THE CHILDFREE PHENOMENON AMONG URBAN MUSLIMS: A MULTIDISCIPLINARY EXAMINATION OF SCIENCE AND MORALITY

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Abstract
The concept of childfree represents a multifaceted issue, influenced by a diverse array of factors, including economic, cultural, social, and philosophical considerations. A comprehensive understanding of the childfree phenomenon necessitates an approach that extends beyond strict reliance on religious interpretation, incorporating other scientific disciplines. Therefore, the integration of morals and science through a multidisciplinary framework becomes imperative. In this context, the mubadalah approach, aligned with the integration-interconnection paradigm, emerges as a suitable methodology for unravelling the complexities of childfree within society. This article endeavours to analyse childfree from the perspective of mubadalah, prioritizing the dialogue between science and morality within the context of marriage. The research methodology employed is descriptive qualitative, employing a literature study approach. The findings reveal that employing the semipermeable mubadalah method to analyse the position of childfree in society has led to the emergence of three new perspectives: the just perspective, the humanist perspective, and the perspective rooted in the value of tawhid. These three perspectives encompass the following notions: firstly, the presence of children assumes a central role in the marital union, requiring thoughtful consideration by both partners; secondly, childfree is not solely a matter of fitrah (innate human disposition), but also involves psychological and moral dimensions; and finally, childfree, from a medical standpoint, is permissible within the context of Islam. These perspectives, derived from medical disciplines, moral frameworks, and religious interpretations, contribute to a nuanced understanding of childfree.

Keywords: Childfree; Moral; Mubadalah; Sains.
A. Introduction

The term "childfree" also commonly referred to as voluntary childlessness, denotes a deliberate choice by individuals to abstain from having children. It is crucial to differentiate this state from involuntary childlessness, which encompasses couples who, despite their desire for children, face certain circumstances preventing conception or childbirth (Neal & Neal, 2021). The phenomenon of childfree is not a recent occurrence recognized solely by the contemporary global community. Chrastil highlights that as early as the 1500s, childfree lifestyles were prevalent in Western countries such as England, the Netherlands, and France. Various factors, including health concerns, philosophical values, and personal life choices, contributed to its emergence. Notably, the prevalence of childfree individuals peaked in the 1900s, with statistics indicating that one in five American women born between 1885 and 1915 did not bear children (Chrastil, 2019). As the 21st century unfolded, the childfree lifestyle transcended being a mere trend observed solely in developed European nations, spreading to Asian countries such as China, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan (Abe, 2018).

The emergence and development of the childfree lifestyle in a particular country or region are intricately shaped by social factors embedded within the community. In the context of America and Western Europe, for instance, a notable trend among young women involves their conscious decision to forgo marriage and childbearing. This deliberate choice stems from their belief that abstaining from having children enables them to pursue professional endeavours without having to contend with the challenges of striving for gender equality and simultaneously raising a family (Chrastil, 2019). Conversely, in the Indonesian social landscape, societal expectations impose a starkly contrasting perspective. Hanandita highlights that within Indonesian society, there exists an ingrained societal construction wherein married couples are perpetually obligated to bear children. This societal expectation represents a form of habitualization that has become deeply entrenched within the fabric of Indonesian culture (Hanandita, 2022).

An additional significant factor influencing the prevalence of the childfree phenomenon within society pertains to medical or health-related aspects. In this context, childfree refers to the situation in which a married couple remains childless due to involuntary childlessness. Infertility represents a common underlying cause of such childfree circumstances. Letherby, as cited by Grace, defines infertility as the inability to achieve a clinical pregnancy after engaging in regular unprotected sexual intercourse for a period of 12 months or more. Furthermore, other health conditions, such as HIV disease, can also contribute to the manifestation of childfree status (Panggabean, 2014). It is important to note that in these cases, the childfree status is not a voluntary choice made by the married couple, but rather a result of circumstances beyond their control. The number of married couples choosing a childless lifestyle has increased significantly in recent decades, indicating one of the substantial demographic behavioural trends observed in Europe. However, the practise of childless life has prompted a wide range of ideological perspectives. According to Siegel, the increasing prevalence of childless couples reflects an individualistic and self-centred society. Focus, on the other hand, blames childless women for the ageing population and the collapse of the social security system. Choosing not to have children, on the other hand, is portrayed as an assertion of self-determination from a feminist perspective, challenging the traditional societal notion that a woman's identity revolves solely around her role as a wife and mother within the domestic sphere (Kreyenfeld & Konietzka, 2017).
In this context, it is important to recognise the historical role of religious traditions in striving to limit the rise of the childfree lifestyle. In pre-revolutionary France, for example, a considerable proportion of adults, ranging from 15% to 22%, consciously chose not to marry or have children. In the American colonies, on the other hand, childlessness was uncommon. The biblical command to reproduce, combined with the pressing necessity for offspring to contribute to agricultural labour, reinforced the community expectation of childbearing. However, by the 1800s, this scenario had undergone significant change (J. Ealey, 2016).

Moreover, Islamic normative studies have also contributed their perspectives on the childfree phenomenon within society. Previous research, conducted by Karunia, delved into thematic analyses of several verses from the Qur'an, including QS. Al-Baqarah (2): 187, QS. Ali Imran (3): 14, QS. An-Nisa' (4): 1, QS. An-Nahl (16): 72, and QS. Ar-Rum (30): 21. The findings of these studies reveal a contradiction with regard to the practice of childfree. However, it is important to note that there is no explicit textual mention mandating the obligation to have children (prohibition of childfree). This viewpoint is supported by the perspectives of renowned scholars such as Imam Al-Ghazali and Shaykh Muhammad bin Muhammad al-Husaini az-Zabidi. By considering these scriptural verses and the opinions of these scholars, it becomes apparent that every individual should assume responsibility and possess awareness of this matter as a manifestation of maqāsid shari'ah (Hazyimara, 2022).

Given the complexities of the underlying issues surrounding the childfree phenomena, determining its status and position requires a multidisciplinary approach rather than a restricted monodisciplinary perspective. According to Amin Abdullah, the linear nature of scientific enquiry and the monodisciplinary approach within religious studies might lead to a gap between religious understanding and the intricacies of real-life situations (Abdullah, 2021). Similarly, in the context of childfree, a contemporary concern within the realm of Islamic family law, fostering a dialogue between the disciplines of natural and social sciences, as well as religious understanding, can yield interpretations that are more contextualised and aligned with societal realities.

Furthermore, Amin Abdullah has emphasised the importance of utilising a multidisciplinary approach in contemporary Islamic studies. Diverse disciplines can coexist inside a certain contextual framework while conforming to the boundaries and procedures of their respective fields by using this strategy (Abdullah, 2021). To determine the position of the childfree phenomena within the context of Islamic law, multiple disciplines should be engaged. In terms of the elements that contribute to its emergence in society, disciplines such as health, culture, social sciences, and economics are critical for examining the childfree phenomena thoroughly.

This approach has become the paradigm and guiding principle of mubadalah in contemporary studies of Islamic family law. Mubadalah is an interpretive approach that aims to achieve a balanced and equitable realization of roles, responsibilities, and positions between men and women, both within the domestic and public spheres (Rajafi, 2020). However, operationally, the mubadalah approach also incorporates scientific and social disciplines, as well as societal moral values. The application of the mubadalah approach in the study of Islamic family law plays a crucial role in generating new insights into various childcare issues (Adib & Mujahidah, 2021), household leadership (Santoso, 2019), polygamy (Indra & Putri, 2022), and maintenance (Zen, 2021). These studies serve as valuable resources for the relevance of employing the mubadalah approach in understanding the childfree phenomenon as a contemporary issue within Islamic family law.
Childfree within the context of Islamic law has been examined by numerous previous researchers, employing a range of approaches such as *maslahah mursalah*, *maqashid sharia*, and *fiqh aulawiyyat*. However, the majority of classical fiqh-based studies tend to converge on the conclusion that childfree is impermissible. The childfree phenomenon is positioned as an action that should not be prioritized within domestic life under any circumstances (Farisi, 2021). Similarly, the analysis of *maslahah mursalah* suggests that childfree is contrary to the objectives of sharia, rendering it *makruh* or reprehensible (S. & Hidayat, 2022). Likewise, from the perspective of *maqashid sharia*, the childfree phenomenon raises concerns about future population issues (Kamilia, 2022). However, when viewed from other angles, such as the medical and moral dimensions of marriage, childfree assumes a broader meaning and purpose. Therefore, the permissibility or prohibition of childfree is contingent upon the specific circumstances and the manner in which it is implemented.

Makhlad (Makhlad, 2022) has conducted a preliminary investigation of childfree within the context of *mubadalah*. It should be noted, however, that in this study, the assessment of *mubadalah* is offered exclusively as one of the digital tafsir products. The investigation is limited in scope, concentrating solely on an article published on the mubadalah.id website. As a result, the study does not provide enough space for the full paradigm and underlying concepts of mubadalah.

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the phenomenon of child freedom from the standpoint of *qira’ah mubadalah*. A complete study on the *mubadalah* interpretation of the childfree phenomena is extremely important. This type of investigation allows for a meaningful discourse about the subjective, objective, and intersubjective aspects of children's roles in families and society. Furthermore, the merging of theological disciplines with scientific and moral issues promises to provide a more humane perspective, especially in this day of numerous crises. As a result, the purpose of this research is to shed light on the ethical consequences of using *mubadalah* in evaluating the legal status and societal position of the childfree phenomena.

B. Method

The research methodology employed in this study is descriptive qualitative research, which aims to provide a comprehensive description of the status and position of childfree in Islam using a *mubadalah* approach. Operationally, this *mubadalah* approach is grounded in the interconnection integration paradigm, which adopts a semipermeable method. This method involves the examination of a problem through the lens of various disciplines, allowing for cross-disciplinary analysis and critical evaluation. The literature review was conducted utilizing the documentation method, involving an extensive review of laws and regulations on marriage, classical fiqh books, scholarly articles, and other relevant written sources pertaining to the research topic. Data analysis employed content analysis techniques, following the following procedures: firstly, dissecting the theoretical concept of childfree and its interpretation in the Qur’an; secondly, identifying the significance and position of *mubadalah* as an approach to understanding the phenomenon of childfree; thirdly, fostering a dialogue between science and morality within the framework of *mubadalah* to generate novel perspectives on childfree in Islam.
C. Findings and Discussion
1. Findings

The Concept of Childfree in the Qur’anic Perspective

The term "childfree" is a compound word derived from the combination of the English words' "child" and "free". When dissected literally, childfree signifies the state of being "free from children". However, according to the definition provided in the Cambridge Dictionary, it is employed to describe individuals who make a conscious decision not to have children, or to depict an environment or circumstance devoid of children. Notably, childfree shares a resemblance in meaning to the term "childless", as elucidated in the Oxford Dictionary, where it denotes the absence of offspring (Jalaludin, 2022).

According to Prastiwi, it is currently challenging to find an appropriate translation for the term "childfree" in Indonesian. This difficulty arises due to the relatively recent emergence of this phenomenon as a topic of discussion, whereas it is already regarded as commonplace in other countries. However, if an Indonesian equivalent is to be established, "childfree" can be interpreted as the deliberate decision made by a married couple to abstain from having children, which is mutually agreed upon by both individuals (Haganta et al., 2022).

Childfree, as a state in which a married couple opts not to have children, can be further classified into various types within its contextual framework. Miall, as cited by Prasetyo and Putra distinguishes two categories of childfree couples, namely those who intentionally choose not to have children (referred to as voluntary childless) and those who unintentionally remain childless (known as involuntary childless) (Prasetyo & Putra, 2017).

Voluntary childlessness represents a household phenomenon motivated by a multitude of factors and concerns. Rogers in her research findings, has highlighted that this decision is primarily driven by attitudes and values. In contrast to individuals who choose to have children, those who opt for voluntary childlessness tend to prioritize individuality, autonomy, freedom from parental responsibilities, opportunities for travel, personal goal attainment, intimacy, personal development, egalitarian gender roles, flexible and unconstrained lifestyles, career advancement, and friendships. Furthermore, childlessness is perceived as a means to uphold marital satisfaction and contentment (Rogers, 1986).

In certain instances, voluntary childlessness can be rooted in a couple's apprehension regarding parenthood. This apprehension may stem from past traumatic experiences, where individuals wish to shield their potential offspring from enduring similar hardships. Moreover, financial considerations play a significant role, as raising children entails increased household expenses. Consequently, couples perceive their current financial situation as inadequate to meet the augmented demands that come with parenting (Rahayu & Rahmah, 2022). The reasons encompassed within this category are deemed more constructive and deviate from the stereotype that childless couples are inherently selfish. In contrast to voluntary childlessness, which involves a deliberate and conscious decision to forgo parenthood, involuntary childlessness is characterized by the inability to conceive despite a desire to have children. This condition is primarily attributed to medical factors, predominantly related to infertility in either the wife, husband, or a combination of both. In only a minority of cases, the underlying cause remains unknown.

Childlessness within this context engenders divergent perspectives among married couples. Firstly, there are couples who hold a positive view of children, perceiving their presence as having a beneficial impact. Consequently, not having
children is deemed a disappointment by these couples. Conversely, there are couples who harbor a negative perception of children, viewing their presence as burdensome. Thus, when their marriage remains childless, these couples actually consider it advantageous (Patnani et al., 2021). This delineation underscores that values and attitudes are not solely shaped at the moment of decision-making but also during the phase of accepting a condition that renders them unable to conceive offspring.

In the context of Islam, childlessness remains intricately tied to the fundamental purpose of marriage, which is the procreation of offspring. Marriage is widely recognized as a means to ensure the perpetuation and continuation of human life, allowing it to endure and progress across generations (Nuroh & Sulhan, 2022). The inclination towards marriage and procreation is deeply rooted in human nature, tracing back to ancient times, predating the era of the Prophet. This significance is referenced and elucidated in verse 38 of Surah Ar-Ra’id in the Holy Qur’an as follows:

وَلَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا رُسُلًا مِّن قَبْلِّكَ وَجَعَلْنَا لََُمْ أَزْوََٰجاا وَذُر ِّيَّةا ۚ وَمَا كَانَ لِّرَسُولٍ أَن يََْتِّىَ بِِِّّذْنِّ ٱللََِّّّ ۗ لِّكُل ِّ أَجَلٍ

"And We have sent messengers before you, and We assigned to them wives and offspring. And it is not for a messenger to come with a sign (miracle) except by permission of Allah. For every time is a [set] decree" (Quran, Ar-Ra’id 13:38).

According to Ibn Kathir’s interpretation, it is expounded that both Prophet Muhammad and the preceding messengers were indeed human beings who engaged in customary human activities, including eating, drinking, walking in the marketplace, marrying, and having children. This interpretation finds agreement with al-Qurthubi, who posits that verse 38 of Surah Ar-Ra’id elucidates how Allah has bestowed upon the messengers the likeness of ordinary individuals, allowing them to partake in worldly delights such as marriage and parenthood. The distinctive characteristic that sets them apart from other humans is the divine revelation they receive (al-Qurthubi, 2008).

According to the interpretations of Imam Ibn Kathir and Imam Al-Qurthubi, it becomes evident that marriage and procreation are inherent aspects of human nature within this earthly realm. Allah, in His wisdom, has bestowed upon humanity abundant opportunities to experience the blessings of worldly life through companionship with a spouse and the joy of raising virtuous offspring. The significance of offspring as one of the objectives of marriage is further underscored by Allah’s words in Surah An-Nahl, verse 72, which state:

وَٱللََُّّ جَعَلَ لَكُم م ِّنْ أَنفُسِّكُمْ أَزْوََٰجاا وَجَعَلَ لَكُم م ِّنْ أَزْوََٰجِّكُم بَنِّينَ وَحَفَدَةا وَرَزَقَكُم م ِّنَ ٱل ِّطَّي ِّبََٰتِّ ۚ أَفَبِّٱلْبََٰطِّلِ يُؤْمِّنُونَ وَبِّنِعْمَتِّ ٱللََِّّ هُمْ يَكْفُرُونَ

"Allah has made for you spouses from among yourselves, and from your spouses, He has granted you children and grandchildren, and has provided you with good things. Then why do they believe in falsehood and deny the blessings of Allah?" (Quran, An-Nahl 16:72).

The verse elucidates that Allah, in His benevolence, conveys to His servants the magnitude of His blessings. He has granted them the gift of spouses, thereby bestowing upon them a source of solace and tranquillity. Furthermore, Allah blesses them with offspring, including children and grandchildren, who bring joy to their hearts and contribute to their well-being by assisting and fulfilling their needs. These descendants offer numerous benefits and blessings to their parents and grandparents. Additionally, Allah provides sustenance comprised of wholesome provisions,
encompassing nourishment, beverages, and both evident and concealed favours that are beyond human comprehension.

The examination of the aforementioned texts allows for the comprehension that, textually, there is no specific verse that directly prohibits childfree lifestyles. However, in terms of substance, Surah Ar-Ra’id 13:38 and Surah An-Nahl 16: 72 impel individuals to seek righteous progeny through lawful marital unions. The Qur’an emphasizes the attainment of a harmonious, affectionate, and compassionate marriage, commonly referred to as "sakinah, mawaddah, and rahmah". Moreover, the presence of children within a marital bond is regarded as a divine blessing from Allah, deserving of gratitude from the couple.

From a moral standpoint, voluntary childfree choices, driven by a desire for individuality and freedom from parental responsibilities, deviate from the ethical principles espoused in the Qur’an. Likewise, the apprehension of financial constraints that may arise from having children undermines the appreciation for the divine blessings bestowed upon those who have offspring. However, when considering involuntary childlessness, the moral dimension shifts, as these individuals continue to strive for God’s blessings by longing for children to grace their households.

2. Discussion
Childfree on Mubadalah Perspective

*Mubadalah*, an Arabic phrase originating from the root "ba-da-la" that denotes the actions of replacing, altering, and exchanging, is important in formal discourse. This phrase incorporates the concept of mutual replacement, alteration, or interchange and functions as a type of conjunction (mu'afalah) and collaboration (musyarakah) between two elements. Faqihuddin Abdul Qodir expands on the concept of mubadalah as a lens for understanding the interaction between men and women in both the personal and public realms. Partnership, cooperation, interdependence, reciprocity, and equality are the pillars of such relationships. Furthermore, the term *mubadalah* is used to describe a manner of understanding Islamic source texts that require the acknowledgement of men and women as equal subjects (Qodir, 2019).

Although the term "mubadalah" initially focused on examining the dynamics between men and women, it has been extended to encompass a broader perspective and understanding of various relationships between two entities. These relationships may encompass a wide range of contexts, including interactions between individuals in general, the state and its citizens, employers and employees, parents and children, teachers and students, as well as majority and minority groups. Consequently, it is imperative that every individual or entity involved in a relationship adopts a fundamental commitment to cooperation, mutual assistance, and support in order to promote and uphold all forms of goodness. This responsibility and obligation transcend individual backgrounds and apply to every person, emphasizing their collective duty towards the betterment of society and the realization of positive outcomes on Earth.

The concept and principle of *mubadalah* are profoundly founded in Islam’s foundational teachings, particularly tawhid, which emphasises the belief in God’s absolute oneness. The word "la ilaha illallah", which Muslims regularly use, attests to Allah’s uniqueness as the one entity worthy of adoration and perfect obedience. This declaration of monotheism includes two fundamental components: acknowledging Allah’s unique oneness and affirming human equality in His presence. In other words, there is no middleman between a servant and his Lord, and humans should not take
god-like attitudes towards one another (Qodir, 2019).

The robust foundation underlying the *mubadalah* approach contributes to the emergence of a just perspective in matters pertaining to family law. Moreover, this approach allows for the development of Islamic law without severing its ties to its foundational principles. Qodir’s early endeavours to ensure a fair and unbiased interpretation of religious texts reflects his aspiration for the Quran to be accessible in contemporary times, transcending the confines of male-dominated patriarchal thinking. His intent aligns with the spirit of considering the Quran as something applicable and relevant to all times and places, while challenging the traditional interpretations widely embraced by the broader community regarding the subordinate nature of the relationship between men and women. Such an interpretive stance is in harmony with the demands of the present era (Ihsaniyah, 2020).

The spirit of revitalisation inherent in the *mubadalah* approach complements Abdullah’s integration-interconnection paradigm. He emphasises the importance of critically examining Islamic disciplines such as fiqh, kalam, tasawwuf, and falsafah, recognising them as products of thought that have grown over time. According to Abdullah (2006: 28), the formation of knowledge is inherently bound by the precise period and context in which it was originally produced. As a result, Islamic studies in the modern era should engage in knowledge reconstruction by incorporating the most recent social realities. This method allows for a dynamic and responsive knowledge of Islam that is relevant to the current situation.

The phenomenon of childfree, which has garnered attention, necessitates a multidimensional analysis from diverse perspectives. Traditionally, childfree has been perceived as a contemporary trend that deviates from the inherent nature of human beings as reproductive creatures. Some argue that childfree thinking is not rooted in Islamic *aqidah* (creed), but rather a product of liberal (freedom-oriented) and secular (separation of religion from life) ideologies (Haqqoni, 2022). Nevertheless, when examining the historical context, the inclination towards having children within a family can be traced back to the theological understanding of Indonesian Muslims who follow the Shafi‘i school of fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence) (Haganta et al., 2022). As a construct influenced by the passage of time and spatial factors, this theological stance remains subject to critical review and analysis from various disciplines.

According to the author’s analysis, the *mubadalah* approach in Islamic studies is aimed at fostering a scientific ethics framework that avoids religious rigidity. In the context of the childfree phenomenon, the primary focus of *mubadalah* is to generate a fresh perspective that prioritizes two key aspects. First, it emphasizes the need to refrain from offering justifications without engaging in critical and fundamental observations of the phenomenon. One of the main criticisms raised by *mubadalah* is the excessive negative response towards married couples who choose to be childfree. The notion that having children is considered the primary objective of marriage and an inherent human instinct cannot serve as the absolute or sole viewpoint when comprehending the childfree phenomenon. Furthermore, the involvement of other factors, such as family values, is necessary to fully grasp the intricacies of the complex nature of family relationships. Elements like effective communication between spouses and respect for reproductive rights should also be scrutinized individually to gain a comprehensive understanding of the essence of childfree itself.

Second, *mubadalah* emphasises the importance of merging multiple disciplines to promote a more humanitarian perspective while addressing complicated challenges. Religious studies should not exist in isolation in this setting but should collaborate with other scientific fields such as medicine, economics, anthropology, politics, and
others. It is critical to recognise that the term "childfree" does not refer only to philosophical thinking or a specific life philosophy, but rather to a variety of situations that may result in a married couple being childless. Infertility, for example, is a separate issue that should be distinguished from voluntary childfree decisions. As a result, a critical assessment of childfree as a cultural phenomenon and an object of discussion within the area of Islamic family law is required.

Based on this description, the *mubadalah* perspective necessitates the integration of various scientific models. One such model involves the integration of religion and science. The term "science" in this context pertains to *hadarat al-'ilm*, encompassing empirical sciences that relate to the understanding of reality (Yulanda, 2019). To comprehensively analyse the childfree phenomenon within the framework of religion, the discipline of health science, also known as medical science, is particularly relevant and should be employed. It provides valuable insights and tools to delve into the intricacies of the childfree phenomenon and its implications.

From a religious standpoint, the presence of children is often regarded as both a form of inheritance and a source of blessings for parents. However, it is crucial to note that this perspective is not absolute. The Prophet's teachings emphasize that upon a person's demise, their deeds come to an end, except for three enduring legacies: continuous charity, beneficial knowledge, and righteous children who pray for their parents (Budiyanto, 2014). This implies that if a parent or an individual does not have children, they can still leave behind two perpetual acts of goodness—charitable contributions and disseminating beneficial knowledge. Additionally, it is essential to recognize that having children is not obligatory under certain circumstances, such as when a couple experiences infertility or faces physical and mental challenges that prevent them from conceiving. Thus, the potential harm resulting from deciding to be childfree would be greater in such cases.

The religious perspective regarding children finds further affirmation in the realm of medical science or health science. Several studies have demonstrated a correlation between childbirth and a reduced risk of developing ovarian and breast cancer among mothers. Although giving birth does not guarantee the prevention of cancer, pregnancy has been shown to contribute to lowering the associated risks (Troisi & Bjørge, 2018). However, it is important to emphasize that pregnancy is not the sole means of reducing the risk of cancer for women. Conversely, pregnancy can also pose health risks for women with specific medical conditions. One such condition that increases the likelihood of complications during pregnancy is heart defects (Guimarães et al., 2019). Consequently, both health science and religious perspectives converge in their recognition that the presence of children in a family is generally recommended, but there are circumstances where it may be prohibited due to potential harm.

In addition to religion and science integration, another model of integration that may be used to analyse the childfree phenomenon is religion and morality integration. Children's care and guiding are behaviours that are strongly anchored in moral ideals. Effective parenting has a major impact on children's moral development (Deviana et al., 2015). The duty to promote morality in society extends beyond the responsibilities of parents alone. A variety of direct and indirect roles can be played to protect and uphold moral standards in the community. As a result, being a parent is only one part of satisfying moral commitments, rather than the only compulsory or absolute need.

**A Semipermeable Approach between Science and Morality**

According to Abdullah, the link between science, which is based on the idea of "causality," and religion, which is based on the pursuit of meaning, is semipermeable,
allowing for mutual impact. Conflicts between religious and scientific views of reality result from a lack of permeability and communication between the two worlds. Each viewpoint tends to see its own interpretation as the most accurate, dismissing the other as incorrect. The collision between scientific and religious interpretations develops as a result of the semipermeable barrier between causation and meaning (Abdullah, 2021).

As a result, different regions have varying levels of awareness for the childfree phenomena. Childfree choices are highly recognised and recognised in Europe and Australia because to their agreement with more relevant philosophical and moral concepts. The decision to live a childless lifestyle is carefully considered and viewed as a worthwhile endeavour that benefits society (Doyle et al., 2012). In the context of Islam, however, some argue that childfree choices are incompatible with Islamic ideals. This perspective stems from a rigid interpretation of human nature and the perceived purpose of marriage, which is intimately linked to the presence of offspring (Jalaludin, 2022).

As a result, the connection of science and religion should not be hampered by an impenetrable barrier that prevents communication and reciprocal effect. Instead, it implies a degree of permeability that allows for interaction and integration. While borders across disciplines persist, scientists in a variety of professions remain open to new ideas and contributions from outside sources. This interconnected interaction can take many different forms, such as clarification, complementarity, affirmation, correction, verification, or change.

Abdullah symbolically compares religious and non-religious studies to a "scientific spider web," demonstrating their connectivity and dynamic interaction. The complicated structure of the web represents the active integration and interplay of numerous disciplines. The network's interstices might be compared to apertures in a wall, serving as ventilation outlets that regulate air circulation and enable information transmission between varied scientific disciplines, facilitating interdisciplinary dialogue and preventing knowledge isolation.

Similarly, when confronted with the childfree phenomena, the viewpoint that sees the existence of children as inherent to human nature and the very meaning of marriage is highly valued. However, it is critical to recognise that, while important, this position should not be used as an absolute negation or criticism of the childfree lifestyle. Additional variables and dimensions that contribute to a thorough understanding of the position and relevance of childfree choices in society must be considered. The mubadalah paradigm, which promotes an integrated and interrelated discourse between scientific and religious moral considerations, integrates the physiological features of human beings with the ethical dimensions of the marriage connection, all within the framework of justice. In general, the mubadalah stance on the childfree phenomena can be divided into three categories. For starters, the presence of children is considered one of the fundamental goals of marriage, needing serious consideration by both husband and wife. Islamic beliefs emphasise that child rearing and care are joint responsibility of both parents, rather than being attributed primarily to the mother or father. This principle is emphasised in hadith teachings.

Abu Hurairah narrated a saying of the Prophet, who stated, "Every child is born in a state of fitrah, pure and clean, and it is their parents who later influence them to adopt a Jewish, Christian, or Muslim faith" (Sahih Bukhari, no. 1373). This hadith's content strongly emphasises both parents' joint duty for shaping their child's religious
affiliation. Similarly, active participation from both parents is widely encouraged in the context of day-care. It has been demonstrated that children who receive affection and care from both parents have more psychological well-being than children who receive it from only one parent (Qodir, 2019).

According to this viewpoint, the decision to have or not have children within a household is the prerogative and obligation of both the husband and wife. Both people actively engage in decision-making, emphasising the importance of effective communication and happy relationships within the family. As a result, in the situation of childless couples who choose not to have children for acceptable Islamic reasons, such as a lack of mental or financial preparedness, the decision should be taken to avoid harm. This option is legal and does not violate any Islamic norms or teachings if it is made voluntarily, without external coercion, and with the mutual understanding of both spouses.

The main foundation of this argument is rooted in the laws of marriage, which are not universally obligatory for humans. According to the consensus among most scholars, the default ruling regarding marriage is mubah, meaning it is permissible but not obligatory. However, the legal status of marriage can vary based on the individual's circumstances, transforming into obligatory (wajib), recommended (sunnah), disliked (makruh), or forbidden (haram) (Sanjaya & Faqih, 2017). Consequently, those who choose not to marry, as per the majority of scholars, are not transgressing any prohibition. It is the dislike for marriage and actively opposing it that are discouraged. Conversely, opting not to marry for personal reasons remains permissible. Consequently, numerous scholars also elect to remain unmarried. The same ruling extends to the childfree choice: if not marrying is permissible, then not having children is likewise permissible within the framework of Islam.

Secondly, the concept of childfree includes not only fitrah but also psychology and morality. Human nature is definitely predisposed to reproduction and procreation. However, it is critical to recognise that human nature includes other characteristics. Personal development, the quest of security and comfort, and the desire to give to and serve others are examples of these. All these characteristics are also inherent in human nature. Thus, if fitrah is regarded solely as the manifestation of human nature, viewing childlessness as a breach of fitrah is an oversimplification.

However, upon closer investigation, Islam recognises and celebrates the all-encompassing nature of human fitrah. According to Quthub, human fitrah has four dimensions: the innate desire for contentment, tranquilly, and inner peace; the intellectual desire for autonomy, freedom, and certainty; the emotional need for empathy, understanding, and harmony; and the inherent rights and obligations for the establishment of legislation, order, and justice (Mualimin, 2017). When viewed through the lens of these innate impulses, childlessness might be viewed as an elective choice that is not prohibited in Islam. This is because fitrah comes from Allah and is unaffected by His creation.

Child freedom, as an individual decision, may not conform to Islamic principles, yet it cannot be definitely called haram. However, if it were to spread, it would be considered haram because it would interfere with the natural path of human reproduction through the biological processes of sexual intercourse, pregnancy, and childbirth. Nonetheless, as an individual choice, childfree can be viewed as a type of blessing and a way to provide care to children who lack parental guardianship. Thirdly, abstaining from having children has medical justification in the Islamic context. In Islamic studies, childlessness is analogous to the practise of 'azl. The act of discharging sperm outside the vagina is referred to as azl. The term al-'azl refers to the
act of separating or releasing. In the medical world, \textit{al-'}azl is known as coitus interruptus, which entails ejaculating outside the vagina to prevent the husband's sperm from colliding with the wife's egg, resulting in the dispersal of semen outside the wife's vagina. Alternatively, both the husband and wife may use contraception methods to avoid fertilisation (pregnancy) (S. & Hidayat, 2022).

Childfree is compared to 'azl because of its essential similarities in rejecting the conception of a child before it has the ability to exist. The major cause of pregnancy is universally acknowledged to be sexual intercourse between a husband and wife. Couples can engage in sexual contact while actively preventing the conception of children by practising 'azl or choosing for childfree, as the wife will not become pregnant if the husband's sperm does not fertilise the wife's egg. Except for rare, extraordinary circumstances in which humans are produced without sexual intercourse, such as the legends of Prophet Adam, Hawa, and the miraculous birth of Prophet Isa, this conjugal bond has a substantial influence on human procreation.

According to Al-Ghazali, the practise of 'azl is permitted rather than being classified as makruh (disliked) or haram (prohibited). 'Azl is seen as a tarkul afdhal act, which means the abandonment of virtues without reaching the level of being forbidden. Imam Al-Ghazali’s point of view is mentioned in his notable work, 

"In my perspective, I hold the opinion that 'azl is not makruh in the sense of makruh tahrim or makrûh tanzîh. This is because the prohibition of any action can only be established based on explicit textual evidence (nash) or analogy (qiyyâs) derived from textual evidence. However, in the case of 'azl, there is no clear textual evidence or a valid analogy that can be used to categorize it as makruh. On the contrary, there is a valid analogy that permits it, such as refraining from marriage altogether, abstaining from intercourse after marriage, or ejaculating outside the vagina after penetration. All of these actions can be regarded as acts of abandoning virtue rather than acts of prohibition. Ultimately, these actions do not make any difference in terms of the potential conception of a child, as it only occurs when sperm fertilizes the egg within the woman's womb". (Cited in Nuroh & Sulhan, 2022).

From an ethical standpoint, the choice to embrace a childfree lifestyle within a marital union is a fundamental entitlement for couples. This entitlement specifically pertains to reproductive rights, which are duly recognized and regulated within the context of Islam, particularly concerning the reproductive rights of women. Husein Muhammad delineates four distinct components that constitute reproductive rights: the right to engage in consensual sexual relations, the right to decline sexual relations, the right to decline pregnancy, and the right to terminate a pregnancy through abortion. These rights collectively encompass the autonomy and agency afforded to individuals in shaping their reproductive journeys within the confines of Islamic principles.

The option to live a childless existence exemplifies the freedom to decline pregnancy, as it is a manifestation of the right to exercise agency over reproductive decisions. Women have the right to refuse pregnancy within the context of Islam, highlighting the enormous esteem granted to women in Islamic civilisation. The provision of the freedom to decline pregnancy demonstrates this respect of women's autonomy, as women bear the costly responsibilities and related risks involved with conception, childbirth, and lactation (Khasanah, 2021). The realization of reproductive rights, specifically the right to decline pregnancy, can be actualized through the principle of equitable partnership between spouses. A conjugal relationship founded
on partnership is imperative to eradicate familial disparities, ensuring the fulfillment of women's rights, including their reproductive autonomy. The fulfillment of these reproductive rights guarantees the preservation of health and well-being. Fundamentally, women's reproductive rights serve as a means for women to exercise decision-making authority concerning their reproductive choices safely and effectively, such as the right to refuse pregnancy. Consequently, the aspiration of cultivating a harmonious, affectionate, and loving household becomes an attainable reality.

The three perspectives generated by mubadalah, pertaining to the childfree phenomenon, emanate from the convergence of medical disciplines, moral considerations, and religious interpretations. Despite the amalgamation of these perspectives, each retains its distinct scientific framework. Clear boundaries persist, giving rise to a novel standpoint that serves as both a corrective and a verifier. For instance, while the presence of children traditionally remains a recognized objective of marriage, the moral and reproductive rights considerations have led to adjustments in the legal status of childfree arrangements, rendering it highly contingent upon the circumstances encountered by couples.

From an objective standpoint, religious texts do not explicitly endorse the choice of leading a childfree lifestyle, particularly evident in the emphatic encouragement for parents to bear children, as depicted in QS. Ar-Ra'd verse 38 and QS. An-Nahl verse 72. However, subjectively analysing these verses through the lens of health science reveals that they do not constitute a prohibition against childfree decisions. Additionally, in the intersubjective analysis phase employing a moral framework, the right to procreate is ultimately entrusted to parents who consider various contextual factors. Consequently, the convergence of health science, moral perspectives, and Islamic scholarship serves to mitigate the rigidity of religious interpretations regarding the childfree phenomenon.

D. Conclusion

Mubadalah is a method or paradigm for understanding social relationships that is based on the core value of tawhid. The value of tawhid needs a more equitable, synergetic, and egalitarian understanding of two or more-party relationship dynamics. The pioneer, Faqihudin Abdul Kodir, specialises in using the mubadalah technique to analyse the interactions between men and women in both the household and public arenas. Nonetheless, the scope and concepts of this approach can be broadened to investigate various forms of public relations in society. This method is operationally consistent with M. Amin Abdullah's integration-interconnection paradigm, which tries to overcome the linear boundaries of disciplines in Islamic studies.

The semipermeable mubadalah technique, which was used to examine the situation of childless people in society, produced three fresh perspectives that are just, humanist, and based on the value of tawhid. These are the perspectives: the presence of children is regarded as a significant objective in marriage, necessitating careful consideration by both spouses; childfree is not solely a matter of fitrah (natural disposition), but also includes psychological and moral aspects; and childfree can be medically permissible in Islam. These viewpoints have emerged because of the merging of medical disciplines, moral considerations, and religious interpretations. The three areas interpenetrate in this interdisciplinary framework and remain open to critique without jeopardising their disciplinary identities.
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F. Author Contributions Statement

A combined team of three researchers conducted the investigation in Indonesia. Sukron Ma’mun was instrumental in developing the research concept and contributing to the background, research methodology, and overall article authoring. Ibnu Akbar Maliki was in charge of data gathering and helped with the literature review part. Sheikh Adnan Ahmed Usmani did data analysis and developed relevant conclusions in the final stages of the investigation. All writers worked together to create reference management research instruments and analytical tools.

G. References


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