

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

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Abstract

The concept of childfree is a complex issue influenced by various factors, including economic, cultural, social, and philosophical considerations. A comprehensive understanding of childfree phenomenon necessitates a method that extends beyond religious interpretations and includes other scientific disciplines. Therefore, the integration of morality and science through a multidisciplinary framework is important. In this context, *mubadalah* method, which corresponded with the integration-interconnection paradigm was a suitable method for unravelling the complexities of childfree in society. Furthermore, childfree was analyzed from the perspective of *mubadalah*, prioritizing dialogue between science and morality in marriage context. This is a descriptive qualitative study with a literature survey method. The results showed that using semipermeable *mubadalah* method to analyze the position of childfree in society introduced three new perspectives, namely just, humanist, and perspective rooted in the value of tawhid. These three included some notions, first, the presence of children assumed a central role in marital union and required thoughtful consideration by both partners. Second, childfree was not only about fitrah (innate human disposition), but also included psychological and moral dimensions. Finally, childfree was permissible in the context of Islam from a medical standpoint. These perspectives, derived from medical, moral, and religious interpretations, contributed to a nuanced understanding.

Keywords: Childfree; Moral; Mubadalah; Sains.

A. Introduction

The term "childfree" also known as voluntary childfree is a deliberate choice made by individuals to abstain from having children. It is important to differentiate this state from involuntary childfree, where couples face certain circumstances preventing conception or childbirth (Neal & Neal, 2021). Childfree phenomenon is not a recent occurrence exclusive to the contemporary global community. Chrastil stated that as early as the 1500s, the lifestyles were prevalent in Western countries such as England, Netherlands, and France. Furthermore, health concerns, philosophical values, and personal life choices were some factors that contributed to its emergence. The prevalence of childfree individuals peaked in the 1900s, and statistics showed that one in five American women born between 1885 and 1915 did not have children (Chrastil, 2019). As 21st century unfolded, the lifestyle expanded beyond being a trend in developed European nations, and spread to Asian countries such as China, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan (Abe, 2018).

The emergence and development of childfree lifestyle in a particular country or region were intricately shaped by social factors in the community. In Western countries such as America and Western Europe, young women chose to avoid marriage and childbearing. This decision was based on the belief that not having children enabled them to pursue professional goals without the challenges of striving for gender equality and simultaneously raising a family (Chrastil, 2019). Meanwhile, Indonesian society placed strong expectations on married couples to have children. This societal expectation represented a form of habitualization that has become deeply ingrained in the culture (Hanandita, 2022).

An important factor that influenced the prevalence of childfree phenomenon in society pertained to medical or health-related aspects. In this context, childfree is a situation where a married couple remained childfree due to infertility. Letherby, as cited by Grace, defined 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 contributed to this status (Panggabean, 2014). It is crucial to note that in these cases, childfree status is not a choice but a result of circumstances beyond control.

Over recent decades, the number of married couples who select childfree lifestyle has significantly increased which marked significant demographic behavioural trends in Europe. However, this choice sparked a wide range of ideological perspectives. Siegel suggested that the rise of childfree couples reflected an individualistic and self-centered society, and women were faulted by Focus for the aging population and the collapse of social security system. From a feminist perspective, choosing not to have children was seen as an assertion of self-determination, challenging traditional societal notion that the identity of a woman solely tied to the role as a wife and mother within domestic sphere (Kreyenfeld & Konietzka, 2017).

The historical role of religious traditions in striving to limit the rise of a childfree lifestyle was important for acknowledgement in this context. For instance, in pre-revolutionary France, a significant percentage of adults, ranging from 15% to 22%, consciously selected not to marry or have children. Childfree was uncommon among American colonies due to the biblical command to reproduce and the need for offspring to contribute towards agricultural labour. However, by the 1800s, this scenario had evolved significantly (J. Ealey, 2016).

Islamic normative studies have also provided perspectives on childfree phenomenon in society. Previous investigations by Karunia, included thematic analyses of several verses from the Qur'an, such as 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 results showed a contradiction with regard to the practice of childfree. However, there was no explicit textual mention that mandated the obligation to have children (prohibition of childfree). This viewpoint was supported by renowned scholars such as Imam Al-Ghazali and Shaykh Muhammad bin Muhammad al-Husaini az-Zabidi. Considering these scriptural verses and the opinions, it became evident that every individual should take responsibility and be aware, as a manifestation of *maqāsid shari'ah* (Hazyimara, 2022).

With the complexities that surrounded childfree phenomena, determining its status and position required a multidisciplinary method rather than a restricted monodisciplinary perspective. As Amin Abdullah stated, the linear nature of scientific inquiry and monodisciplinary method in religious studies might lead to a gap between religious understanding and intricacies of real-life situations (Abdullah, 2021). Similarly, in the context of childfree choices, a contemporary concern in Islamic family law, which fostered dialogue between disciplines of natural and social sciences, as well as religious understanding, produced interpretations that were more contextualised and associated with societal realities.

Amin Abdullah emphasized the importance of a multidisciplinary method in contemporary Islamic studies, which allowed diverse disciplines coexist in a certain contextual framework (Abdullah, 2021). To determine the position of childfree phenomena in Islamic law, multiple disciplines were included. Also, disciplines such as health, culture, social sciences, and economics were critical for examining childfree phenomena considering elements that contributed to its prevalence in society.

This corresponded with the paradigm and guiding principle of *mubadalah* in contemporary studies of Islamic family law. *Mubadalah* was an interpretive method that aimed to achieve a balanced realization of roles, responsibilities, and positions between both genders in domestic or public spheres (Rajafi, 2020). Practically, *mubadalah* integrated scientific and social disciplines, as well as societal moral values and its application in the study of Islamic family law contributed to gaining new insights into various childcare issues (Adib & Mujahidah, 2021), household leadership (Santoso, 2019), polygamy (Indra & Putri, 2022), and maintenance (Zen, 2021). These studies were valuable resources for understanding childfree phenomenon as a contemporary issue in Islamic family law through the application of *mubadalah* method.

Childfree in the context of Islamic law has been explored by numerous scholars, using various methods including *maslahah mursalah*, *maqashid sharia*, and *fiqh aulawiyat*. Classical fiqh-based studies typically converged on the view that childfree was impermissible, and positioned as an action not to be prioritized in domestic life (Farisi, 2021). The analysis of *maslahah mursalah* suggested that it contradicted the objectives of sharia, and rendered it *makruh* or reprehensible (S. & Hidayat, 2022). From the perspective of *maqashid sharia*, childfree phenomenon raised concerns about future population issues (Kamilia, 2022). When other dimensions of marriage such as medical and moral aspects were considered, it had a broader meaning and purpose. Therefore, the permissibility or prohibition of childfree depended on specific circumstances and how it was implemented.

Makhlad (2022) conducted a preliminary investigation of childfree in the context of *mubadalah*. The study assessed it as one of the digital tafsir products, had a limited scope, and concentrated solely on an article published on *mubadalah.id* website. Therefore, it did not provide a comprehensive exploration of the full paradigm and underlying concepts of *mubadalah*.

This study aimed to investigate childfree freedom from the perspective of *qira'ah mubadalah*. It allowed for a meaningful discussion about subjective, objective, and

intersubjective aspects of the roles of children in families and society. Furthermore, the integration of theological disciplines with scientific and moral issues held the potential to offer a more compassionate viewpoint, specifically during crises. This study also sheds light on the ethical implications of using *mubadalah* to access the legal and societal status of childfree phenomena.

B. Methods

This study used a descriptive qualitative method, which aimed to provide a comprehensive description of the status and position of childfree in Islam using *mubadalah* method. This method is grounded in the interconnection integration paradigm that uses a semipermeable method. It included examining a problem through the perspectives of various disciplines and allowed for cross-disciplinary analysis as well as critical evaluation. Furthermore, a literature review was conducted using the documentation method and included an extensive review of marriage laws, classical fiqh books, scholarly articles, and other relevant written sources related to the topic. Data analysis used content analysis method with the following procedures, first, dissecting the theoretical concept of childfree and its interpretation in the Qur'an, second, identifying the significance and position of *mubadalah* as a method to understanding childfree phenomenon, third, fostering a dialogue between science and morality in the framework of *mubadalah* to generate novel perspectives on childfree in Islam.

C. Results and Discussion

1. Results

The Concept of Childfree in the Qur'an Perspective

The term "childfree" is a compound word combining "child" and "free" in English, signifying a state of being "free from children". According to Cambridge Dictionary, it describes those who choose not to have children or environments without children. This concept is similar to "childless", according to Oxford Dictionary, where it denotes the absence of offspring (Jalaludin, 2022).

Prastiwi noted the challenge of translating "childfree" into Indonesian due to its recent emergence as a topic, and it was already considered a commonplace in other countries. However, an Indonesian equivalent might be a mutual decision by a married couple to abstain from having children (Haganta et al., 2022).

Childfree couples were further categorized into two types, namely voluntary and involuntary as outlined by Miall, cited by Prasetyo and Putra (Prasetyo & Putra, 2017). Voluntary childfree is a choice driven by various factors and concerns. The study by Rogers considered this decision to be primarily motivated by attitudes and values. Those who selected voluntary childfree prioritized individuality, autonomy, freedom from parental responsibilities, travel, personal goals, intimacy, personal development, gender equality, flexible lifestyles, career advancement, and friendships. Furthermore, it was perceived as a way to uphold marital satisfaction and contentment (Rogers, 1986).

The choice to be childfree was rooted in the apprehension of couples about parenthood which stemmed from past traumatic experiences, where individuals wished to prevent their potential offsprings from enduring similar hardships or financial considerations as raising children could be expensive (Rahayu & Rahmah, 2022). These reasons were more constructive and deviated from the stereotype that childfree couples were inherently selfish. Meanwhile, involuntary childfree was characterized by an inability to conceive despite a desire for children often due to medical factors such as infertility in either the wife, husband, or both, with some cases having unknown causes.

Childfree showed various perspectives among married couples. Some viewed children as positive addition, and not having them was disappointing, while others perceived children as burdensome and finding advantages in childfree marriage (Patnani et al., 2021). This distinction showed that values and attitudes evolved not only during the decision-making process but also when couples accepted their inability to conceive.

In Islamic context, childfree is closely related to the fundamental purpose of marriage, which is procreation. Marriage is seen as a means to ensure the continuation of human life across generations (Nuroh & Sulhan, 2022). This perspective is deeply ingrained in human nature tracing back to ancient times, predating era of the Prophet and is referenced in verse 38 of Surah Ar-Ra'd in the Holy Qur'an as follows:

وَلَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا رُسُلًا مِّن قَبْلِكَ وَجَعَلْنَا لَهُمْ أَزْوَاجًا وَذُرِّيَّةً ۖ وَمَا كَانَ لِرَسُولٍ أَنْ يَأْتِيَ بِآيَةٍ إِلَّا بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ ۗ
لِكُلِّ أَجَلٍ كِتَابٌ

"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'd 13:38).

According to Ibn Kathir interpretation, it was explained that both Prophet Muhammad and earlier messengers engaged in typical human activities such as eating, drinking, walking in the marketplace, marrying, and having children. Al-Qurthubi agreed and stated that verse 38 of Surah Ar-Ra'd showed how Allah allowed these messengers to enjoy worldly pleasures, with the distinction being the divine revelation they received (al-Qurthubi, 2008).

Imam Ibn Kathir and Imam Al-Qurthubi interpretations stated that marriage and procreation are inherent aspects of human nature in this earthly realm. Allah has provided humanity with 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 was further stated by the words of Allah in Surah An-Nahl, verse 72:

وَاللَّهُ جَعَلَ لَكُم مِّنْ أَنْفُسِكُمْ أَزْوَاجًا وَجَعَلَ لَكُمْ مِّنْ أَزْوَاجِكُمْ بَنِينَ وَحَفَدَةً وَرَزَقَكُمْ مِّنَ الطَّيِّبَاتِ ۗ
أَفَبِالْبَاطِلِ يُؤْمِنُونَ وَبِنِعْمَتِ اللَّهِ 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).

Verses in the Qur'an stated that Allah gave blessings in the form of spouses, offsprings, and sustenance, as sources of comfort, joy, including well-being for the servants.

Examinations of Qur'an texts allowed the comprehension that no specific verse directly prohibited childfree lifestyles. However, in terms of substance, Surah Ar-Ra'd 13:38 and Surah An-Nahl 16: 72 promote individuals to seek righteous progeny through lawful marriages. The Qur'an promotes harmonious, affectionate, and compassionate union, commonly known as "*sakinah, mawaddah, and rahmah*", and having children within a marital bond is seen as a divine blessing deserving of gratitude.

From a moral perspective, voluntary childfree choices that prioritized individuality and freedom from parental responsibilities deviated from the ethical

principles of the Qur'an. Similarly, concerns about financial constraints from having children undermined appreciation for divine blessings given to those with offspring. However, in cases of involuntary childfree, the moral dimension changed, as these individuals continued to long for children and strived for blessings of God.

2. Discussion

Childfree on *Mubadalah* Perspective

Mubadalah, is an Arabic phrase that originated from the root "ba-da-la" which signifies actions of replacing, altering, and exchanging. It is a concept of mutual replacement, alteration, or interchange, functioning as a form of conjunction (*mu'afa'alah*) and collaboration (*musyarakah*) between two elements. Faqihuddin Abdul Qodir elaborated on *mubadalah* as a lens for understanding the interactions between men and women, emphasizing partnership, cooperation, interdependence, reciprocity, and equality in relationships. The term was used to describe a manner of understanding Islamic source texts that required the acknowledgement of both genders as equal subjects (Qodir, 2019).

Although the focus was initially on examining the dynamics between men and women, the concept of *mubadalah* has broadened to include various relationships between entities in diverse contexts. They were interactions between individuals, the state and citizens, employers and employees, parents and children, teachers and students, as well as majority and minority groups. The fundamental commitment to cooperation, mutual assistance, as well as support was crucial for the betterment of society and positive outcomes on Earth.

The principle of *mubadalah* was profoundly founded in the foundational teachings of Islam, particularly *tawhid*, which emphasized the absolute oneness of God. The declaration of "*la ilaha illallah*" by Muslims regularly underscores how special Allah is as the one entity worthy of adoration and perfect obedience. This declaration of monotheism includes both uniqueness of Allah and the equality of all humans, discouraging any god-like attitudes towards one another (Qodir, 2019).

Mubadalah provided a solid foundation for a just perspective on family law and allowed the development of Islamic law while staying true to its foundational principles. Endeavours of Qodir to ensure unbiased interpretation of religious texts corresponded with a goal of making the Qur'an relevant in contemporary times, breaking away from male-dominated patriarchal thinking. This intent corresponded with the spirit of considering the Qur'an as applicable and relevant to all times and places. This was because it challenged traditional interpretations regarding the subordinate nature of the relationship between both genders, which was in line with demands of the present era (Ihsaniyah, 2020).

The revitalisation spirit inherent in *mubadalah* complemented the integration-interconnection paradigm of Abdullah. The importance of critically examining Islamic disciplines was emphasized such as *fiqh*, *kalam*, *tasawwuf*, as well as *falasafah*. The formation of knowledge was inherently bound by the precise period and context in which it was originally produced. As a result, knowledge reconstruction through the incorporation of recent social occurrences should be engaged in Islamic studies in the modern era (Abdullah (2006:28). This method allowed for a dynamic and responsive idea of Islam that was relevant to the current social realities.

Childfree phenomenon, which has gained attention, required a multi-dimensional analysis from various perspectives. Traditionally, it has been viewed as a departure from the natural reproductive nature of humans. Some stated that this was rooted in liberal

and secular ideologies rather than Islamic creed (Haqqoni, 2022). Historic context showed that the inclination towards having children in a family could be traced back to theological understanding of Indonesian Muslims who followed Shafi'i school of fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence) (Haganta et al., 2022). This construct influenced by time and spatial factors, remained open to critical review from various disciplines.

According to analysis, *mubadalah* aimed to foster a scientific framework that avoided religious rigidity and prioritized two key aspects. First, it emphasized the need to refrain from offering justifications without engaging in critical and fundamental observations of the phenomenon. Excessive negative responses towards childfree married couples challenged the notion that having children is the sole objective of marriage. Other factors such as family values and reproductive rights should be considered.

Second, *mubadalah* showed the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration. Religious studies should work in conjunction with scientific fields such as medicine, economics, anthropology, politics, and to address the multifaceted challenges of childfree phenomenon. It was critical to differentiate between voluntary childfree choices and issues such as infertility. Therefore, a critical assessment of childfree as a cultural phenomenon and object of discussion in Islamic family law was necessary.

Mubadalah perspective promoted the integration of various scientific models, including religion and science. In this case, "science" referred to *hadarat al-'ilm*, and included empirical sciences related to understanding reality (Yulanda, 2019). To comprehensively analyse childfree phenomenon in the religious framework, medical science was particularly relevant and used. It offered valuable insights and tools for delving into the intricacies of childfree phenomenon and the implications.

From a religious perspective, having children is often seen as a form of inheritance and source of blessings for parents. However, it is essential to note that this perspective is not absolute. Teachings of the Prophet emphasized that the deeds of a person come to an end upon demise, except for three enduring legacies, namely continuous charity, beneficial knowledge, and righteous children who pray for the parents (Budiyanto, 2014). This implied that even though individuals do not have children, they can leave behind two perpetual acts of goodness – charitable contributions and sharing beneficial knowledge. It is also important to recognize that having children is not obligatory in certain circumstances, such as infertility or physical and mental challenges. Therefore, the potential harm of choosing to be childfree would be greater in such cases.

Religious perspectives on children found reinforcement in the field of medical or health science. Numerous studies showed a correlation between childbirth and a reduced risk of ovarian and breast cancer among mothers. Although giving birth does not guarantee the prevention of cancer, it has been shown to lower associated risks (Troisi & Bjørge, 2018). Pregnancy is not the sole means of reducing the risk of cancer for women and in some cases, it can pose health risks, specifically for women with specific medical conditions such as heart defects (Guimarães et al., 2019). Therefore, both health science and religious perspectives acknowledged that the presence of children in a family was generally recommended, but there were circumstances where it may be prohibited due to potential harm.

Another model of integration used to analyze childfree phenomenon was the integration of religion and morality. Caring and guiding children are deeply rooted in moral ideals and effective parenting significantly influenced their moral development (Deviana et al., 2015). The responsibility to promote morality in society extends beyond the role of parents alone. Various direct and indirect ways can be used in upholding moral standards in community. Consequently, being a parent is just one aspect of

fulfilling moral obligations, rather than the sole compulsory or absolute requirement.

A Semipermeable Method between Science and Morality

According to Abdullah, the link between science, which is based on the idea of "causality," and religion, based on the pursuit of meaning, is semipermeable, allowing for mutual impact. Conflicts between religious and scientific world views of reality result from insufficient permeability and communication. Each perspective often believed its own interpretation to be most accurate, dismissing the other as incorrect. The collision between scientific and religious interpretations developed due to this semipermeable barrier between causation and meaning (Abdullah, 2021).

Different regions had varying levels of awareness for childfree phenomenon. In Europe and Australia, childfree choice was widely recognized and respected due to the agreement with more pertinent philosophical and moral principles. Choosing a childfree lifestyle was a carefully considered endeavour perceived as beneficial to society (Doyle et al., 2012). In the context of Islam, some stated that childfree choice was incompatible with Islamic ideals. This perspective derived from a rigid interpretation of human nature and the perceived purpose of marriage, closely related to the presence of offspring (Jalaludin, 2022).

The connection of science and religion should not be hindered by an impenetrable barrier preventing communication and mutual influence. It implied a level of permeability that permitted for interaction and integration. Although disciplinary boundaries persisted, scientists across various fields remained receptive to fresh insights and contributions from external sources. This interconnected collaboration could take on various forms, including clarification, complementarity, affirmation, correction, verification, or change.

Abdullah compared religious and non-religious studies to a "scientific spider web," which showed the connectivity and dynamic interaction. The complicated structure represented active integration and interplay of numerous disciplines. The interstices of networks might be compared to apertures in a wall, that served as ventilation outlets, regulated air circulation, enabled information transmission between varied scientific disciplines, facilitated interdisciplinary dialogue, and prevented knowledge isolation.

When addressing childfree phenomenon, perspective that considered children as inherent to human nature and the very essence of marriage held significant value. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that this viewpoint should not be used to unconditionally negate or criticize childfree lifestyle. A comprehensive understanding of the position and significance of childfree choice in society necessitated considerations of additional variables and dimensions. *Mubadalah* paradigm, which advocated an integrated as well as interconnected discourse between scientific and religious moral considerations combined physiological aspects of human beings with ethical facets of marriage institution, all under the umbrella of justice. In general, *mubadalah* stance on childfree phenomenon could be categorized into three main areas. First, the presence of children was considered as one of the fundamental objectives of marriage, which required serious consideration by both spouses. Islamic beliefs stressed that child rearing and care were shared responsibilities of both parents, rather than being predominantly assigned to either the mother or father. This principle is stated in hadith teachings.

مَا مِنْ مَوْلُودٍ إِلَّا يُولَدُ عَلَى الْفِطْرَةِ فَأَبَوَاهُ يُهَوِّدَانِهِ أَوْ يُنَصِّرَانِهِ أَوْ يُمَجِّسَانِهِ

Abu Hurairah narrated a saying where the Prophet stated that "*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 strongly emphasized joint responsibility of both parents in shaping religious affiliation of the child. Similarly, active participation from both parents was highly promoted as studies showed that children who received love and care from both parents tended to have better psychological well-being compared to those who received from only one parent (Qodir, 2019).

According to this perspective, decision to have or not have children in a household is a prerogative and obligation of the husband and wife. Both partners actively participated in decision-making process, underlining the significance of effective communication and fostering healthy relationships within the family. Consequently, in the case of childfree couples who select not to have children for acceptable Islamic reasons, such as mental or financial preparedness, these decisions are legitimate and do not contravene any Islamic norms or teachings, provided they were made willingly, without external coercion, and with mutual understanding of both spouses.

The fundamental basis of the argument was grounded in the laws of marriage, which were not universally obligatory for individuals. Most scholars agreed that the default ruling on marriage is *mubah*, meaning it is permissible but not mandatory. The legal status of marriage could vary depending on circumstances of individuals, potentially becoming obligatory (*wajib*), recommended (*sunnah*), discouraged (*makruh*), or forbidden (*haram*) (Sanjaya & Faqih, 2017). Therefore, those who chose not to marry, according to consensus among most scholars, were not in violation of any prohibition. Choosing not to marry for personal reasons remained permissible, and many scholars selected to remain unmarried. Same principle applied to childfree choice of when not marrying is permissible, then not having children is similarly permissible in the framework of Islam.

The concept of childfree includes just fitrah and also psychology and morality. While human nature inherently inclined towards reproduction and procreation, it is crucial to acknowledge that human nature included other various traits. Aspects such as personal development, pursuit of security, comfort and the desire to contribute to and serve others are integral to humans. Therefore, when fitrah is solely perceived as an expression, labeling childfree choices as a breach is an oversimplification.

With closer examination, Islam acknowledges and celebrates the holistic nature of human fitrah. According to Quthub, human fitrah consists of four dimensions, namely an innate desire for contentment, tranquilly, inner peace; intellectual longing for autonomy, freedom, certainty; emotional need for empathy, understanding, harmony; as well as inherent rights and obligations for establishment of law, order, and justice (Mualimin, 2017). When considered in the light of these intrinsic inclinations, childfree might be viewed as a voluntary choice that was not prohibited in Islam.

Childfree, as an individual choice, may not correspond with Islamic principles, but it cannot be definitely labelled as haram. When this is to become widespread, haram might be considered as it could potentially interfere with the natural process of human reproduction through sexual intercourse, pregnancy, and childbirth. Meanwhile, as an individual decision, being childfree can be seen as a form of blessing and a way to provide care to children who lack parental guardianship. Abstaining from having children can be medically justified in the Islamic context. In Islamic studies, childfree is similar to the practise of *'azl*, the act of discharging sperm outside the vagina. In medical realm, it is known as *coitus interruptus*, meaning ejaculation outside the vagina to prevent sperm from fusing with the ovum. Alternatively, both the husband and wife

may use contraception methods to prevent fertilization (S. & Hidayat, 2022).

The comparison between childfree and 'azl lies in the fundamental similarity in preventing the conception of a child. It is widely recognized that sexual intercourse between a husband and wife is the primary cause of pregnancy. Couples can engage in sexual contact while actively avoiding the conception of children by practising 'azl or selecting for childfree. With the exception of rare and extraordinary circumstances such as legends of Prophet Adam, Hawa, and the miraculous birth of Prophet Isa, this marital union significantly affects human procreation.

According to Al-Ghazali, the practise of 'azl is considered permissible rather than being classified as makruh (disliked) or haram (prohibited). 'Azl is viewed as a tarkul afdhal act, meaning it is the abandonment of virtues without reaching the level of being forbidden. The Imam Al-Ghazali perspective was mentioned in the Ihya 'Ulumuddin work.

“In my perspective, I hold the opinion that 'azl is not makruh in the sense of makruh tahrîm or makrûh tanzîh. This is because the prohibition of any action can only be established based on explicit textual evidence (nash) or analogy (qiyâs) derived from textual evidence. However, in the case of 'azl, there is no clear textual evidence or a valid analogy 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 ovum in the woman's womb”. (Cited in Nuroh & Sulhan, 2022).

From an ethical perspective, the decision to embrace a childfree lifestyle in a marital union is a fundamental entitlement for couples. This distinctively pertains to reproductive rights, which are duly recognized and regulated within the context of Islam, particularly concerning reproductive rights of women. Husein Muhammad outlined four distinct components that constitute reproductive rights, namely to engage in consensual sexual relations, decline sexual relations, decline pregnancy as well as terminate a pregnancy by abortion. These collectively contain the autonomy and agency afforded to individuals in shaping their reproductive journeys in the context of Islamic principles.

The choice to lead childfree existence represents freedom to decline pregnancy, and manifesting the right to exercise agency over reproductive decisions. In the context of Islam, women have the right to refuse pregnancy reflecting high regard given to them in Islamic civilisation. Furthermore, granting the freedom to decline pregnancy underscores respect for the autonomy of women, as they bear the substantial responsibilities and associated risks of conception, childbirth, and lactation (Khasanah, 2021). The realization of reproductive rights, particularly the right to decline pregnancy, can be achieved through the principle of an equitable partnership between spouses. A marital relationship built on partnership is essential to eliminate family disparities, ensuring the fulfillment of women rights, including their reproductive autonomy. This ensures the preservation of health and well-being. In essence, women reproductive rights empower them to safely make reproductive decisions, including the right to refuse pregnancy. This fosters the aspiration of creating a harmonious, affectionate, and loving household.

Three perspectives derived from *mubadalah*, concerning childfree phenomenon, resulted from the convergence of medical disciplines, moral considerations, and religious interpretations. Despite the combination of these views, each maintained its

unique scientific framework, with clear boundaries which created a distinctive standpoint and served as both corrective and validator. For instance, while having children traditionally remained a recognized goal of marriage, moral and reproductive rights considerations have led to changes in the legal status of childfree choices, making it highly dependent on the circumstances faced by couples.

From an objective perspective, religious texts did not explicitly endorse the choice of leading a childfree lifestyle, particularly evident in strong encouragement for parents to have in verses like QS. Ar-Ra'd verse 38 and QS. An-Nahl verse 72. However, subjective analysis of these verses through the lens of health science showed that they do not constitute a prohibition against childfree choices. During intersubjective analysis phase employing a moral framework, the right to procreate depended on parents who considered various contextual factors. Consequently, convergence of health science, moral perspectives, and Islamic scholarship served to mitigate rigidity of religious interpretations regarding childfree phenomenon.

D. Conclusion

In conclusion, *mubadalah* was a method or paradigm rooted in the core value of tawhid and offered a more equitable, synergistic, and egalitarian understanding of multi-party relationships. Faqihuddin Abdul Qodir pioneered the application in analyzing interactions between men and women in both private and public spheres. However, the scope and concepts of this study were not extended to explore various forms of public relations in society. This method corresponded with the integration-interconnection paradigm of M. Amin Abdullah, which aimed to transcend the traditional boundaries of disciplines in Islamic studies. The semipermeable *mubadalah* method used to examine childfree phenomenon in society produced three new perspectives based on the value of tawhid, namely (1) the presence of children was considered a significant goal in marriage and required thoughtful consideration by both spouses, (2) childfree was not solely a matter of fitrah (natural disposition), but included psychological and moral dimensions, and (3) childfree could be medically permissible in Islam. These perspectives were through the fusion of medical disciplines, moral considerations, and religious interpretations. The three domains interacted in an interdisciplinary framework and remained open to criticism without compromising their disciplinary identities.

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F. Author Contributions Statement

This study was conducted by a collaborative team of three scholars in Indonesia. Sukron Ma'mun played an important role in shaping the concept and contributed to the background, methodology, and overall authorship. Ibnu Akbar Maliki was responsible for data collection and assisted with the literature review section. Sheikh Adnan Ahmed Usmani conducted data analysis and formulated pertinent conclusions in the later stages. All authors collectively worked on developing reference management instruments and analytical tools.

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