

Research Article

Childfree Perspective Imam Syafii and Ulama Jamaah Tabligh in Bandar Lampung City

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ORCIDLinda Firdawaty: <https://orcid.org/0009000717390753>**Abstract.**

The childfree phenomenon has sparked debates in Indonesian society for its pronatalist and religious values. The act of choosing to be childfree is feared to create a crisis in future human resources. This study aims to describe the views of Imam Shafi'i and compare them with the views of scholars from the Tabligh Jamaat in the city of Bandar Lampung regarding childfree. This research adopts a qualitative comparative approach, with informants being scholars from the Tabligh Jamaat in the city of Bandar Lampung. Data were obtained through interviews. The results of the study indicate that Imam Shafi'i did not specifically discuss childfree; he linked it to the practice of 'azl as a means of preventing pregnancy. Imam Shafi'i allows individuals to not have offspring, but such an act is considered leaving behind virtues and not following the Prophet's Sunnah. On the other hand, scholars from the Tabligh Jamaat believe that childfree is not prohibited in Islam, but Islam strongly encourages the multiplication of offspring. The existence of the Muslim community is essential for the development and expansion of Islamic da'wah. Having righteous children is the greatest investment that will eventually intercede for their parents. The common ground between the two opinions is that both allow for childfree and view it as an act that forsakes marital virtues. The difference lies in the fact that Imam Shafi'i merely considers it as leaving behind virtues and opposing human nature, while scholars from the Tabligh Jamaat perceive Muslims who choose to be childfree as incurring great loss. The act of being childfree contradicts the concept of tanâsul, which entails permanently cutting off progeny.

Keywords: Childfree, Imam Syafii, Ulama Jama'ah Tabligh

1. Introduction

Childfree is the decision made by a family not to have children, even though they are physically and medically capable of reproducing. This phenomenon has started to emerge in Indonesia, particularly among artists and middle-to-upper-class families. The childfree phenomenon began to gain attention after the "Youtuber" Gita Savitri brought it to the public's attention, resulting in a lot of debate and controversy within a society known for its religiosity and strong adherence to traditional customs and culture. As a result, there have been negative accusations and stigmas directed towards childfree

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individuals[1].[2] Agustina argues that childfree causes a loss to the country due to a decrease in the future productive age population.

Recent data indicates that the percentage of Australians residing in families consisting of couples with children is expected to decrease progressively. Over the period of 1996 to 2016, there was a decline in the proportion of Australians living in such families, dropping from 54% to 49%. This downward trend is projected to continue, with estimates suggesting a further decrease to 48% by the year 2041. It is worth noting that a significant number of these couples have consciously opted to be without children, while others find themselves in this situation due to various circumstances. As Rifkin points out, associating the value of one's life solely with the act of producing children is a violation of human dignity, disregarding individual variances and personal choices.[3]

The rate of permanent childlessness among women in Japan, Hong Kong, and Singapore is significant, with approximately 3 in 10 women in these countries not having children. This trend of permanent childlessness has been on the rise in East Asia, starting from relatively low levels of 4% to 12% among women born in the 1950s and escalating to extremely high levels among those born in the 1970s, as depicted in Figure ???. In Singapore, for instance, 28% of women born between 1975 and 1980 were found to be childless according to the 2020 census. Japan has also witnessed a steady increase in childlessness among women born from the early 1950s until the generation born between 1974 and 1976, which reached its peak at 28%. Hong Kong exhibits even higher levels of childlessness, peaking at 35% among women born in 1971 before gradually declining to 30% among those born in 1979.

Based on data from the World Bank, the birth rate trend in Indonesia continues to decline. In 2019, the crude birth rate per 1000 population in Indonesia was 17.75%. This data is supported by the results of population censuses issued by the Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS), which indicate a decrease in population growth rate. The population growth rate from 2010 to 2020 was 1.25%, a decrease from the previous period from 2000 to 2010, which was 1.49%.

Considering the declining birth rate in Indonesia, along with the emergence of the childfree phenomenon, it is clear that there has been a decrease in childbirth. There are many reasons why someone chooses to be childfree, including psychological, economic, and environmental factors. Some people choose to be childfree out of fear of pregnancy, fear of childbirth, fear of aging and losing attractiveness, fear of career disruption, and more. However, choosing to be childfree does not come without risks, especially in the midst of Indonesian society, which holds conservative views regarding

the essence of marriage and the importance of offspring in a family. The decision of a couple to be childfree can lead to negative stigma from members of society and family.

Marriage is the Sunnah of the Prophet, a sacred bond that is highly revered in Islam. In addition to being a form of worship and obedience to Allah's command, marriage aims to fulfill biological needs in a halal manner. Marriage also aims to increase offspring, as stated by the Prophet Muhammad, "Marry those who are loving and fertile, for I will take pride in your large numbers on the Day of Resurrection in front of other nations." In line with this, Wahbah Zuhaili states that the wisdom of marriage is to protect oneself and one's partner from actions that lead to haram, to preserve the existence of mankind, and to perpetuate lineage and descent.[4]

For Muslims, having children and raising them to be righteous generations is a noble gift and trust from Allah SWT. In Islam, having righteous children is an invaluable long-term investment, both in this world and the hereafter. According to Imam Ghazali,[5] if someone has righteous children, their prayers will become ongoing good deeds that continue to benefit them even after their parents have passed away. Even a child who dies in the womb or at a young age can intercede with Allah's permission in the afterlife.

Imam Shafi'i is one of the classical scholars who is knowledgeable in various fields of knowledge, including the Qur'an, hadith, and fiqh. In response to those who choose not to have offspring (childfree), Imam Shafi'i states that refusing to have children is permissible. However, according to him, the act of being childfree diminishes virtues. On the other hand, scholars from the Tabligh Jamaat believe that someone who refuses to have children is not following the Sunnah of the Prophet, which commands Muslims to multiply offspring. Furthermore, having children is an invaluable investment. Having righteous children is an ongoing good deed that will pray for their parents when they have passed away and will intercede on the Day of Judgment if they become a memorizer of the Qur'an.

This issue is interesting to study in this research because both of these scholars rely on their thinking based on the Qur'an and hadith, but they have different views. Imam Shafi'i, in determining the law, considers the context of an event and the dynamics of society, while the scholars from the Tabligh Jamaat take a more textual and literal approach in practicing all aspects of Islam, especially the Sunnah of the Prophet. Therefore, the research question is how Imam Shafi'i and the scholars from the Tabligh Jamaat perceive childfree and what are the differences in their opinions?

Several studies that discuss childfree include Nailis Safita,[6] who states in her research that in the book *Ihya Ulumuddin* written by Imam Al-Ghazali, there are four aspects that categorize marriage as an act of worship: seeking the pleasure of Allah,

producing offspring, performing actions beloved by the Prophet Muhammad, and hoping for prayers and blessings from righteous children after the parents have passed away. The desire to have children is considered a natural inclination of human beings. Islam, in general, and the Qur'an specifically, clearly state that children are a gift and one of the purposes of marriage.

Research on the hadiths related to the childfree phenomenon shows that the presence of hadiths regarding childfree, which are examined in this writing,[7] can be accepted and used as a basis for arguments in determining a law. This research also concludes that the hadiths of the Prophet do not support the childfree attitude, except for married couples who experience infertility. Research on the practice of childfree and the response of Islamic organizations in Kebumen reveals that childfree has garnered various responses, both positive and negative. Childfree is seen as a radical feminist ideology, and Islamic organizations in Kebumen consider childfree as an act that goes against human nature, deviating from the Qur'an and hadiths, as well as the purpose of marriage.[8]

Kamaluddin's research on the goals of child education within the Tabligh Jamaat families aims to raise children who are righteous, able to benefit others, and capable of interacting with society. They do not prohibit adhering to a particular school of thought, but they want their children to be able to interact and ultimately engage in da'wah, just as their parents do. Therefore, the main goal of Islamic education they desire is to engage in da'wah, inviting others to worship, improving morals, strengthening monotheism, and always drawing closer to Allah, living according to the Sunnah of the Prophet. (Ismaya, p. 28. Kamalludin, "Family Development in the Perspective of the Tabligh Jamaat," p. 28.)

2. Methodology

This research is a field research that involves informants as the subjects of the study. The informants selected are scholars from the Tabligh Jamaat with a background in Islamic boarding schools and Islamic Studies, considering that they are scholars from the Tabligh Jamaat who have a solid foundation in religious knowledge. Data is collected through interviews with prominent Tabligh Jamaat figures in the city of Bandar Lampung. The analysis is conducted qualitatively and comparatively, resulting in a study that compares the thinking of Imam Shafi'i as a classical scholar with the thinking of scholars from the Tabligh Jamaat, who are considered to have a textual approach in understanding Islamic teachings.

3. Discussion

3.1. Definition of Childfree

Childfree is a combination of two English words: child, which means offspring, and free, which means without. If translated literally, childfree means free from children. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, it is used to refer to people who choose not to have children or a place or situation without children. Childfree also shares a similar meaning with childless, which in the Oxford Dictionary means having no children. According to Agrillo, the term 'childfree' indicates someone who has no desire or plans to have children.[8]

Childfree is synonymous with the concept of tanâsul. As a verb, it can be interpreted as procreation or having offspring.[9] Because in reality, one cannot achieve procreation on their own, the presence of a partner is essential. The concept of tanâsul encompasses the laws related to having offspring. These laws regulate individuals to adhere to the messages conveyed by the Shari'a regarding procreation, such as multiplying offspring, prohibiting abortion, forbidding the killing of children out of fear of poverty, prohibiting self-castration, ensuring the health of mother and child, and more.[10]

In her research, Rachel Chrastil,[11] a history professor at Xavier University, explains that the condition of not having children, whether natural or by choice, has existed for centuries. Islamic history also shows that the choice not to have children has been present since the time of Jahiliyyah (pre-Islamic era). This was the reason for the revelation of verses regarding the virtue of marriage (Q.S. Ar-Rum verse 21), the importance of having children (Q.S. An-Nahl verse 72), and the assurance of sustenance from Allah (Q.S. An-Nur verse 32). Furthermore, the topic of childfree has been discussed by Ustaz Adi Hidayat in a lecture titled "UAH Talks about Childfree."

3.2. Reasons for Childfree

Reasons for being childfree can include valid reasons, such as infertility, a wife suffering from a disease that poses a risk to herself and the fetus if pregnancy occurs, or a woman having difficulty finding a suitable spouse. On the other hand, reasons that are not considered valid are related to economic concerns. In fact, some people choose to be childfree out of fear of pregnancy, childbirth, aging, loss of attractiveness, disruption of their career, and other personal reasons. In developed countries, preserving one's beauty is cited as a reason for couples to choose to be childfree.

In the book "Childfree and Happy," Victoria Tunggono explains[12] that there are many factors that contribute to someone choosing to be childfree, including financial and mental factors, career aspirations, hobbies, physical capacity, philosophical objections, and environmental considerations. For these individuals, having children is not seen as a crucial part of achieving happiness in life.

3.3. Imam Shafi'i's View on Childfree

Imam Shafi'i's full name is Muhammad ibn Idris ibn Abbas ibn Uthman ibn Shafi'i ibn Sa'ibn Said. He was born in Gaza in the year 150 AH (767 CE), coinciding with the death of Imam Abu Hanifa Ahmad Ash-Shurbasi. He was born into a poor family in Palestine, in a village inhabited by Yemeni people. He passed away at the age of 55 (204 AH) on a Friday night in the month of Rajab, corresponding to June 28, 819 CE, in Egypt. Imam Shafi'i was a scholar who defended the Maliki school of thought and the great scholars of Medina. He also had his own views and methods of deducing rulings from actions.

Imam Shafi'i's methodology involved placing the Qur'an as the highest foundation for determining a ruling. If he did not find the ruling in the Qur'an, he would then refer to mutawatir hadiths. When a ruling was not found in the hadiths, he would rely on ahad hadiths. The criteria for accepting an ahad hadith as a basis were as follows: (1) Itsq, (2) Intellect, (3) Accuracy in memorization, (4) Hearing the hadith directly, (5) Not defaming or contradicting the hadith narrators. If the ruling still could not be found, he would resort to ijma'. However, Imam Shafi'i only accepted the consensus of the companions that was based on the Qur'an and Sunnah, and he rejected the consensus of the successors (tabi'in) as a reference for determining rulings. The ijma' referred to by Imam Shafi'i was the consensus of the scholars and not a silent consensus. If a ruling still could not be found, he would use the method of istimbath through qiyas (analogical reasoning), and if qiyas did not provide a basis, he would rely on the statements of the companions to determine a ruling. However, Imam Shafi'i rejected the use of istihsan (juristic preference) as a method of istimbath. According to him, istihsan implied that the Shariah was incapable of providing rulings for all issues, and he believed that all matters should ultimately be returned to Allah and His Messenger. In responding to the reluctance to have offspring/childfree, Imam Shafi'i based his opinion on the act of 'azl (coitus interruptus). He used the method of qiyas to equate the ruling on childfree with the act of 'azl. Qiyas means to compare or equate something that does not have a specific legal ruling with something that does have a specific legal ruling due to the presence of a common factor, the illat (legal cause).[13] 'Azl refers to the act of

ejaculating outside the female genitalia with the intention of avoiding fertilization or pregnancy. Imam Shafi'i made the analogy between childfree and 'azl because 'azl prevents pregnancy in women.

According to Imam Shafi'i, 'azl itself is not a prohibited act. According to him, the practice of 'azl is permissible without any specific conditions. However, some followers of the Shafi'i school of thought state that 'azl can only be performed with the wife's consent. Therefore, the act of 'azl performed by the husband must be approved by the wife.

According to Al-Fairuzabadi asy-Syairazi, a classical jurist, he adopted the position of the majority of scholars who allow 'azl only with the wife's permission. According to him,[14] in the case of a free wife, 'azl must be done with the wife's consent. The wife has the right to engage in sexual relations, but with 'azl, ejaculation does not occur. The consequence of 'azl is that the wife can prevent having offspring.

Imam Shafi'i's opinion also permits the performance of 'azl without permission because Imam Shafi'i believes that the wife has rights in sexual intercourse but not the right to ejaculation, although many scholars disagree and oppose his view. The scholars argue that the wife's consent is necessary if 'azl is to be performed during sexual intercourse. In this regard, Imam Shafi'i refers to a verse in the Qur'an regarding the issue of the size of a family, specifically mentioned in Surah An-Nisa, which commands Muslims to be fair to their wives and be content with having only one wife for their entire lives (HR. An-Nasa'i).

'Azl is the right of both husband and wife and is not an obligation or recommendation. 'Azl is an alternative and easy method to regulate the number of children to be born. Therefore, Imam Shafi'i, in essence, compares 'azl to the regulation of birth spacing. However, returning to the fundamental ruling that having offspring is the right of every married couple, according to him, the decision to be childfree is a right of every couple and not an obligation. Thus, the decision to be childfree is permissible.

Similarly, Imam Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali, known as Imam Al-Ghazali, in his great work *Ihya' 'Ulum ad-Din*, explains [15] that the main purpose of marriage is to have children. According to him, this is in line with the purpose of the creation of the male genitalia and sperm, and the womb of women, which Allah has given both men and women the desire to multiply and preserve Allah's creation. Imam Al-Ghazali concludes that the decision to be childfree means abandoning the virtue (*tarku al-afdhal*) of marriage, and if it is done for mere pleasure, it is considered *makruh* (disliked).

3.4. Opinions of Tabligh Jamaat Scholars on Childfree

The Tabligh Jamaat is a community group that focuses on increasing faith and righteous deeds. This movement is not political, partisan, or organizational. The efforts of the Tabligh Jamaat aim to practice what the Prophet Muhammad did. According to Sheikh Zakaria al-Kandahlawi, the work of the Tabligh Jamaat is to produce devout individuals.

Idawi Syamsi, an Islamic scholar from the Tabligh Jamaat in Bandar Lampung, holds a Bachelor's degree in Da'wah from 1994. He is a respected figure in the Tabligh Jamaat and believes^[16] that having offspring is the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad. One of the goals of marriage is to have children, and the Prophet Muhammad encouraged choosing a fertile and caring spouse to preserve the human race. As stated in a hadith, "Marry women who are fertile and loving, for I will be proud of your numbers compared to other nations on the Day of Resurrection" (HR. An-Nasa'i).

Muhammad Rizal, another scholar from the Tabligh Jamaat, argues that Islam mandates marriage with the aim of safeguarding people from prohibited acts.^[17] Behind this, marriage also aims to perpetuate the generation of humankind. Having children and raising them to become righteous and memorize the Qur'an will allow the child to intercede for 10 members of their family. Therefore, raising a righteous child who memorizes the Qur'an will intercede for their parents in the hereafter. The child's supplications will continue to benefit their parents even after they have passed away.

This is evident in the hadith of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW): "The actions of a person come to an end after their death except for three: ongoing charity, beneficial knowledge, and a righteous child's prayers." Therefore, by having a righteous child, the prayers and recitation of the Qur'an from that child will flow towards both parents.

Analyzing the explanations of the scholars and applying the maqasidic interpretation, it can be concluded that procreation is one of the purposes of marriage, although not the sole and absolute purpose. Marriage is a means of fulfilling the natural needs of human beings in establishing a marital relationship and the love for offspring. Children can bring joy and solace to the soul. In addition to worldly happiness, having offspring provides tranquility towards eternal happiness.^[18]

Ustaz Ridwan,^[19] as a scholar from the Tabligh Jamaat, expresses that having offspring is the aspiration and goal of every Muslim who gets married. By having children and raising them to be righteous, parents can receive intercession because of their child's righteousness. Their prayers will continue to flow even after the parents have passed away. According to him, a righteous child who memorizes the Qur'an can intercede for 10 of their family members who are destined for hellfire. Therefore, parents

aspire to have a child who memorizes the Qur'an in the hopes of receiving intercession for both themselves and their family members.

However, in the research conducted on this hadith, it was found that its chain of narrators is weak.[20] Weak hadiths cannot be used as a legal basis. However, weak hadiths can serve as a reference for practical matters, aiming to motivate people to be diligent in worship and recitation of the Qur'an. The Qur'an is believed to contain many explicit and implicit wisdom. Those who constantly recite it will receive blessings and rewards from Allah, as well as benefit those around them. Thus, it is possible that parents may receive rewards because they were instrumental in their child's study of the Qur'an. Therefore, it is expected that both parents will also have a closer relationship with the Qur'an.

4. Conclusion

Imam Shafi'i permits individuals to choose not to have offspring; however, such a decision disregards the virtues of marriage and does not align with the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad regarding procreation. On the other hand, the scholars of the Tabligh Jamaat view childfree as not prohibited in Islam, but Islam strongly encourages the multiplication of progeny. In addition to following the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad, having righteous children is considered the greatest investment that will later intercede for their parents. According to the perspective of the scholars of the Tabligh Jamaat, the existence of the Muslim community is necessary for the development and expansion of Islamic propagation. Both parties agree that childfree is permissible, but the difference lies in Imam Shafi'i's perspective, which entails forsaking the virtues of marriage, while the scholars of the Tabligh Jamaat believe that Muslims who choose childfree are at a great loss since children are an investment for both this world and the hereafter. Besides being able to care for their parents in old age, righteous children will intercede for their parents. The act of choosing childfree contradicts the concept of *tanâsul*, which entails permanently severing the lineage and runs counter to the *maqasid al-Shari'ah* in preserving lineage.

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