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The Quranic Response to The Childfree Phenomenon

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Abstract

This article aims to understand deeply how the Qur'an sees the phenomenon of childfree. This qualitative research uses a literature study data collection method from various sources or documents in the form of books, tafsir books or journals. In the verse study, the conceptual maudu'i method is used, which is a method of collecting verses that discuss a topic without the need for specific terms or terms but through a concept on the theme being studied. The findings in this article show that in the Qur'an there is no prohibition on a married couple's decision not to have children. This is because in the Qur'an there are also verses that explain that children can be a test or trial for both parents, so that they have the potential to bring bad things in the future. However, the presence of children in a marriage relationship is basically an innate consequence of marriage. Other verses state the virtues of having children and prayers for good offspring. The presence of children is one of the factors for the realisation of mercy in a marriage. Through several interpretations, it can be interpreted that children can mediate the harmony and happiness of a married couple, as the position of a child who can be *Qurrata A'yun* for both parents

Keywords: Childfree, Qur'an, Children, Offspring, Parents

INTRODUCTION

Childfree has recently become a topic of much discussion and many pros and cons in society. The desire for couples to be childfree existed around the 1800s before the term childfree emerged. (Tunggono, 2021). In Indonesia, this phenomenon has only been discussed after influencer Gita Savitri Devi voiced her childfree decision on her social media pages.

The term childfree can be found in the Miriam-Webster English dictionary which means 'without children' or without children. In the Macmillan dictionary childfree is described as 'someone who has decided not to have children.' (Tunggono, 2021). It is not

because of a body condition that has an abnormality but a conscious decision. According to Susan R. Hoffman, childfree is a prevalent alternative lifestyle in contemporary American society, as evidenced by the declining birth rate. The choice of a childless lifestyle after marriage in family composition is a new trend that is rapidly spreading. (Salahuddin & Hidayat, 2022).

The childfree trend that has begun to spread to society supports the desire of modern women who have the will to show their existence both in themselves and the public sphere without being disturbed by the presence of children. They consider that children have limited women's space. Based on a feminist perspective, the choice of childfree is a woman's authority to control her own body so that no one else has the right to impose something on her, especially related to self-reproduction. There are many other reasons behind the decision to choose childfree, including reasons to reduce overpopulation in society, and concerns about the responsibility of children in the future, including financial issues.

A person's or couple's childfree decision is personal. However, if many couples choose to go childfree, then there are concerns that other problems will arise in the future, in this case related to population issues. Indonesia has a declining birth rate lately, as evidenced by world bank data where in 2019 the crude birth rate per 1000 population was only 17.75 per cent. Strengthened by the results of the population census by the Central Statistics Agency from 0.24% from 1.49% (2000-2010). down to 1.25% (2010-2020). only. Based on the declining birth rate data, Indonesia threatened with potential under population growth in the future.

In the Quran, the childfree lifestyle seems to defy the nature of marriage. Because the presence of offspring in a family is an innate consequence of the marriage relationship. In fact, some scholars argue that presenting offspring is one of the goals of family (*maqasid al-usrah*). (Islam & Sunan, 2020).. As explained in QS. al-Nahl [16]: 72, which emphasizes the blessing of marriage and the gift of having offspring to be the successor of humans to prosper the contents of nature. (Shihab, 2000). In addition, there are other verses that explain the position of children as a source of sustenance QS. al-Isra' [17]: 31, there is even a verse that explains the pursuit of good offspring through prayer QS. Ali Imran [3]: 38.

The phenomenon of childfree lifestyle is interesting to be studied more deeply through the focus of the discussion based on the interpretation of the Quranic verses that explain the meaning of the presence of children in a marriage relationship that is adjusted to the present context. So that it can be found to what extent the Quran can reduce the childfree trend and the threat of Indonesia's potential under population growth in the future.

RESEARCH METHODS

This qualitative research relies on library research, by data sources taken from books, journals, books, and related papers. The research conducted uses literature research. The specific characteristics used as a basis for developing research knowledge include; this research deals directly with the data or text presented, or through eyewitnesses in the form of events, researchers only come face to face directly with sources in the library or ready-made data, and the data used is secondary data. In the verse study, the conceptual maudu'i method is used, which is a method of collecting verses that discuss a topic without the need for specific terms through a concept on the theme being studied.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The Childfree Phenomenon in Indonesia

Childfree, in the oxford dictionary, is a term intended for the condition of not having children intentionally. In contrast to the term childless, which is a condition of not having children due to infertility problems not by deliberate choice. In the social perspective of society, childless is more understandable because it is experienced due to compulsion. In contrast to childfree as a lifestyle that can be chosen and determined (Mingkase & Rohmaniyah, 2022).

The term Childfree originated in the English language around the end of the 20th century, to inform society that not being a parent was a legitimate choice, so that society could advocate for someone who chose a childfree lifestyle (Mingkase & Rohmaniyah, 2022). In Indonesia itself, childfree is a new reality that is developing in society. This was initiated by several influencers such as Gita Savitri and Cinta Laura Kiehls who loudly expressed their decision to choose childfree on their social media pages along with the reasons behind it. This has triggered pros and cons in society because although every human being has full rights over their body, it is contrary to human nature and cultural values that have been attached before. The busy discussion about the childfree phenomenon has led to individuals and communities who were previously silent now daring to express their choice not to become parents, as evidenced by the existence of new communities on social media groups such as the Facebook group 'Childfree Indonesia' which was created in May 2021 with 180 members (may increase or decrease) (Marfia, 2022). Followed by the #childfreeindonesia hashtag on social media Twitter (Mingkase & Rohmaniyah, 2022).

On a large scale, childfree is echoed as evidence of body politics in women. Because women dare to choose not to use their reproductive functions by not conceiving and giving birth. On a smaller level, the reason why someone chooses not to become a parent is often based on the desire for freedom from childcare responsibilities. In addition, the modernity that has developed gives rise to the thought of that a woman is capable of realising happiness in her household simply by being a spouse without assuming the identity of a mother. (Salahuddin & Hidayat, 2022).. In one study, other common reasons for couples refusing to parent included couples who refuse to become parents include:

1. Financial worries
2. Mental unpreparedness
3. Marrying as a means of living with a partner, not to continue offspring.
4. Couples who have offspring are a habit or form of habituation in society, while couples who choose childfree represent the mindset of society that develops with the times (Salahuddin & Hidayat, 2022).

Based on these reasons, the number of couples who choose a childfree lifestyle allows for the potential emergence of under population growth in the future. Head of the Population and Family Planning Agency, Hasto Wardoyo said that three provinces in Indonesia, namely East Java, Yogyakarta and Central Java have experienced zero and under population growth, which results in the number of people or population in the area not increasing, but remaining or even decreasing (Antara, 2022).

Zero growth occurs when there is no change in population in an area for a certain length of time. That is, the number of births and the number of deaths is relatively the same. This has a positive impact through a favourable demographic bonus because the number of productive and non-productive ages is balanced (Nuryani & Julia, 2022). In contrast to under population growth, if the birth rate graph continues to fall, it can lead to a shortage of population growth and disrupt the total fertility rate, which in turn can lead to under population growth. This will ultimately have a negative impact in the future because the number of productive age people in a country is less than the number of elderly people, which has an impact on weakening the rate of economic growth.

Interpretation of Quranic Verses on Childlessness

In the Quran, there is no explicit explanation of Childfree explicitly, but substantially there are verses of the Quran that explain the relationship between offspring and the purpose of marriage. The relationship between offspring and the purpose of marriage, that the result of

human pairing (through marriage). is the presence of offspring or children. Elsewhere in the Quran, the position of children in the family, namely as a comfort for the heart and a source of sustenance, with not denying how children can be a trial for both parents. It is explained in the Quranic verse regarding the position of a child in the family. One of them is that a child can become *Qurrah A'yun* or eye-conditioner, heart-conditioner for both parents who are able to educate them well. As in the Quran Q.S al-Furqan 25: 74:

وَالَّذِينَ يَقُولُونَ رَبَّنَا هَبْ لَنَا مِنْ أَزْوَاجِنَا وَذُرِّيَّاتِنَا فُرْقَةً أَعْيُنَ وَاجْعَلْنَا لِلْمُتَّقِينَ إِمَامًا

Means “And those who say, “Our Lord, grant us from among our wives and offspring comfort to our eyes and make us an example for the righteous.”

This verse also teaches humans to always ask and pray to Allah so that they are given pious offspring who become a comfort to the heart as a successor to the struggle in preaching Islam. Efforts to make a child as a cool heart are to educate and instill in them the basic foundations of faith and Islam as a guide or their basis in living life in the world. A child who has had the provision of Islamic education a child who is *Qurrah A'yun* is certain to be a manifestation of his parents' success and even the hereafter, because he always prays for his parents even though their parents have passed away.

A child who is *Qurrah A'yun* can certainly be a manifestation of his parents' success in this world and even the hereafter, because he always prays for his parents even though his parents have died. As quoting the hadith from the interpretation of surah Q.S al-Furqan 25:74 in tafsir al-Munir that when someone dies then cut off everything except 3 things, one of which is the prayer of a righteous child whose rewards will continue to flow to his parents. In addition, a pious child is a gift whose value will not be replaced by anything, because he can raise the degree of his parents (Az-Zuhaili, 2016).

In Q.S al-Isra' 17:31 there is a verse that contains advice and warnings so that a person does not kill his child for fear of poverty, because Allah guarantees to fulfil the sustenance of each of his creatures. The presence of children is a gift, a blessing, from them can be born various kinds of goodness. Children are sustenance from Allah for humans, because sustenance is a variety of things that are beneficial and enjoyable for those who receive it, especially if the child is righteous and always in obedience to Allah, then blessings will always be added and Allah's grace on both parents of the righteous child. Because it could be that the hard work and sincerity of parents in shaping the character of their children to become an obedient

servant is one of the reasons for the more blessed sustenance obtained, because by educating children properly is one form of piety to Allah.

In the Quran there is a word of Allah that explains one of the fruits of piety:

“Whoever fears Allah surely. He will make for him a way out. And give him sustenance from where he does not expect it’ (At-talaq: 2).

In certain layers of society there is an understood belief about many children many sustenance. This proverb should be understood not only in terms of quantity or number of children in a family, but most importantly in terms of their quality. The term needs to be interpreted by placing children as an investment in the future, by really shaping good character for their children so that they grow up as useful human beings. Thus, the good quality of self-possessed by children can be used as a motivation to achieve fortune (Cahyono, 2013).

The position of children in the Qur'an, apart from being a pleasure and a source of sustenance, can also be a fitnah for their parents, as found in Q.S al-Taghabun 64: 15 explained that a child is a fitnah for his parents.

إِنَّمَا أَمْوَالُكُمْ وَأَوْلَادُكُمْ فِتْنَةٌ وَاللَّهُ عِنْدَهُ أَجْرٌ عَظِيمٌ

Means:” Your wealth and your children are but a trial, and Allah has with Him a great reward.”

Fitnah is in the form of trials or tests, a test is not always in the form of distress but can also be in the form of ease, the test can eventually become a disaster or a favour depending on how each person passes it. Calamity means distancing someone from their god, while favour can make someone closer to their god.

If when someone is given a trial in the form of hardship but he can get closer to his god and always have good thoughts, then the test or trial can be a blessing for him, in the sense that he is able to pass the trial. on the other hand, if a person is tested with hardship and even makes him far from God then he is among those who fail facing the test of hardship. And if someone is given a test in the form of ease makes him more arrogant and distances himself from Allah, then that person is said to have failed the test in the form of ease, otherwise when someone is given a test of ease by Allah and he is always close to Allah, then that person is said to have succeeded in undergoing the test of ease that Allah gave.

As explained by Quraish Shihab in his interpretation, if children can be a test for parents not only because they are driven by great love for them because of allowing them to violate the provisions of Allah, but because children are a mandate entrusted by Allah to someone who wants it, so that Allah tests these parents through their children, to see if these parents are able to maintain His mandate properly.

The position of children as trials for their parents provides an understanding of the extent to which parents play a role in the process of fostering and teaching children towards obedience and the path pleasing to Allah. If parents are unable to educate and foster their children, in the end the child can become a problem in the future. In Q.S al-Nahl 16:72, Q.S al-Nisa' 4:1, and al-Rum 30:21, the content of the interpretation of the verse explains that the purpose of marriage in general is to create a family that is *sakinah, mawaddah and rahmah* as explained in Q.S al-Rum 30:21.

Based on the interpretation in Surah al-Nahl verse 72, it is explained that the creation of men and women is to have a sense of need for each other and this is a fitrah for them. And from both feel the need to maintain the continuity of their kind (humans). in the world, so that from both of them children and grandchildren can be born as a successor to the lineage which is an adornment of world life that should be proud of. The next sentence explains that Allah has determined a good sustenance for them.

In the interpretation of the interpretation of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, in the fragment of the 72nd verse of Surah al-Nahl, it is explained that Allah has regulated and determined the good and useful sustenance that will be given to humans, so that humans should not be afraid of difficulties in supporting their children because of the fear of lack of sustenance.²² There is a correlation between the interpretation of this verse and Q.S al-Isra' 17:31 in which it is written that Allah will fulfil the sustenance of human children and humans themselves.

This verse is one of several explanations of the various manifestations of Allah's power and His favours. namely making humans in pairs, wives for men of the same species (humans). to create harmony and create benefits, so that from the married couple made children and grandchildren, which is also one form of pleasure given by Allah. In the fiqh of life or legal law section in tafsir al Munir, this verse is a sign of the importance of synergy in the family, between husband and wife and their offspring to create a harmonious family as one of the components of Islamic society.

In surah al-Nisa' the first verse is explained, in this verse humans are commanded to fear Him, the giver of favours, as the creator of humans from one self (Adam).. Thus the majority of *mufassirs* say that the first human being that Allah created was Adam, then from Adam also Allah also created a partner for him. From Adam and his spouse, human beings multiplied and spread across this Earth.

The next verse contains an order to always maintain kinship, in the redaction mentioned the word al-Arham which is the plural of the word uterus which means affection.

This verse is a reminder for humans to always realise the unity of the human bloodline and maintain it (al-Qurtuby, 2008). On QS. al-Rum 30:21 discusses the power of Allah and His gifts to humans, one of which is through the creation of humans and their partners. By pairing, humans can love each other and get peace or tranquility in their lives.

The thing important in the discussion of this verse is the purpose of marriage. The first is *sakinah (litaskunu)* which means silence or calm, meaning that marriage can give birth to a sense of inner calm or tranquillity. It can be concluded that a person should be calm when with his or her spouse.

This verse also explains that the purpose of marriage is *mawaddah* and *rahmah*. According to some scholars, the meaning of *mawaddah* has a broader meaning than just love, which is a strong feeling and desire for the good of the partner. Meanwhile, *rahmah* means affection, accompanied by sympathy, or addressed to those who are blessed. (al-Qurtuby, 2008).

In a concept of pairing between man - woman or husband - wife, according to the interpretation of some Ulama', the word *mawaddah* is related to the biological relationship between husband and wife, then *rahmah* is obtained together with the presence or birth of children because of biological relations between husband and wife.

The Childfree Phenomenon and the Interpretation of the Meaning of Offspring in the Contemporary Context. In today's life, modernisation dominates life in society. Modern or contemporary society is a society that is more concerned with prestige and life style. During this period, the society tends to be unable to escape the development of an increasingly modern life. The rapid development of technology brings modern society to live in the world simultaneously so that it becomes a possibility for each other to connect, be influenced or influence, and sort out or decide on the thoughts and life style that match what is desired. With technology, people from different parts of the world can mingle and open to each other. This will certainly affect the community, such as in terms of life style, which was originally conventional turned into modern.

In this era, contemporary society also develops in terms of norms, behavioural habits, and even the outlook on life or mindset of the community, including women. In this era, some modern women have thoughts to continue to show their existence and do not want to be left behind, to the point of having to put aside their nature (as a mother).. So that the choice not to have children or childfree becomes one of the options for women to continue to exist in the public sphere without being disturbed by the presence of a child. In addition, there are also several concerns that cause the desire of married couples not to have children after marriage.

In the beginning, society considered the presence of offspring in a marriage relationship as a goal or complement to married life, and even success for couples who have offspring is a reproductive achievement for married couples. So that it is considered a certain achievement. Children in the family are also the successor to the hopes, desires, and ideals of the family. Some other assumptions say that children can be a guardian for their parents in the future when they are old. (Mardiyani & Kustanti, 2016).

Along with the times, based on changes and developments in human mindset and the influence of modernisation, the assumption of the presence of children in a family has shifted, even the phenomenon of childfree at this time began to be widely found, including in Indonesia. Women adherents of childfree began to voice the choice to live without having children loudly. The rise of this phenomenon has led to individuals and communities who previously did not dare to speak out for their choices now dare to state their choices, especially on social media pages. For example, there is a group on the Facebook social media channel called childfree Indonesia which was created since May 2021, its members have touched hundreds and continue to increase or decrease over time (Marfia, 2022).

There is no prohibition in the Quran against a couple deciding not to have children. However, the presence of children in a marriage relationship is basically an innate consequence of the marriage. That is why the choice not to have children in a marriage relationship is controversial because it seems to defy human nature or innate instincts. In addition, there are verses stating the virtues of children in the Quran, as well as prayers for good offspring, which draw attention to the importance of having children in a family as the purpose of marriage.

The purpose of marriage in the Quran has been explained in surah al-Rum verse 21, that is *sakinah mawaddah* and *rahmah*. Based on the previous interpretation, it can be concluded that the presence of children is one of the factors for the realisation of *rahmah* in a marriage. Through several interpretations that have been put forward in the previous chapter, it can be interpreted that children can be an intermediary for the harmony and happiness of a married couple, as the position of a child who can be *Qurrata A'yun* for both parents.

In another verse there is a verse that says that the position of children can be a test or trial for both parents, so that it has the potential to bring bad things in the future. This seems to be an argument in favour of new couples in the contemporary era to support their thoughts in negating the presence of a child in their marriage. Indeed, the condition of a child is dependent on how the parents care for and educate him. As stated in the Prophet's hadith:

‘Abu Hurairah (radhiyallahu anhu). reported: The Messenger of Allah (SAW). said: ‘No baby is born except in a state of fitrah. Then it is his parents who make him a Jew or a Christian or a Mussulman....’

From the above hadith can be taken wisdom that being a parent is one of the heavy tasks, because it puts the child's position, where the child is a mandate from Allah, as a great responsibility for life. So that parents are obliged to nurture, educate, provide for and instil good morals based on obedience to Allah. The task is not easy, but when a married couple together are jointly responsible for this, it will indirectly make the relationship between the two closers, more bound to each other. So that from this process creates *sakinah* between the two. In this case, it can be seen from a psychological point of view that the presence of children in a marriage relationship can be said to be a beneficial factor. Firstly, seen from the development of children, parents will feel satisfied with their marriage, which can strengthen the marriage relationship. In addition, the presence of children as a means of encouraging communication between married couples because they experience the growth and development of the child together. Second, by imagining the child's childhood, parents will tend to feel younger through the child's daily activities. Thirdly, children as a symbol that bridges the future with their parents' past, this is because parents often find their own joy in their children, the character and character that is passed down. (Rahayu & Hendrati, 2015).

When a couple has a child in the relationship, many aspects of life change including family planning or commitment. The presence of children can make a person pay more attention to family income, leisure time, and even health. Therefore, there is a positive correlation or relationship between the presence of children and family life satisfaction. (Hairunisa, 2021).

In one study, it was mentioned that feelings of loneliness, boredom, and stress in parents can disappear after the presence of a child. Some people argue that the atmosphere of marriage will become new after the presence of a child because the presence of children in the household becomes a new responsibility for parents so that parents are more motivated in doing good things to fulfil these responsibilities. Parents who can do their job in fulfilling their obligation to look after and educate their children have their own satisfaction and pride (Nuryani & Julia, 2022).

The Quran contains many verses that explain about efforts or ways to educate and make children well and obey Allah as a guide for married couples in raising their children. So, it is appropriate for Muslims to always maintain and continue offspring in this era in order to

preserve the goodness of goodness and inherit it through proper care and education so as to be able to transform contemporary values in the frame of true morality based on the value of divinity. Because the offspring of a Muslim can be the next generation that is expected to bring goodness to civilisation. In addition, it is important for married couples to always pray that their offspring will have a good role in becoming caliphs on this Earth.

CONCLUSION

In the Qur'an, there is no detailed prohibition on the decision of a married couple not to have children. This is because in the Qur'an there are also verses that explain that children can be a test or trial for both parents, so that they have the potential to bring bad things in the future. This seems to be an argument in favour of new couples in the contemporary era to support their thoughts in negating the presence of a child in their marriage. However, the presence of children in a marriage relationship is basically an innate consequence of marriage or known as *fitrah*. On the other hand, other Qur'anic verses state the virtues of having children and prayers for good offspring. The presence of children is one of the factors for the realisation of mercy in a marriage. Through several interpretations, it can be interpreted that children can mediate the harmony and happiness of a married couple, as the position of a child who can be *Qurrata A'yun* for both parents. This is in line with the purpose of marriage in the Quran, as explained in surah al-Rum verse 21, which is to achieve *sakinah mawaddah and rahmah*.

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