



The Childfree Phenomenon and Its Impact on Family Resilience: An Islamic Legal Perspective

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Abstract

The childfree phenomenon is becoming an increasingly discussed topic in the modern era, including in Indonesia. In a society that culturally and religiously considers children to be a blessing and the main purpose of marriage, the childfree choice raises controversy and debate, especially when examined from the perspective of Islamic family law. This study aims to analyze how the childfree phenomenon is viewed from the perspective of Islamic law and to what extent this decision impacts family resilience. The study is motivated by the increasing number of couples choosing not to have children for reasons such as career, personal freedom, or concerns about social and environmental conditions. The research method used is a qualitative approach with literature review and normative analysis of verses from the Quran, hadith, and opinions of scholars regarding the command to have children and the purpose of marriage in Islam. Additionally, the researcher also uses a sociological approach by referring to theories of family resilience to assess the practical impact of childfree within the structure of Muslim families. Data was obtained from scientific literature, Islamic documents, and in-depth interviews with several Muslim couples who practice the childfree principle. The main findings of this study indicate that although Islam does not explicitly prohibit childfree, there is a strong encouragement in Islamic teachings to have children as a form of continuing the family line, strengthening family bonds, and fulfilling the *maqashid al-syari'ah*.

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INTRODUCTION

The family is the most fundamental social unit in the structure of society, playing a strategic role in shaping individual character and ensuring the continuity of a nation (Arliman S et al., 2022; Pranawukir, 2021). From an Islamic perspective, the family is not merely viewed as a social institution but as a spiritual vehicle that plays a fundamental role in educating future generations with noble character and building a civilization rooted in Islamic values.

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Marriage, as the foundation for establishing a family based on *sakinah*, *mawaddah*, and *rahmah*, holds a central position emphasized in the Quran, particularly in Surat Ar-Rum verse 21, which emphasizes that the presence of love and compassion in marriage is a source of spiritual peace (Aulia Herawati et al., 2025; Dalimunthe & Sinulingga, 2023; Sholahuddin Ashani, 2021). In this context, the existence of children as a result of marriage is considered a key element in achieving the goals of the family in Islam. Children are not only the continuation of the lineage (*hifdz al-nasl*), but also a trust that must be safeguarded, a source of comfort for parents, and a field of reward that brings blessings to family life. This concept is deeply rooted in Islamic tradition and teachings, which view the family as the primary foundation of social and religious life (Prayitno & Ja'far, 2025; Rosela et al., 2025).

However, the development of the times and global social dynamics have brought about a new phenomenon that challenges this traditional paradigm, namely the childfree phenomenon (Dianis Sviri & Arlinayanti, 2024; Vasile et al., 2021). Childfree is a conscious choice made by individuals or couples not to have children, not for medical or infertility reasons, but as an expression of freedom to choose a lifestyle based on ideological, psychological, or practical considerations. This phenomenon, which initially developed in Western countries with a background of individualism and the women's liberation movement, is now beginning to be recognized and adopted by some Muslim communities, including in Indonesia. Social media and the globalization of information have accelerated the spread of this idea, particularly among the millennial generation and the educated middle class, who are more open to changes in family values and norms. The presence of public couples who openly identify themselves as childfree (Nabila et al., 2024; Nurjanah & Nur, 2022; Stahnke et al., 2023).

The discourse on childfree has brought about a significant paradigm shift in the understanding of family. On one hand, some people view childfree as a form of individual autonomy and a human right to determine the structure of one's family according to one's life choices (Saputro, 2022; Símonardóttir, 2024). They reject the notion that the absence of children signifies marital failure or an incomplete family. On the other hand, others view the childfree decision as a rejection of religious and cultural norms that consider children as a vital element of the family. In the context of Islam, fundamental questions arise regarding the legality and ethics of the childfree choice within the framework of Islamic family law, as well as how this decision impacts family resilience holistically, encompassing spiritual, social, and psychological aspects. These questions are particularly important because the family in Islam serves multifaceted functions, including reproduction, childrearing, protection of family members, and spiritual nurturing, all of which can be impacted by the decision not to have children. To comprehensively understand the childfree phenomenon, multidisciplinary research becomes highly relevant. An approach that integrates family jurisprudence, family sociology, and developmental psychology can provide a deeper understanding of how childfree decisions affect role structures and emotional dynamics within families, as well as their implications for the sustainability of ideal family functions in Islam (Bunyamin et al., 2025; Nakkerud, 2024; Zulaikha, 2023).

Through this study, it is possible to formulate an understanding that is not only normative but also contextual and adaptive to ongoing social changes. Previous empirical studies have examined aspects of childlessness and family resilience, providing a foundation for this analysis. For example, a study by Gouni entitled *Childlessness: concept analysis*. International found that childless families can remain resilient, but couples feel an emotional and social void that affects the quality of their life together. These findings emphasize the importance of social support and the quality of interpersonal relationships as pillars of family resilience. Furthermore, a study by titled "Child-Free Lifestyle in Muslim Societies: A Review of Islamic Law

and Indonesian Kiai Figures Perspective” discusses the impact of childfree on reproductive functions and the role of education within the family, and offers solutions through a humanistic and contextual approach to da'wah. Additionally, research conducted by titled “Attitude and Legal Consciousness of Muslim Families Regarding the Majelis Ulama Indonesia Fatwa on Supporting Palestine (Hadi, 2024; Alkausar & Kusumawati, 2023).

Examining the Islamic legal response to the growing phenomenon of childfree lifestyles in urban areas. This study shows that although childfree is considered controversial, some scholars offer a more flexible view by considering the *maslahat* (benefits) and *mafsadah* (harm) caused, so that the Islamic legal approach can be more adaptive without neglecting the principles of sharia. Finally, the study in the work titled “Measuring differentiation of self to evaluate subjective well-being in women who are childfree by choice” highlights the aspect of women's autonomy in making childfree decisions (Shenaar-Golan & Lans, 2023). Using a feminist perspective, this study reveals that the decision to remain childfree is closely related to educational level, past traumatic experiences, and reduced patriarchal pressure within the family. However, this study has not yet explored the Islamic legal dimensions of this phenomenon in depth. Despite this, the study still lacks a connection to the aspects of spirituality and family resilience from an Islamic perspective.

METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach with library research, which aims to explore, understand, and analyze the phenomenon of childfree and its influence on family resilience in the perspective of Islamic law (Sandi, 2024). Library research was conducted by collecting and reviewing data from various written sources, both primary and secondary, such as books, scientific journals, legal documents, and articles relevant to the topic under study. This approach was chosen because the issues raised are normative and conceptual in nature, requiring an in-depth examination of Islamic legal principles, Islamic family law theory, and contemporary social discourse developing in society (Engkizar et al., 2025). Data collection techniques were carried out through documentary studies and observations of various public discourses, both in scientific literature and social media, to understand the dynamics of Muslim society's thoughts and perceptions regarding the childfree decision. Subsequently, the data was analyzed using content analysis techniques, with stages including data reduction, data display, and systematic and critical conclusion drawing.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Childfree Phenomenon: Concept, Reasons, and Practices

The childfree phenomenon is a lifestyle choice that is becoming increasingly visible in contemporary urban societies (Syah & Taufiq, 2024). Based on field study results, the decision to live without children is not one that is made suddenly or impulsively. Rather, this choice arises from a lengthy discussion between partners, filled with rational and emotional considerations. From a sociological perspective, the childfree phenomenon can be understood as a form of individual and couple autonomy in determining the direction of their family life, reflecting new values in modern families: freedom, equality, and self-awareness. The concept of childfree itself differs from the condition of childless. While childless refers to the state of not having children due to reasons beyond one's control (such as infertility), childfree is a deliberate and conscious decision not to have children. Informants in this study revealed that this decision was not made in a vacuum, but was influenced by various

factors, such as traumatic childhood experiences, socio economic instability, and ethical considerations regarding global issues such as climate change and overpopulation. The decision to be childfree is a form of moral and existential responsibility for the life they want to live.

Psychologically, some informants stated that the decision not to have children actually increased harmony in their relationship. Without the burden of parenting, couples can allocate more time to self-development, healthy relationships, and the achievement of other life goals (Fajrin & Purwastuti, 2022). This reflects a shift in the paradigm of family function; from being heavily focused on biological reproduction to prioritizing the quality of interpersonal relationships. From Giddens' perspective on pure relationships, relationships built on mutual understanding and shared happiness are becoming increasingly dominant in modern society. In this context, childfree becomes a strategy for couples to maintain the quality of their relationship within an equal and supportive framework. From an economic perspective, childfree is also considered a rational choice in increasingly challenging economic conditions. Some informants admitted that financial constraints and concerns about the costs of childcare, education, and securing their children's future are strong reasons for not having children. This perspective aligns with rational choice theory, which emphasizes that individuals tend to make decisions based on cost-benefit considerations.

It cannot be denied that the decision to remain childfree often attracts social pressure and stigma (Kaputra et al., 2021). Informants noted strong social and cultural expectations especially from families and traditional communities that still view the presence of children as the essence of marriage. However, couples who choose to remain childfree remain steadfast in their choice, demonstrating a transformation of values in urban society. This choice reflects a trend toward reflective individualism, where individuals or couples dare to articulate their life preferences even if they go against dominant norms. Here, the childfree phenomenon serves as an important indicator of the dynamics of modern family values and the shifting life orientations of the educated middle class. Furthermore, childfree is also linked to environmental awareness. Some informants stated that they were reluctant to bring children into a world that is becoming increasingly inhospitable due to the climate crisis, ecological disasters, and environmental degradation (Engkizar et al., 2022). In this context, the decision to be childfree is not merely a personal choice but also a form of contribution to planetary sustainability. This perspective highlights the connection between ecological awareness and lifestyle choices, demonstrating that childfree can also be seen as an ethical practice in addressing global crises.

Islamic Legal Perspective on Childfree

The phenomenon of childfree, which terminologically refers to the conscious and voluntary decision of a married couple not to have children, is a complex issue that requires a contextual, adaptive, and *maqāsid* based Islamic legal response. In classical Islamic legal literature, discussions about the decision not to have children are not explicitly found as standalone legal provisions. The Quran and Sunnah do not provide normative guidelines that directly command or obligate every married couple to have children. Nevertheless, the existence of children remains in an important position as one of the purposes of marriage (*tanasukh*) and as part of the worldly pleasures bestowed by Allah upon His servants. Surat Asy-Syūrā verses 49–50 affirm that only Allah has full authority to grant offspring or to make someone childless. The verse reads: “To Allah belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth. He creates what He wills. He gives daughters to whom He wills and gives sons to whom He wills. Or He makes whom He wills childless. Indeed, He is All-Knowing and All-Powerful.” This verse serves as evidence that, from an Islamic theological

perspective, offspring are part of divine destiny that cannot be fully controlled by humans. Therefore, not having children is not necessarily considered a violation of Allah's law, as long as the decision is not based on deviant intentions or contrary to the values of Sharia law.

If the decision not to have children is based on reasons justified by Islamic law, such as medical considerations (physical and mental health), psychological trauma resulting from past violence, or emotional unpreparedness that could cause harm to the household, then being childfree may fall under the category of *rukhsah* (legal leniency) that is justified (Rauf, 2023). In ushul fiqh, there is a principle that states, “*al-masyaqqah tajlibu at-taysir*” (difficulty attracts ease), and “*ad-dharuratu tubih al-mahzūrat*” (in an emergency, prohibited matters become permissible). Thus, in certain situations, Islamic law allows couples to decide not to have children, provided that this brings benefit and does not cause harm. However, it is important to emphasize that Islam highly values *tawakkal* (trust in Allah) and *ikhtiar* (effort). Excessive fear of the potential difficulties in raising children, without any effort to seek solutions, is seen as a sign of weak faith in Allah as *al-Razzaq*, the Provider of sustenance. Islam teaches that every child is born with their own provision, as stated in Quran 6:151, “And do not kill your children out of fear of poverty. We provide for you and for them...” Therefore, disproportionate economic reasons cannot be justified as a basis for permanently rejecting offspring.

In terms of method, childfree practices carried out through permanent medical procedures such as vasectomy or tubectomy, without strong health reasons, are considered to violate the principle of *ta'til an-nasl* (cessation of procreation). This contradicts human nature and the purpose of sharia in preserving procreation (*hifz al-nasl*). The use of temporary contraceptive methods is still tolerable within the bounds of birth control (*tanẓīm al-nasl*), not permanent restriction (*taḥdīd al-nasl*), which is generally not permitted except in emergency situations. Thus, understanding childfree in Islam cannot be separated from the framework of maqāṣid al-syarī'ah. As long as the decision maintains family stability, prevents conflict between spouses, and improves the quality of life while remaining within the boundaries of Islamic values, then the decision is acceptable in fiqh. However, if the reasons and methods contradict the basic values of sharia, such as violating human nature, rejecting the sunnah of Allah, or interrupting the regeneration of the ummah without clear benefit, then the decision must be critically examined from a normative and ethical perspective. Therefore, the Islamic legal approach to childfree must be conducted wisely, holistically, and contextually.

The Impact of Childfree on Family Resilience

Family resilience is one of the key indicators in measuring the quality of family life. It not only reflects a family's ability to withstand challenges but also mirrors its capacity to grow, develop, and fulfill its functions optimally across various aspects of life (Engkizar et al., 2021). Conceptually, family resilience is a multidimensional construct encompassing economic, social, psychological, spiritual, and cultural dimensions. In the context of the childfree phenomenon the conscious decision of couples not to have children family resilience takes on new forms and challenges worthy of further examination. This decision is not merely a personal choice but is closely tied to the configuration of values, relational structures, and social expectations prevalent in society. In the economic dimension, childfree couples often exhibit relatively stable and efficient resilience profiles. Research findings indicate that the absence of children in a household allows couples to allocate resources more flexibly and strategically. The economic burdens typically faced by families with children such as education costs, daily consumption needs,

healthcare, and future planning for children become irrelevant in the childfree context. It cannot be denied that economic stability is one of the main pillars in building family resilience (Fazil, 2025).

In urban societies characterized by high living costs, career pressures, and lifestyle demands, the decision to remain childfree often emerges as an adaptive strategy. This can be viewed through the lens of rational choice theory, where individuals or couples make decisions based on rational calculations of the long term benefits and costs of each action. Without the additional financial burden of raising children, couples can strengthen the economic resilience of their families and minimize dependence on external parties, including extended family or the state. However, when viewed from a social and psychological perspective, the childfree decision presents a more complex dynamic. Within the framework of traditional families, children hold a strategic position as emotional bonds, heirs to the family line, inheritors of moral and religious values, and symbols of marital success. The absence of children can lead to role vacancies within the household, particularly in terms of value transmission, companionship in old age, and intergenerational connectivity.

However, the resilience of childfree families cannot be understood solely through a traditional lens. Informants in this study showed that relationship resilience is not solely determined by the presence of children, but rather by the quality of interaction between partners, the intensity of communication, and the ability to manage conflicts constructively. Couples who choose to remain childfree actually have more space to support each other, build emotional intimacy, and create a more egalitarian household structure (Purnama & Pujihartati, 2024). In this context, Anthony Giddens' theory of the pure relationship becomes relevant. He states that relationships in modern society tend to shift from traditional function-based relationships toward relationships based on love, negotiation, and equality. Marital relationships are no longer understood solely as a means of reproduction but as a vehicle for achieving emotional balance, personal happiness, and spiritual harmony. Furthermore, the involvement of childfree couples in social activities such as communities, religious activities, humanitarian work, and professional networks further strengthens their social-psychological resilience (Engkizar et al., 2025). This activity provides an alternative space for self-actualization and fulfillment of life meaning, which is usually associated with the role of being a parent. In the social ecology perspective according to Urie Bronfenbrenner, micro and macro environments greatly determine the development of individuals and families (Fitri et al., 2023).

The childfree phenomenon also marks a shift in the family paradigm in modern urban societies (Bunyamin et al., 2025). Whereas families were previously understood as biological institutions that emphasized reproduction, there is now a growing understanding that families are emotional and social institutions built on mutual agreement, equal relationships, and the achievement of sustainable quality of life. Family resilience in this context is no longer measured by the presence of children, but rather by how well the family can fulfill basic functions such as love, affection, moral support, emotional security, and social stability. As a final reflection, the impact of childfree on family resilience cannot be simplified as an absolutely positive or negative factor.

The Childfree Phenomenon in Social, Religious, and Public Policy Contexts

The childfree phenomenon in Indonesia reflects a social trend that marks significant changes in the dynamics of values and family structures within a society undergoing cultural transformation and modernization. The choice to remain childfree, though still a minority preference, has elicited diverse and often contradictory responses from both the general public and religious institutions.

Traditionally, the presence of children in a family has been positioned as a fundamental element symbolizing the success of a household, the continuation of lineage, and the affirmation of social and natural roles within Indonesia's collective society, which remains deeply rooted in traditional and religious values. Therefore, a couple's decision to live without children is often seen as deviating from the norm and frequently faces negative stigma, such as being labeled as selfish, irresponsible, or even suffering from psychological issues. However, the choice to remain childfree typically stems from careful consideration of psychological, economic, and quality-of-life factors, rather than a mere rejection without reason.

However, in parallel, the childfree phenomenon also marks a shift in mindset, particularly among urban youth and the educated middle class, who are beginning to adopt values of individualism, gender equality, and freedom of choice in personal life aspects. Empirical data from various surveys indicate that awareness of the right to determine one's own life choices, including the decision not to have children, is gaining traction and acceptance, albeit still limited. Social media and digital platforms act as catalysts for change, providing open dialogue spaces, ongoing education, and positive representations of childfree lifestyles that have previously been underrepresented in the public sphere (Laventia et al., 2025; Azizah et al., 2024). From a sociological perspective, the childfree phenomenon can be understood as part of the diversification of family patterns toward greater inclusivity and a reflection of modernity that promotes individual freedom and autonomy without undermining the value of community.

For example, if the decision to remain childfree is made to avoid severe psychological pressure, destructive family conflicts, or due to serious health conditions, then an absolutely punitive religious attitude can actually exacerbate spiritual and mental crises. In this context, religion should serve as a source of strength, a moral guide emphasizing compassion, justice, and wisdom, not as a tool for stigma or exclusion (Arbi, 2023; Neliwati et al., 2022). A responsive approach to social change in religious outreach should prioritize human beings and their well-being, so that religion becomes a space for healing and empowerment, not merely a tool for judgment.

Being childfree is more than just a choice not to have children (Mingkase & Rohmaniyah, 2022; Salahuddin & Hidayat, 2022). It reflects changes in social values, shifts in family norms, and demands for recognition of personal autonomy in private life. The social and religious implications that arise are multidimensional, touching on aspects of interpersonal relationships, the responses of religious institutions, and state policies. Therefore, the approach to this phenomenon must be based on social empathy, inclusive religious justice, and a commitment to the overall well-being of humanity, so that this social change can be accepted harmoniously and become part of the dynamic and humanistic development of society.

CONCLUSION

The childfree phenomenon reflects a paradigm shift in the meaning of family life, especially in urban communities that are more open to freedom of life choices. The decision not to have children is not a form of avoidance of responsibility, but the result of deep rational and emotional considerations, including psychological, financial, environmental aspects, to the search for the meaning of happiness with a partner. In the perspective of Islamic law, this choice falls under the category of *mubah* (permissible) as long as it does not contradict the principles of sharia, and can be tolerated in certain situations that consider the *maslahat* and conditions of the couple. Meanwhile, family resilience in the context of childfree does not

automatically decrease, but rather transforms by emphasizing the quality of communication, economic stability, and the depth of emotional relationships. Socially, this phenomenon challenges traditional norms that still measure family success by the presence of children, so childfree couples often face stigma and social pressure. However, there is a growing trend of social acceptance among younger generations and urban communities. The religious and public policy implications of this phenomenon demand a more contextual, empathetic and inclusive approach from both religious and state institutions. Thus, childfree is not just a personal choice, but also a reflection of the dynamics of values, social structures, and the evolving demands of the times.

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