing a normative-juridical method enriched by a socio-legal perspective, the study draws upon the Qur'an, Hadith, classical works of ushul fiqh, the Compilation of Islamic Law, Indonesian marriage legislation, and relevant contemporary scholarship. The analysis demonstrates that sadd adz-dzari'ah functions as a preventive instrument capable of restricting pathways that reliably lead to greater harm. Excessive postponement of marriage without strong and legitimate justification may be regarded as a dzari'ah that warrants discouragement or restriction in order to protect the higher objectives of Islamic family law. The article concludes that a nuanced application of the principle offers both a theoretical contribution to contemporary ushul fiqh and practical guidance for communities, religious authorities, and policymakers seeking to respond constructively to the growing trend of delayed marriage.

Keywords: postponement of marriage; adulthood; sadd adz-dzari'ah; Ibn Qayyim al Jawziyyah; Islamic family law

Introduction

Marriage occupies a foundational position in Islamic teachings and in the social organisation of Muslim communities. It is understood not merely as a private contractual arrangement between two individuals, but as a means of realising tranquillity (*sakinah*), mutual affection (*mawaddah*), and mercy (*rahmah*) (Qur'an 30:21). Beyond the personal dimension, marriage serves broader religious and social functions: the legitimate regulation of sexual relations, the preservation of lineage (*nasab*), the protection of dignity, and the formation of stable family units that constitute the basic building blocks of society. In the Indonesian legal context, these values are reflected in Law No. 1 of 1974 on Marriage (as amended by Law No. 16 of 2019) and in the Compilation of Islamic Law (*Kompilasi Hukum Islam*/KHI), which set out the essential elements (*rukun*), conditions (*syarat*), and objectives of marriage for Muslims.

Despite the clear normative encouragement of marriage, a growing number of adults in Indonesia are choosing to postpone it. Data from Statistics Indonesia (BPS) indicate a sustained decline in marriage rates over recent years. This trend is observable across many urban and semi-urban areas, including Pekalongan City. In South Pekalongan District specifically, the tendency of individuals who have reached the age of legal majority and social adulthood to remain unmarried for extended periods has become sufficiently visible to attract attention from local religious officials, community leaders, and researchers. The decision to delay is commonly explained by reference to economic considerations, the desire to complete education or consolidate a career, a perceived lack of psychological readiness, and broader shifts in how society evaluates the appropriate timing of marriage.

Postponement is not inherently problematic. A temporary delay undertaken for the genuine purpose of strengthening financial, emotional, or spiritual foundations may be consistent with the Qur'anic emphasis on readiness (Qur'an 24:32) and with the broader objective of establishing lasting, harmonious families. Prolonged postponement, however, raises serious concerns. It may increase exposure to social environments conducive to free association and *zina*, delay the formation of families with consequent demographic and intergenerational effects, generate sustained social and psychological pressure on the individuals concerned, and potentially undermine the realisation of the higher objectives (*maqasid*) of Islamic family law. These concerns become particularly salient when examined through the principle of *sadd adz-dzari'ah* — the blocking of means that lead to harm (Jalili).

Previous research has addressed related themes from several angles. Studies have examined the influence of high bridal gifts (*mahar*) on decisions to postpone marriage (Marpaung & Iskandar, 2026), the experiences of career women who delay marriage (Raihana & Abdullah, 2024), and hermeneutical readings of Qur'anic verses concerning readiness for marriage (Putri et al., 2025). One recent study has applied *sadd adz-dzari'ah* together with *maslahah mursalah* to the policy of raising the minimum legal age of marriage as a preventive measure against child marriage (Rasyid, 2025). Yet no study has specifically investigated the postponement of marriage among adults in

South Pekalongan through a sustained application of *sadd adz-dzari'ah*, particularly the comprehensive and systematic formulation developed by Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah.

This article seeks to fill that gap. It analyses the meaning of adult marriage postponement, identifies its principal causes, examines its potential harms, and evaluates the phenomenon through the principle of *sadd adz-dzari'ah*. In doing so, it aims to contribute both to the theoretical development of contemporary *ushul fiqh* in the domain of family law and to practical understanding among communities and institutional stakeholders in South Pekalongan.

Method

This study employs a normative-juridical method combined with a socio-legal approach (Sugiyono, 2018; Suteki & Taufani, 2018). The normative-juridical aspect focuses on the examination of Islamic legal principles, particularly the doctrine of *sadd adz-dzari'ah* as elaborated by classical scholars, with special emphasis on the systematic formulation of Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah. Primary legal materials include the Qur'an, Hadith, classical works of *ushul fiqh*, the Compilation of Islamic Law (KHI), and Law No. 1 of 1974 on Marriage as amended by Law No. 16 of 2019. The socio-legal dimension is used to situate the normative analysis within the concrete social reality of South Pekalongan District. Data were obtained through a combination of library research and limited field observation, including informal conversations with officials of the Office of Religious Affairs (KUA), community leaders, and adults who have postponed marriage. The analysis proceeds by first clarifying the conceptual framework of *sadd adz-dzari'ah*, then mapping the causes and potential harms of adult marriage postponement in the local context, and finally applying the principle to evaluate the phenomenon. The study is qualitative and descriptive-analytical in nature, aiming to produce both theoretical insight and practical recommendations.

Result

The Phenomenon and Its Causes in South Pekalongan

Field observations and local assessments indicate that adult marriage postponement has become a noticeable social pattern in South Pekalongan District. A significant number of individuals aged 21 and above remain unmarried into their late twenties and thirties. The principal causes identified are:

1. Economic factors, perceived insufficient financial readiness to meet the costs of marriage and household establishment.
2. Educational and career aspirations, prioritisation of higher education completion and professional consolidation.
3. Psychological readiness, desire for greater personal maturity and emotional stability.
4. Socio-cultural shifts, changing perceptions of the ideal timing of marriage, influence of social media, and weakening of traditional social pressure to marry early.

These factors often operate in combination rather than in isolation, producing a cumulative effect that normalises prolonged singlehood.

Potential Harms (*Mafsadah*)

The study identifies several categories of potential harm associated with prolonged postponement:

a. Increased risk of free association and *zina* due to extended exposure to mixed-gender social environments without the structure of marriage.
b. Delayed family formation with implications for demographic patterns and intergenerational support.
c. Social and psychological pressure, including loneliness, family questioning, and reduced social integration.
d. Undermining of the higher objectives (*maqasid*) of Islamic family law, particularly the protection of religion, lineage, and dignity.

Application of Sadd adz-Dzari'ah

The analysis distinguishes two categories of postponement. Temporary, purposeful delay aimed at genuine preparation aligns more closely with *fath adz-dzari'ah* (opening the means to benefit) and remains consistent with Islamic principles of readiness. In contrast, excessive, indefinite, or poorly justified postponement functions as a *dzari'ah* leading to *mafsadah*. In accordance with Ibn Qayyim's framework (Jalili), such postponement may legitimately be discouraged or restricted through religious guidance, community education, and premarital counselling, without requiring formal legal prohibition.

Discussion

The findings confirm that *sadd adz-dzari'ah* remains a relevant and flexible instrument for addressing contemporary social phenomena within Islamic family law. Ibn Qayyim's emphasis on preventing harm by closing its pathways provides a coherent rationale for responding to prolonged marriage postponement without collapsing into rigid compulsion (Jalili). The distinction between beneficial temporary delay and harmful indefinite postponement is crucial. It prevents the principle from being misapplied to legitimate preparation while still enabling a preventive response to patterns that reliably generate *mafsadah*. This balanced application is consistent with the dual principles of *sadd* and *fath adz-dzari'ah* and with the higher objectives of the Sharia. From a socio-legal perspective, the persistence of dualism between formal law and living social practice in South Pekalongan underscores the importance of non-state mechanisms, religious leaders, KUA officials, families, and community educators, in operationalising the principle. Indonesian positive law does not prohibit adult marriage postponement; therefore, the most effective intervention lies in ethical and religious guidance rather than legislative change.

The study also highlights the continuing vitality of classical *ushul fiqh*. Far from being a closed historical artefact, principles such as *sadd adz-dzari'ah* can engage modern realities when applied with methodological discipline and sensitivity to context. This contributes to the broader project of developing contemporary Islamic legal thought that remains rooted in tradition while responsive to social change.

The Principle of Sadd adz-Dzari'ah: Linguistic, Technical, and Jurisprudential Foundations

The expression *sadd adz-dzari'ah* is composed of two Arabic terms. *Sadd* derives from the verb *sadda-yasuddu-saddan*, which conveys the meanings of closing, blocking, obstructing, or sealing an opening. *Adz-dzari'ah* (plural *adz-dzara'i*) refers to a means, medium, pathway, or instrument that leads to a particular end. In its technical legal sense within *ushul fiqh*, *sadd adz-dzari'ah* denotes the prohibition or restriction of an act that is originally permissible when that act is likely to serve as a means to a prohibited or harmful outcome (Jalili). Classical jurists have articulated the concept with care. Al-Baji characterised it as a matter that is outwardly lawful but is blocked because it ultimately leads to a forbidden act. Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah offered one of the most systematic and influential treatments of the principle. He described *adz-dzari'ah* as an action that is permissible in its outward form yet becomes prohibited when it functions as a reliable pathway to something unlawful. For Ibn Qayyim, *sadd adz-dzari'ah* constitutes one of the four foundational pillars of Islamic legal reasoning, standing alongside the direct commands and prohibitions that address both ultimate ends and the means that lead to them (Jalili).

Ibn Qayyim emphasised that the Sharia is concerned not only with the final prohibited or obligatory acts themselves, but also with the intermediate pathways that lead toward those acts. Just as the law commands and encourages the means that lead to obligatory or recommended outcomes, it also prohibits or restricts the means that lead to forbidden outcomes. The preventive function of *sadd adz-dzari'ah* is therefore integral to the protective purpose of the divine law. It operates on the recognition that harm is more effectively prevented by closing its pathways than by waiting until the harm has already materialised. The Qur'anic foundations of the principle are illustrated in several well-known verses. Allah forbids the believers from insulting the deities worshipped by the polytheists, lest the latter respond by insulting Allah out of ignorance (Qur'an 6:108). Women are prohibited from striking their feet in such a manner that the sound of their hidden ornaments becomes audible and potentially incites desire (Qur'an 24:31). Believers are instructed to avoid a particular form of address to the Prophet that was used mockingly by others, and to adopt a different expression instead (Qur'an 2:104). Commercial transactions are prohibited after the call to the Friday prayer so that the community is not distracted from the remembrance of Allah (Qur'an 62:9). In each of these cases, an act that is originally permissible is restricted because of the significant likelihood that it will lead to a greater harm recognised by the Sharia. These examples demonstrate that *sadd adz-dzari'ah* is not an arbitrary restriction of freedom. It is a reasoned, evidence-based preventive mechanism grounded in the higher objectives of the law. The principle does not abolish the original permissibility of an act in all circumstances; rather, it intervenes when the probability of resulting harm is substantial and the nature of that harm is acknowledged within the normative framework of the Sharia. Complementary to *sadd adz-dzari'ah* is the principle of *fath adz-dzari'ah* (opening the means to benefit), which encourages pathways that reliably lead to recognised goods. The two principles together enable a balanced and purposive approach to legal reasoning.

The Phenomenon of Adult Marriage Postponement in South Pekalongan: Meaning, Causes, and Social Context

Adult marriage postponement refers to the deliberate decision of individuals who have reached the age of adulthood commonly understood in social and legal discourse as twenty-one years and above to delay entering into marriage. In the specific setting of South Pekalongan District, this phenomenon has become sufficiently pronounced to warrant focused scholarly attention. Local observations, conversations with religious affairs officials, and preliminary community assessments indicate that a noticeable proportion of adults remain unmarried for extended periods, often well into their late twenties or thirties.

The principal factors contributing to the phenomenon may be grouped into several interrelated categories. Economic considerations occupy a prominent place. Many young adults express the view that they have not yet achieved a level of financial stability sufficient to meet the expected costs of marriage, including the provision of a suitable residence, the fulfilment of customary or religious obligations surrounding the wedding, and the subsequent establishment of a household. Educational and career aspirations constitute a second major cluster of reasons. Individuals frequently prioritise the completion of higher education, the securing of stable employment, or the consolidation of professional advancement before contemplating marriage. A third factor is psychological and emotional readiness. Some individuals articulate a desire for greater personal maturity, clearer self-understanding, or more stable emotional capacity before assuming the responsibilities of married life. Finally, broader cultural and societal shifts play a significant role. Changing perceptions of the ideal timing of marriage, the influence of social media representations of lifestyle and success, evolving gender roles, and a gradual weakening of earlier social pressures to marry at a relatively young age all contribute to the normalisation of delayed marriage.

These motivations are not uniform, nor are they equally distributed across gender, educational level, or socio-economic background. Nevertheless, their cumulative presence in South Pekalongan produces a discernible social pattern. The phenomenon is no longer exceptional or sporadic; it has become a recognisable feature of contemporary adult life in the district.

Potential Harms (Mafsadah) Associated with Prolonged Postponement

While temporary postponement for the sake of genuine preparation may be beneficial, prolonged and poorly justified delay carries a range of potential harms. From a social perspective, extended singlehood in adulthood can increase exposure to mixed-gender social environments and interactions that heighten the risk of free association and zina. The absence of the structured responsibilities and social recognition that accompany marriage may leave individuals more vulnerable to forms of relationship that fall outside the boundaries established by Islamic ethics.

From a demographic and familial perspective, widespread postponement contributes to delayed family formation. This has implications for fertility patterns, intergenerational support systems, and the long-term vitality of community structures that have traditionally relied on relatively timely marriage and childbearing. Individuals who remain unmarried for many years frequently report experiences of social pressure, questions from family and neighbours, feelings of loneliness, and psychological strain. In some cases, the accumulation of these pressures can affect mental well-being and social integration.

From the standpoint of Islamic family law and its higher objectives, these outcomes touch upon several protected interests: the preservation of religion (through the avoidance of zina and the maintenance of moral boundaries), the preservation of life and dignity, the protection of lineage, and the fostering of social conditions conducive to stable family life. When postponement becomes excessive, it risks undermining rather than serving these objectives.

Analysing Adult Marriage Postponement through the Lens of Sadd adz-Dzari'ah

The application of sadd adz-dzari'ah to adult marriage postponement requires careful differentiation. The principle does not render every form of delay unlawful or blameworthy. A temporary postponement undertaken for the clear purpose of achieving genuine readiness, financial, educational, emotional, or spiritual, may be consistent with the Qur'anic emphasis on preparedness (see, for example, Qur'an 24:32) and with the broader aim of establishing families that are more likely to endure and to realise sakinah, mawaddah, and rahmah. In such cases, postponement functions as a means to a recognised good and therefore aligns more closely with fath adz-dzari'ah than with sadd adz-dzari'ah.

The evaluative situation changes when postponement becomes excessive, indefinite, or driven primarily by considerations that lack strong religious or social justification. When delay continues for many years without clear progress toward marriage, and when it is accompanied by increased exposure to environments and patterns of interaction that elevate the risk of moral and social harm, the postponement begins to function as a dzari'ah leading to mafsadah. At this point, the preventive logic of sadd adz-dzari'ah becomes applicable. Ibn Qayyim's methodological framework is especially instructive. He insisted that the law must address not only the ultimate prohibited acts but also the intermediate pathways that reliably lead to them. Just as the Sharia restricts certain forms of speech, commercial activity, or social behaviour when they are likely to produce greater harm, it may also regard prolonged, unjustified postponement of marriage as a pathway that warrants restriction or strong religious and social discouragement. The purpose is not to compel marriage upon those who are genuinely unprepared, nor to deny the legitimacy of careful preparation. Rather, the purpose is to close the door to harms that arise from indefinite delay and to encourage a more purposeful orientation toward the eventual establishment of a family.

Empirical patterns observable in South Pekalongan suggest that both categories of postponement are present. Some individuals delay marriage for a limited and purposeful period while actively preparing themselves. Others remain unmarried well into later adulthood with no clear trajectory toward marriage and with increasing exposure to the risks identified above. It is the latter pattern that most clearly invites the application of sadd adz-dzari'ah. Religious leaders, officials of the Office of Religious Affairs (KUA), families, and community educators have a responsibility to distinguish these situations and to offer guidance that promotes timely and realistic preparation rather than open-ended postponement.

Indonesian positive law does not prohibit the postponement of marriage by adults. The legal framework concentrates on ensuring that, when marriage is contracted, it satisfies the prescribed conditions of age, consent, capacity, and registration. The normative resources of

Islamic jurisprudence, including the principle of sadd adz-dzari'ah, nevertheless remain available as a source of ethical, religious, and communal guidance. The principle can inform public discourse, premarital counselling programmes, mosque-based education, and family advice without requiring formal legislative amendment.

Broader Implications for Islamic Family Law and Community Practice

The analysis carries several implications. At the theoretical level, it illustrates the continuing relevance and adaptability of classical ushul fiqh principles to contemporary social phenomena. Sadd adz-dzari'ah, when applied with the methodological discipline exemplified by Ibn Qayyim, provides a flexible yet principled instrument for addressing new configurations of potential harm within the sphere of family life. It demonstrates that ushul fiqh is not a closed historical artefact but a living methodology capable of engaging modern realities. At the practical level, the findings suggest that stakeholders in South Pekalongan, officials of the KUA, community and religious leaders, educators, and families, should promote a balanced and realistic understanding of marriage readiness. Emphasis should be placed on purposeful preparation rather than on indefinite delay. Premarital education and counselling programmes can usefully highlight both the importance of adequate readiness and the risks associated with excessive postponement. Initiatives that support young adults in achieving economic and educational milestones more efficiently may also help to reduce the incidence of prolonged singlehood.

At the level of broader legal and religious discourse, scholars and practitioners of Islamic family law are encouraged to continue refining the contextual application of sadd adz-dzari'ah. The principle should neither be deployed mechanically to prohibit every form of delay nor be neglected when clear pathways to recognised harm are evident. A nuanced, evidence-informed, and maqasid-oriented application best serves the protective and facilitative purposes of the Sharia.

Conclusion

The postponement of marriage among adults in South Pekalongan is a complex phenomenon shaped by economic, educational, psychological, and cultural factors. Temporary postponement undertaken for the sake of genuine preparation may be consistent with Islamic principles of responsibility and readiness. Prolonged and poorly justified delay, however, carries the risk of significant social and religious harm, including increased vulnerability to moral transgression, delayed family formation, and sustained personal and communal strain. The principle of sadd adz-dzari'ah, particularly as systematically elaborated by Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, offers a coherent and authoritative framework for evaluating this phenomenon. By focusing on the means that lead to harm, the principle enables a preventive response that protects the higher objectives of Islamic family law without imposing rigid compulsion upon those who are unprepared. Excessive postponement that functions as a reliable pathway to mafsadah may legitimately be discouraged within the ethical and religious guidance offered to Muslim communities.

This study contributes to the development of contemporary ushul fiqh by demonstrating the applicability of a classical principle to a distinctly modern social trend. It also provides practical insight for communities, religious institutions, and local stakeholders in South Pekalongan who seek to respond constructively to the growing pattern of delayed marriage. The ultimate aim is to foster social and religious conditions in which marriage can be contracted at an appropriate time, with adequate preparation, and in a manner that realises the enduring ideals of sakinah, mawaddah, and rahmah.

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