

**Childfree Practices in Indonesia
(Study on the Response of Islamic Community Organizations in Kebumen Distric)**

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Abstrak

Artikel ini membahas tentang praktik *childfree* di Indonesia. *Childfree* memiliki arti bahwa kesepakatan yang dilakukan oleh pasangan suami-istri untuk tidak memiliki anak selama masa pernikahan. Praktik yang ada di masyarakat justru masih tabu dalam mendengar istilah *childfree* sendiri, dan sebagian kecil masyarakat ada yang tidak tabu, bahkan sudah mempraktikannya terutama di kalangan elite atas. Penelitian ini menarik untuk dikaji karena *childfree* sendiri bertentangan dengan tujuan dari perkawinan, yaitu untuk memiliki keturunan serta hak reproduksi dalam Islam untuk menikmati hubungan biologis. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi pandangan atau respon beberapa Ormas Islam yang ada di Kebumen tentang *Childfree*. Metode penelitian menggunakan penelitian kualitatif (*field research*), objek utama dalam penelitian ini adalah praktik *childfree* serta pandangan Ormas Islam di Kebumen. Teknik pengumpulan data menggunakan wawancara kepada beberapa ormas Islam di Kebumen. Teknik analisis data menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif analisis. Hasil penelitian mengidentifikasi: (1) *childfree* sebagai fenomena isu masa kini yang menuai beragam pendapat, ada yang mendukung dan sebaliknya. (2) *childfree* sebagai feminisme radikal. (3) *childfree* menurut pendapat Ormas Islam di Kabupaten Kebumen seperti (Nahdlatul Ulama, Muhammadiyah, Lembaga Dakwah Islam Indonesia, dan Hidayatullah) adalah *childfree* sudah melawan kodrat, karena sudah menyimpang dari al-Qur'an, Hadis serta tujuan dari perkawinan.

Kata Kunci: *Childfree, Feminisme Radikal, Ormas Islam.*

Abstract

This article discusses child-free practices in Indonesia. Childfree means an agreement made by husband and wife not to have children during the marriage period. Practices in society are still taboo when you hear the term childfree itself. There is also a small portion of society that is no longer a taboo and has even practiced it, especially among the upper elite. This research is interesting to study because childfree itself is contrary to the purpose of marriage, namely having children and reproductive rights in Islam to enjoy biological relations. This article aims to explore the views and responses of several Islamic organizations in Kebumen regarding childfree. This research uses qualitative methods (field

research). The main object of this research is child-free practices and the views and responses of Islamic organizations in Kebumen. Data collection techniques were carried out by interviewing several Islamic organizations in Kebumen. Then the data analysis technique is descriptive analysis. The results of the study identified: (1) childfree as a phenomenon of current issues that reap various opinions, some support it and some don't (2) childfree as a radical feminism. (3) childfree in the opinion of Islamic organizations in Kebumen Regency such as (Nahdlatul Ulama, Muhammadiyah, Indonesian Islamic Da'wah Institute, and Hidayatullah) is that childfree has gone against nature, because it has deviated from the Koran, Hadith, and the purpose of marriage.

Keywords: Childfree, Radical Feminism, Islamic Community Organizations.

Introduction

The childfree phenomenon (Merriam-Webster, 1996, p. 521) is not new in the world but has existed since the 1930s in the United States as a result of life during the Great Depression or the Malaise Crisis which caused economic destruction in both industrial and developing countries (Chrastil, 2019, p. 85). The crisis caused economic difficulties and psychological pressure on society (Fauzi et al., 2020, p. 30), so many Americans were worried about their future and decided not to have children (Frejka, 2017, p. 1). The childfreetrend doubled in the mid-1970s and 2000s from 10 to around 20% (Frejka, 2017, p. 1). When asked about why adults choose not to have children voluntarily (voluntarily childless) (Sutherland, 1995, p. 276). explanations range from the impact of macro-social forces such as increased female labor force participation to micro-level motivations such as autonomy and freedom (Asrohah & Idayatni, 2020, p. 52) In addition, increased numbers of voluntary childlessness (Hird & Abshoff, 2000, p. 348) were also due to the feminist movement of the 1970s, increased reproductive options, and increased female labor force participation (Blackstone & Stewart, 2012, p. 720).

Childlessness (Echols & Shadily, 1992, p. 129) or the desire to have children is growing in Indonesia. This phenomenon began to be widely discussed when one of the "Youtubers" Gita Savitri brought it up to the general public. This triggers many pros and cons in society in terms of the freedom to have children. When asked about the character of his future child, Gita Savitri answered in a debriefing. Gita answered that it is better not to have children, the more chaotic, the more difficult life is, like putting oneself in the position of a child who failed. Apart from Gita, other artists such as Cinta Laura said that they prefer to adopt children rather than have children because the world is now densely populated

(Sabri, 2011, p. 38), said Cinta Laura on Anang Hermansyah's Youtube channel (Ethno Widyastuti, 2022).

If you look at the data released by the World Bank, the trend of birth rates in Indonesia continues to decline, even in 2019, the crude birth rate per thousand population in Indonesia reached 17.75. This data is supported by the results of a census issued by BPS which shows a decline in population growth. The population growth rate in 2010-2020 was 1.25%, down from 1.49% in the previous period 2000-2010. If you look at the data, the birth rate in Indonesia is decreasing. This is reinforced by the emergence of the *childfree phenomenon*, many people choose to be *childfree* related to psychological problems and economic and environmental factors (Wahib, 2014, p. 36), some people even choose to be *childfree* because they are afraid of having children in a world full of violence. Choosing not to have children does not mean there are no risks, and in conservative Indonesian society, not having children is negatively accused by various groups (Humaniora, 2022).

Childfree is controversial in Indonesia because it is considered contrary to the thinking of the Indonesian people, most of whom think that the purpose of marriage is to have children. Tanaka & Johnson as quoted by Miwa et al said that Indonesia is a country classified as a country that supports the birth of children with a birth rate of 2.26. and the presence of children is important in marriage according to 93% of Indonesian people. This is based on the thinking of the Indonesian people who think that children can provide social benefits as a source of peace and social status (Azizi et al., 2020, p. 48), economic benefits as a source of income and old age security (Pelu, 2011, p. 311), cultural benefits as heirs, religious benefits as a mandate from God, psychological benefits as a source of family satisfaction (Patnani et al., 2021, p. 118). The study of *childfree* has become a hot topic of conversation in the current digitalization era because childfree practices have recently emerged in society. In subsequent developments, recent researchers have also conducted research on childfree patterns or the like, including Eva Fadhilah (Fadhilah, 2021, pp. 71–80), Miwa Patnani, Bagus Takwin, Winarini Wilman Mansoer (Patnani et al., 2021, pp. 117–129), Uswatul Khasanah, Muhammad Rosyid Ridho (Khasanah & Ridho, 2021, pp. 104–128) and others.

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on the views/responses of several Islamic mass organizations in Kebumen regarding Childfree.

The Research related to *childfree* which is reviewed with general sciences such as psychology and others has been researched by Miwa Patnani, Bagus Takwin, and Winarini Wilman Mansoer. This study tries to analyze the impact of the absence of children in a marriage showing different results which are assumed to be related to the different importance of children for each couple. The findings of this study are that the presence of children is still considered important in marriage because it is considered a gift from God, has a positive impact on life, provides benefits for parents, and has a positive impact on married couples. Likewise, Nuria Febri Sinta Rahayu and Fatimah Aulia Rahmah in their writing that the stigmatization of Indonesians towards the childfree phenomenon *has been* slightly dismissed by some Indonesians who adhere to feminism and adhere to the principle of childfreeness or the desire not to produce offspring or not have children, even though they are married. As for research written by Sitti Muliya Rizka, Taat Kurnita Yeni Ningsih, Mutmainnah, and Yuhatriati, in their writings, it is stated that the meaning of *childless* (economically and biologically capable enough), but still cannot be blessed with children. Based on data released by the World Bank that the birth rate in Indonesia continues to decline, even in 2019 the crude birth rate per 1,000 population released by BPS, where there has been a decrease in the population growth rate.

Subsequent research is classified regarding childfree which is reviewed using Islamic law analysis, on this theme, it is found by Eva Fadhilah's research, in her research using the normative approach of the Qur'an and Sunnah can be seen that it has a decent recommendation in Islam is not an obligation. So childfree is not included in the category of prohibited acts, because every married couple has the right to plan and manage their household life including having children. Nevertheless, although no verse directly prohibits childfree, as a human being who believes in Allah SWT, the choice to be childfree can be said to be an unwise use of Allah SWT to ensure the survival of each servant. Likewise, with Uswatul Khasanah's research, Muhammad Rosyid Ridho, this study attempts to analyze the phenomenon of childfreeness from the perspective of women's reproductive rights in Islam. This is because it concerns their reproductive rights. Reproductive rights between husband and wife have been discussed in Islam. The same thing was in the research of M. Irfan Farraz Haecal, Hidayatul Fikra, and Wahyudin Darmalaksana, but in this study childfree *was*

analyzed using takhrij and Sarah hadith. In conclusion, it shows that childfree includes makruh, which can shift to mubah, if there is 'illat according to the perspective of Islamic law.

The research related to childfree written by Abdul Hadi, Husnul Khotimah, Sadari, and Abdul Hadi explains the differences in terms of mentioning childless (not having children for health reasons) and *childfree* (not wanting to have children). The conclusion at the end of the writing is that *childfree* is a prohibited decision in Islam if viewed in the science of fiqh because the application of childfree is not based on clear reasons and seems to use reasons regarding worldly affairs such as careers, work, or the economy. In fact, in Islam, it has been explained that children have many virtues including charity, getting the blessings of the world and the hereafter, increasing piety, getting intercession, and getting a high degree in heaven. Aty Munshihah, M. Riyan Hidayat also expressed his opinion in summary: (1) childfree is one way *to* turn off native regeneration with the modern version; (2) economic motive is one of the causes of homicidal behavior of the child; (3) childfree has deviated from Islamic law in the form of hifz nasl and hifz nafs, the article is, by keeping offspring, the human population is maintained.

By reviewing several previous studies, the research that the researcher is conducting will certainly have a different position from previous research. There are some similarities with previous research, namely in discussing childfree. Previous research discussed a lot about childfree, which was analyzed using Islamic law analysis and there was also childfree, which was viewed from general sciences such as psychology and other sciences. However, what makes this research position different from previous research is in terms of the research object, the researcher focuses on the response of Islamic organizations in Kebumen Regency regarding childfree practices in Indonesia. Researchers will try to complement previous research with a background in processes that have not been discussed in previous studies.

Research Method

This study uses qualitative methods. Qualitative methods are traditional research methods that have been used for a long time. This method of writing uses field research with the main object of writing as childfree practice and the object of this writing is the views/responses of Islamic organizations in Kebumen. The researchers took mass organizations such as *Nahdlatul Ulama*, *Muhammadiyah*, Indonesian Islamic Da'wah Institute, and Hidayatullah as one of the instruments in this study because these organizations

have great influence and live side by side with the people of Kebumen. This research uses descriptive analysis, in general, this research is analyzed based on the inductive method (Azwar, 2010, hlm. 40) That is analyzing based on the facts found in a particular phenomenon, then conclusions are drawn on general results. In this case, the researcher describes the results of his research in the form of the results of interviews with Islamic organizations in Kebumen. The conclusion in this paper uses an empirical approach, with the aim of uncovering true values in childfree practices in society so that they should be actualized in the future (Sugiyono, 2008, hlm. 25).

Research Finding

Childfree in Islamic Law

Islam is a religion of love that makes human nature as parents and children. This fitrah must be appropriate to realize maqasid syari'ah, especially hifz an-nasl, as an effort to protect offspring (Saputra & Busyro, 2018, p. 43). Islam encourages every human being to have offspring from legal marriage, not only that but also the obligation of parents to prepare for education and full responsibility for children. As the Word of God Qs. An-Nisa' verse 9: *Walyakhsyal-lazīna lau tarakū min khalfihim zurriyyatan ḍi'āfan khāfū 'alaihim, falyattaqullāha walyaqūlū qaulan sadīdā(n)*. Based on the sound of the verse above, provides an explanation that the suggestion to multiply offspring needs to be accompanied by attention and welfare for children to be able to live well in this world. One of the efforts to optimize children's education is by adjusting the spacing of children's births (Alimni et al., 2022, p. 224) and it doesn't come to rejecting the presence of children and choosing childfree.

Childfree trend or agreement between husband and wife not to have children after marriage continues to be a topic of conversation. Some agree and some disagree, some agree (Carmichael & Whittaker, 2007, pp. 111–143) and argue that it is the right of each partner with various arguments to be given, and some disagree with their reasons. In the study of childfree fiqh, practically it can be described as an agreement that denies the birth or form of a child before the child-to-be exists or afterward. Thus, legal questions about the origins of childfree can be answered by discovering laws that deny child form before it has the potential to exist, that is before sperm is in the woman's womb (Maeda et al., 2015, pp. 1–12).

There are several parallels in the study of fiqh, namely by denying the existence of a child before sperm is in the woman's womb, or by not getting married at all, not having sex after marriage, not inserting or spilling semen into the uterus after the penis enters the vagina, or with the "*azl*" method (Hamid Al-Ghazali, tt, p. 51) or discharge of semen outside the vagina. All of these are substantially the same as childfree choices in terms of both rejecting the child's existence before it potentially exists (Mollen, 2006, pp. 269–282). In this regard, Imam al-Ghazali explained that the law of '*azl*' is permissible, not to the point of being makruh, let alone unlawful, the same as the first three cases, which were both mere trifles of '*afdal*' or simply leaving out virtues. Imam al-Ghazali explained: „I believe that the law of '*azl*' is not makruh with the meaning of makruh tahrim or makruh tanzih, because to stipulate a ban on something can only be done based on texts or qiyas on texts, even though there is no text or origin or source of qiyas that can be used as evidence for makruh '*azl*'. What exists is the origin of the qiyas that allows it, namely not getting married at all, not having intercourse after marriage, or not *inzal* or spilling sperm after inserting the penis into the vagina (Al-Husaini, 1994, pp. 379–380). Because alles ist nur ein Akt des Abwendens von Virtue, nicht ein Akt des Verbietens. Everything makes no difference because a new child will potentially exist by placing sperm in the woman's uterus (Hamid Al-Ghazali, tt, p. 51).

Based on the opinion of Imam al-Ghazali above, then childfree which is carried out using *azl* is legally permissible, but the law will be different when childfree is carried out by completely and intentionally eliminating the reproductive system because the law eliminating the reproductive system is haram. This is in line with the opinion of Sayyid Abi Bakar in the Book of I'anatut-Thalibin explaining that the use of a device that can terminate a pregnancy from its legal source is haram (Fadhilah, 2021, p. 78). Therefore, the position of childfree in Islamic law must first determine the legal *illat*. The *illat* position greatly influences the child-free law, if the *illat* fulfills the dharuriyat category, then childfreeness is permissible. For example, if a pregnant woman can threaten her life, it is permissible to be child-free because it is an emergency. Or it could also be when there is chaos in a country that lacks sources of clothing, food, shelter, and security. In this case, childfree is permissible because it contains benefits in an emergency (*maslahah dharuriyat*) (Fauzan, 2022, p. 7). Then, when deciding to be child-free, it must be accompanied by mature and conscious thought. Childfree is an act of reproductive rights to not have children or refuse pregnancy. This can be achieved when there is a cooperative relationship between husband and wife in

the household by discussing and deciding whether to be child-free or not. Discussions that are carried out must be open, especially for women regarding whether childfree decisions are carried out or not. The reasons for childfree action must be based on strong reasons, so as not to harm both parties (Khasanah & Ridho, 2021, pp. 104–128).

Factors Causing Childfree Practices Between Husband and Wife in Indonesia

Several factors cause married couples to choose *childfree* marriage: a) Finance Financial considerations are like slavery in the past, so a man allows his slave girl to only be fucked by him in an “*azl*” way to avoid having children so that with this condition the male owner can still make the slave girl his property. b) Sexuality and Life Safety Namely to maintain the beauty of his wife and the quality of her body so that it lasts longer and remains attractive to invite to sexual activity and to keep her alive because she is worried that she will die if she gives birth to a child.

a) Financial or Economics: the economy is used as a reason for being *childfree* because they are worried that having children will make their life difficult, they have to work harder, and get involved in illegal jobs (Meier, 2014, pp. 159–168). b) Wrong presumption: People prefer not to have children because they are afraid that the child that will be born will be a girl, while they believe that marrying off a girl is a disgrace as was the belief of the ancient ignorant Arabs who killed their children. They feel the dominance of men over women. For centuries, women have been placed as *the second human being*, which the superiority to men. This culture and perception ultimately place women only in the domestic realm (Hariyanto, 2016, p. 84). c) Phobia: Phobias are psychiatric disorders, especially anxiety disorders. People with phobias experience an intense fear of objects and situations. Phobias are also a reason for people to choose *child-free*. There are several phobias suffered by *childfree*: *Aphenphosmophobia* (fear of touch), *acrophobia* (fear of disorder or neatness), *atelopobia* (fear of imperfection), *atychiphobia* (fear of failure), *ecophobia* (fear of the house), *ephebiphobia* (fear of teenagers), *gamophobia* (fear of marriage), *tokophobia* (fear of pregnancy), *obesophobia* (fear of gaining weight), *philophobia* (fear of love), *pedophobia* (fear of children) and *tokophobia* (fear of childbirth) (Tunggono, 2021, pp. 46–49).

Childfree Perspectives on Radical Feminism

Childfree relationships and radical feminism (Kwon, 2005, p. 56) Found in the reproductive area, women's biology is one of the special concepts to make women creatures below men. However, the issue of being childfree does not fully enter into the study of radical feminism, the couple chooses childfree because they do not want their children to suffer in the future. This is in line with what was said by Gita Savitri, that no one knows the future, for the children who are born will face a world that cannot be imagined, and in the end, they choose childfree. Substantially, Gita Savitri's reasons are not radical feminism, but there are elements of radical feminism, namely the refusal to give birth to children or reproduce. Reproduction that women will experience causes the body to undergo extreme changes (Medina, 2022, pp. 77–90). Physically, significant changes will occur, especially in the abdomen and vagina, and when the child is born, the female breasts will also become saggy, unlike usual (alo doctor, 2022).

Andrea Dworkin in ihrem Werk „Woman Holding“ explains that „Forcing sex in marriage causes forced pregnancy in a marriage. Andrea protested forms of slavery, later also against customs that forced women to give anyone else control over their maternal functions (Dworkin, 1974, p. 55). Andrea also said that the home is the most dangerous place for a woman, she is likely to be killed, raped, beaten, and robbed of her work value. If a woman is beaten, the husband was likely the beater, 25% of whom were beaten during pregnancy. If they don't have their own money, they are more vulnerable to abuse from their husbands and unable to escape. Andrea also mentioned that with legal abortion and contraception, around 3/4 of women is still single. Many have suggested that women do not have to be pregnant to contribute to a large part of demographic change (Dworkin, 1974, p. 226).

Andrea also believes that pregnancy is a form of oppression, pregnant women have experienced social exploitation. She is the Last Days at Hot Slit, women out of wedlock will be thrown away, labeled as delinquents, and become a stigmatized disgrace, as well as the high cost of marriage that makes young women depressed (BOGOCH, 2021, p. 96). Andrea also explained that abortion is very important to free women from the unequal burden of being forced to give birth to unwanted babies. Social programs to force women to give birth to unwanted babies are very important because they cannot bear grief and recognition (BOGOCH, 2021, p. 97). This happens because of the exploitation of the body that makes women in the domestic sphere. Although Andrea has conventional views, she also supports

birth control and abortion, because it is more honorable (Duberman, 2020, p. 9). Andrea Dworkin provides a hypothesis that the exploitation of the body in the gender system is pregnancy. The powerlessness of women when pregnant will be very weak and women will even get a narrow space, their freedom is very limited, and it feels like a prison. Therefore, Andrea Dworkin offers a simple concept of thinking that women should not be constrained by anything, including reproduction, but there must be a relationship between husband and wife to make choices and beliefs regarding childfree.

Childfree Practices in Indonesia: Responses of Islamic Organizations in Kebumen District

Nahdatul Ulama

The response of the Nahdatul Ulama of Kebumen Regency regarding the practice of *childfree* in Indonesia has two major answers. If *childfree* is done the same as using family planning, namely to delay having children, it is permissible, conversely, if the reason for being *childfree* is used other than the reasons above, then this is not permissible. If choosing *childfree* is like maintaining a good birth rate, it is using „*azl*“, not changing the reproductive system such as cutting off the fallopian tubes and so on. Because in Islam *Azl permissible ist. Childfree* which is carried out like family planning must have considered the various benefits and harms. With the illustration that if a husband and wife do not perform '*azl*', then harm can occur, for example mentally and physically not ready, the child's growth and development is not good because the birth distance is too close, the child's nutrition is not guaranteed because the need to meet the child's nutrition is too close, and so on (Dawamudin, personal communication, 6 July 2022).

Muhammadiyah

Kebumen Regency *Muhammadiyah's* response regarding the practice of childfree in Indonesia is seen by the people accessing it, not yet fully aware of the term childfree. Childfree actions have violated nature because it is no longer the purpose of marriage to have children and childfree is considered as not following the verses of the Koran. The existence of this child-free practice can be problematic among scientists because it is still taboo in society. The reason people choose childfree is that they don't know the meaning and term childfree. Over time, a child-free decision can be more and more agreed upon. The childfree

practice itself occurs a lot among artists/public figures, then it is imitated by the community (D, personal communication, 8 June 2022).

Indonesian Islamic Da'wah Institute (LDII)

Indonesian Islamic Da'wah Institute (LDII) Kebumen District's response regarding childfree *practices* in Indonesia is the same as that of Muhammadiyah which states that childfree practices are not yet understood by people in this regard. One of the sources from LDII said that childfree is very contrary to the sunnah of the Prophet regarding marriage and denies the purpose of marriage to have children. Questioning the legitimacy of the law, child-free is illegal, especially to the point of changing the reproductive organs. In practice, childfree has gone against the nature of husband and wife because humans need regeneration by continuing offspring through marriage. If there are more and more couples who choose *childfree*, the human population may decrease. The resource person agreed more with a saying that says „many children, lots of fortune“. The child itself is an extraordinary blessing from Allah SWT, if we choose to be childfree then it means we reject the special provision from Allah SWT (H. Gunardi, personal communication, July 6, 2022)

Hidayatullah

Kebumen Regency's *Hidayatullah* response regarding child-free *practices* in Indonesia is the same as Muhammadiyah and LDII. The decision to be *childfree* is not by nature and is contrary to sunnatullah. The existence of marriage results in lineage, lineage aims to maintain quality. The more children, the more Muslims. The child is a charity, namely a pious child. The more children, the greater the chance to have pious children who are good deeds for their parents. In contrast to couples who choose childfree, they do not have the opportunity for the reward of a pious child. In addition, when they die, there are no children who will send prayers later. Getting married and continuing offspring is something that Allah SWT likes, in contrast to childfree which is a decision not to continue offspring. So, the child-free *law* is haram because it is something that Allah SWT does not like (Faqihuddin, personal communication, 14 July 2022)

Conclusion

The desire not to have children in Indonesia is getting bigger. Therefore, Childfree is a contemporary issue phenomenon that reaps various opinions, there are those who support

Childfree, namely radical feminism. Meanwhile, the statements of Islamic organizations in Kebumen Regency (Nahdlatul Ulama, Muhammadiyah, Indonesian Islamic Da'wah Institute, and Hidayatullah) stated that children's freedom is contrary to nature, because it has deviated from the Al-Qur'an, Hadith and the purpose of marriage. The significance of this research is only focused on how Islamic organizations in Kebumen view the childfree phenomenon in Indonesia. The author's limitations in this regard are that in Kebumen itself there has not been a childfree phenomenon. This research can still be continued with more in-depth research by looking for data in the field regarding child-free cases in Kebumen and the causal factors.

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