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Childfree in Islamic Discourse: Analysis of Interpretation on QS. An-Nisa Verse 9

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Abstract

The childfree phenomenon is the existence of different views on the decision not to have children, both from a social, economic, and religious perspective. Childfree is considered an individual right that is influenced by factors of welfare, economic stability, and personal freedom. This study uses a qualitative method with a library research approach to analyze the concept of childfree in Islam, especially in relation to QS. An-Nisa verse 9. The findings of this research study are that the decision to be childfree in Islam has significant implications for the sustainability of Muslim generations, the inheritance of Islamic values, and the social and economic stability of the community. Islam emphasizes the importance of marriage and offspring as part of the maqashid sharia, with the aim of maintaining the existence and strength of the community. Classical scholars generally reject the decision to be childfree without sharia reasons, while contemporary scholars consider certain conditions that can justify it, such as health and economic factors.

Keywords: *childfree phenomenon, maqashid sharia, inheritance of Islamic values, religious perspective*

INTRODUCTION

Childfree refers to an individual or couple's decision not to have children, either biologically or through adoption, based on personal choice rather than infertility or medical limitations (Syahriar et al., 2024). This decision is typically influenced by various considerations such as economic, social, environmental factors, as well as psychological well-being and quality of life. Unlike childless, which describes a condition of not having children due to uncontrollable factors, childfree emphasizes a conscious and deliberate choice to live without offspring (Siregar, 2024). According to The World Factbook by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in 2022, Saint Pierre and Miquelon recorded the lowest crude birth rate in the world at 6.47 births per 1,000 population, followed by Monaco (6.66), Andorra (6.88), South Korea (6.92), and both Japan and Italy at 6.95 (Nikma, 2024). Spain reported a birth rate of 7.13, while Taiwan (7.39), Greece (7.61), and Puerto Rico (7.87) were also among the top ten countries with the lowest birth rates. In comparison, Indonesia had a significantly higher birth rate of 15.32 per 1,000 population, indicating that the phenomenon of declining birth rates is more prevalent in developed countries generally characterized by high

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urbanization, elevated cost of living, and shifting social values that encourage individuals to delay or even opt out of parenthood (Nallanie & Nathanto, 2024).

According to the Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS) report in 2023 titled Tracing the Childfree Trend in Indonesia, approximately 71,000 women of reproductive age (15–49 years) chose to be childfree, based on data from the National Socioeconomic Survey (SUSENAS) (Dita et al., 2024). This trend has increased over the past four years, with the prevalence of childfree at 7% in 2019, declining slightly to 6.3% in 2020, rising again to 6.5% in 2021, and reaching 8.2% in 2022 (Audinovic & Nugroho, 2023). This trend is believed to contribute to the decline in Indonesia's Total Fertility Rate (TFR), which has been continuously decreasing since 1971, mirroring global demographic patterns that show a decrease in the number of children born (Munthe et al., 2024). The DATAin BPS 2023.01-1 study revealed that Java Island has become the center of the childfree paradigm in Indonesia, with nearly 9% of women in this region choosing not to have children in 2022 particularly in DKI Jakarta, West Java, and Banten (Pragita et al., 2025). This phenomenon is more common in urban areas, often associated with openness to modern ways of thinking. Moreover, SUSENAS 2020 data indicated that the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic increased childfree rates in Jakarta and East Java, likely due to economic pressures that prompted women to avoid additional financial burdens within the household (Choi et al., 2024).

The childfree phenomenon is influenced by various factors, including economic, educational, cultural, and environmental reasons (Manggul & Janggu, 2022). The high cost of raising children and economic uncertainty have caused many couples to hesitate in having offspring (Fatimatuzahroh et al., 2025). Furthermore, women with higher education levels tend to delay or decline parenthood in favor of career focus and financial independence. Changing social values in urban areas have also made childfree decisions more accepted as a modern lifestyle that emphasizes freedom and flexibility (Agusti et al., 2025). Environmental concerns and traumatic family experiences also play a role. In the long term, the increasing number of childfree couples may impact family dynamics, population structures, and national economic and social systems. In Islam, marriage and procreation are considered highly important as part of the family institution, which serves as a cornerstone of human civilization (Siregar, 2024). Marriage is not merely a bond between two individuals but a sacred covenant (mitsaqan ghalizhan) aimed at creating a harmonious household filled with love (mawaddah) and compassion (rahmah) (Aldino, 2023). The Qur'an affirms that one of God's signs is the creation of spouses for humans, as stated in Surah Ar-Rum (30:21). Moreover, procreation is one of the main purposes of marriage, as mentioned in Surah An-Nahl (16:72), which emphasizes that through offspring, the continuity of humankind is preserved, and Islamic values can be passed on to future generations.

The childfree phenomenon has sparked varying interpretations among Islamic scholars (Musthofa & Syafi', 2023). Some traditional scholars argue that opting for childfree living without valid Sharia-based reasons contradicts the objectives of marriage in Islam, as having children is considered a natural human inclination and part of the Prophet Muhammad's Sunnah (Effendi, 2025). Meanwhile, contextualist scholars take into account the maslahah (public interest) and mafsadah (harm) associated with such decisions. When grounded in legitimate concerns such as health or psychological conditions that may cause harm, choosing not to have children is acceptable in Islam (Zubaidah, 2023). This approach aligns with Islamic principles that avoid imposing hardship on believers and emphasize the well-being of married couples (Nikma, 2024). The childfree phenomenon, defined as the

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decision not to have children either biologically or through adoption, is growing in various countries—including Indonesia. Such decisions are generally driven by economic, social, environmental, and lifestyle factors, emphasizing flexibility and career orientation. From an Islamic perspective, marriage and offspring hold fundamental value for the continuity of humanity, as emphasized in Surah An-Nisa (4:9) (Yulia & Amal, 2024). This verse warns against leaving future generations in a state of weakness economically, socially, or morally urging Muslims to fear Allah and uphold the rights of children. Tafsir scholars such as Ibn Kathir and Al-Maraghi interpret this verse as a call for parents and guardians to ensure the well-being of children, including their financial, educational, and religious development (Aprilyanti, 2022). The verse underscores a moral and social responsibility toward future generations and illustrates that Islam places great importance on childbearing as part of hifzh an-nasl (preservation of lineage) within the maqasid al-shariah (higher objectives of Islamic law) (Hayati et al., 2025). Most scholars, such as Ibn Hazm and Al-Ghazali, view having children as a key purpose of marriage in Islam not only to fulfill biological needs but also to preserve the existence of the Muslim ummah. Some contemporary scholars believe that childfree decisions may be permissible under certain conditions, such as health-related reasons or other factors that would cause greater harm to the couple thus aligning with Islam's balance between rights and responsibilities within family life (Darki & Wibowo, 2023).

Sociological studies of childfree trends in countries with low birth rates, such as South Korea, Japan, and Italy, reflect structural changes in modern societies that prioritize economic stability and personal freedom. In Indonesia, BPS data indicate a rise in women choosing not to have children, particularly in urban areas facing greater economic pressure. This trend may have significant implications for social and economic dynamics, including a reduced productive-age population, which could affect labor systems and social welfare in the long run. From an Islamic perspective, the childfree decision must be carefully assessed by considering responsibilities toward future generations. If the decision is based on fear of being unable to provide a decent life for children, it may be viewed as a precautionary measure in Islam. However, if it is driven purely by self-interest and disregards Islamic values related to human continuity and social responsibility, it could contradict Islamic teachings. Further academic research is needed on the childfree concept in light of Islamic principles, particularly in relation to maqasid al-shariah and relevant Qur'anic exegesis, to offer a comprehensive understanding of the moral, social, and religious implications of such decisions (Nabillah, 2024).

Commentaries by classical scholars vary on the interpretation of Surah An-Nisa (4:9). Ibn Kathir explains that the verse serves as a warning to those present at the time of a person's death, ensuring that any bequest made does not harm the heirs. Thus, the bequest must be fair and not disregard children's rights. Tafsir Al-Muyassar highlights that the verse addresses guardians and caretakers of orphans, urging them to protect children's rights as they would wish for their own children. Al-Maraghi emphasizes that the verse reminds parents not to leave their children in a vulnerable state, economically, educationally, or morally—indicating that responsibilities toward offspring go beyond material needs and include moral and religious upbringing. This verse is closely tied to the concept of long-term responsibility toward future generations (Nurjanah & Nur, 2022). Parents are not only obligated to meet their children's immediate material needs but also to prepare them to become self-reliant and resilient after their parents pass away. This includes providing quality education, moral and ethical development, and financial security to prevent them from falling into hardship. The verse also underlines the importance of justice in wealth management, both in inheritance and

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in social responsibility toward orphaned children. Thus, it goes beyond individual family obligations and addresses social stability at large, where the welfare of the next generation becomes the foundation for the continuity of humanity.

A study conducted by Almutiroh and colleagues found that the decision to be childfree is influenced by internal factors (e.g., personal preferences, health, or career) and external ones (e.g., social, economic, and environmental pressures). From the Islamic legal perspective, the permissibility of childfree living is situational. If the decision is based on valid Islamic considerations, such as maslahah dharuriyyah (urgent necessity), it may be permitted. However, if the decision is made without legitimate grounds and contradicts the objectives of maqasid al-shariah, it is considered impermissible in Islam. Jalaludin's research concluded that, according to Islamic law, the main goals of marriage include not only emotional and spiritual aspects but also the function of tanasul (procreation). In this view, the childfree ideology contradicts the essence of tanasul, one of the key purposes of marriage. The study also noted that if the decision to remain childfree stems from justifiable reasons, such as health or psychological conditions that may cause harm, then under the principle of maslahah dharuriyyah, tolerance may apply (Almutiroh et al., 2023). However, if the decision is consciously made in disregard of the procreative purpose of marriage, then it is considered inconsistent with maqasid al-shariah and generally disapproved.

Pangestu's study concluded that the choice to live childfree is a personal right or joint decision made by millennial families based on economic, medical, psychological, educational, personal, and environmental factors (Jalaludin et al., 2022). While Islam views having children as a source of blessing in this world and the hereafter, the Qur'an does not explicitly prohibit not having children. Therefore, the childfree decision should not be outright condemned or justified but respected as a valid personal choice within the framework of individual rights, without external interference (Pangestu, 2023). Further studies are necessary to examine the childfree phenomenon through a more comprehensive lens, including an analysis of Surah An-Nisa (4:9). Such research is expected to enrich academic and Islamic discourse and assist Muslims in understanding and evaluating the decision to remain childfree in accordance with Islamic teachings. The purpose of this study is to analyze the position of marriage and offspring in Islam, explore scholars' views on the childfree decision—particularly in relation to the interpretation of Surah An-Nisa (4:9), and explain the implications of childfree living from an Islamic perspective, especially in terms of responsibilities toward future generations.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative method with a library-research approach aimed at analyzing the concept of childfree, scholars' viewpoints, and Qur'anic interpretations relevant to the phenomenon particularly in relation to Q S . An-Nisāʾ (4:9) (Sulistyawati, 2023). A library approach is chosen because it enables an in-depth exploration of pertinent scholarly sources, including books, academic journals, Qur'anic exegeses, and articles that discuss marriage and procreation in Islam. Data are collected from indexed databases such as SINTA, Scopus, Google Scholar, and various university repositories to ensure the validity and credibility of the sources used. The study also consults classical and contemporary tafsīr works to understand how Q S . An-Nisāʾ (4:9) is contextualized within Islamic discourse on responsibility toward future generations.

Once gathered, the data are examined through content analysis to identify key themes in the literature namely the status of marriage and procreation in Islam, scholarly perspectives

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on childfree decisions, and the implications of such choices for future generations. This approach includes interpreting tafsīr texts to link Q S . An-Nisāʾ (4:9) with the childfree phenomenon. The information is systematically categorized and compared to produce comprehensive conclusions (Sulistyawati, 2023). Findings are presented in a descriptive-analytical format, organized according to the research objectives. Ultimately, the study seeks to make a significant academic contribution by enriching the discussion of childfree choices within Islam while offering fresh insights into social responsibility and generational sustainability from an Islamic perspective.

RESULTS

The Position of Marriage, Progeny in Islam, and the Childfree Decision

Marriage in Islam occupies an exceptionally important position as a family institution that forms the primary foundation for building human civilization. Islam views marriage not merely as a social contract between two individuals but as a mitsāqan ghalīẓhan (a firm covenant) aimed at establishing a harmonious household filled with love and mercy (mawaddah wa raḥmah) (Mutiah et al., 2024). This is emphasized in the Qur'an, as stated by Allah SWT in QS Ar-Rūm [30]: 21, which mentions that marriage is one of God's signs that brings tranquility to spouses. The exegesis of Ibn Kathīr and al-Ṭabarī explains "litaskunū ilayhā" ("so that you may find tranquility with her") and "mawaddah wa raḥmah" ("love and mercy") in Ar-Rūm 30: 21 as signs of God's greatness in creating mates. The verse clarifies that marriage is a source of calm for humankind because Allah created spouses so they may find serenity in one another; He also places love and mercy between married couples, which is a sign of His greatness and grace. In Islam, marriage is not only to fulfill biological needs but also carries broader functions: preserving chastity (ḥifẓ al-farj) from fornication, creating tranquility in the household, strengthening social bonds, and obtaining offspring as part of Muslim generational continuity (ḥifẓ an-nasl).

Progeny in Islam plays a fundamentally crucial role in preserving the continuity of humankind. Allah SWT affirms in QS An-Naḥl [16]: 72 that children are a blessing and a trust that must be safeguarded by parents. The tafsirs of al-Qurṭubī and al-Sa'dī, particularly those referencing verses on wealth and children, reinforce that children are a trust and blessing from Allah that must be cared for and educated properly. Al-Qurṭubī highlights that everything, including children, belongs to Allah and humans are merely entrusted to utilize it. Al-Sa'dī emphasizes that children are a test for parents and a great reward for those who fulfill their obligations well (Nurhasnah, 2024). Offspring not only symbolize family continuity but also hold immense devotional value, as stated in a ḥadīth of the Prophet ﷺ that a righteous child who prays for his parents becomes one of the deeds that do not cease after death (Muslim 1631). Islam stresses the importance of educating children to grow into pious and noble individuals capable of passing Islamic values to the next generation. Islam likewise warns Muslims not to leave their offspring in a weak state, as emphasized in QS An-Nisāʾ [4]: 9. Having and nurturing progeny is a significant responsibility in Islam that must be carried out with full trust and awareness of spiritual and social duty (Syafi'i et al., 2023).

The phenomenon of childfree, namely the decision of an individual or couple not to have children biologically or through adoption has sparked debate among Muslim scholars and academics. Most traditional scholars argue that a childfree decision without legitimate reasons contravenes the primary objective of marriage in Islam, which is to obtain offspring. This view is grounded in the concept of tanāsul (generational continuity), part of the maqāṣid

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al-sharīʿah (ultimate objectives of Islamic law). Imam al-Ghazālī in Iḥyāʾ ʿUlūm al-Dīn stresses that marrying and having children is the Sunnah of the Prophet ﷺ and a recommended act of worship. The Prophet ﷺ stated in a ḥadīth that he will boast of his numerous ummah on the Day of Resurrection (Abū Dāwūd 2050). Many scholars thus view having children as part of a Muslim's responsibility in marriage (Sunarto & Imamah, 2023).

Some contemporary scholars offer a more contextual approach to the childfree decision. Scholars assess that if the choice is based on reasons recognized by Islam such as health factors, psychological conditions, or economic considerations that may bring harm then childfree can be permissible. A fiqh maxim states ad-ḍararu yuzāl ("harm must be removed"); therefore, if having children would pose great harm to the couple, opting not to have children can be regarded as a precautionary measure in Islam. The maqāṣid al-sharīʿah perspective posits five principal objectives: preserving religion (ḥifẓ al-dīn), life (ḥifẓ al-nafs), intellect (ḥifẓ al-ʿaql), lineage (ḥifẓ an-nasl), and wealth (ḥifẓ al-māl). Preserving lineage is indeed a principal aim, yet if childfree is chosen to avert greater harm such as medical conditions preventing safe childbirth then it may fall under maṣlaḥah ḍarūriyyah (compelling benefit) permitted in Islam. Childfree decisions must thus be examined with regard to responsibility for future generations and maqāṣid al-sharīʿah values to remain within Islamic teachings. Empirical studies, such as by Al-Ramahi & Atawneh, indicate that young Muslims' perceptions of marriage and offspring are shifting under modernity and individualism, though Islamic values remain a key reference highlighting the need for contextual approaches to childfree issues (Hanandita, 2022).

Scholars' Views on the Childfree Decision in the Exegesis of QS An-Nisāʾ Verse 9

The childfree decision choosing not to have children has become an increasingly discussed topic in Islam, especially in connection with Qur'anic and prophetic teachings. A frequently cited verse is QS An-Nisāʾ : 9: "Let those [parents] fear Allah who, if they were to leave behind weak offspring, would be worried for them. So let them fear Allah and speak words of appropriate justice." This verse underscores the importance of parental responsibility for their children's welfare materially, morally, and spiritually. Scholars interpret it from various perspectives regarding childfree decisions, especially concerning generational continuity, child welfare, and parental responsibilities in Islam.

Classical exegesis regards the verse as a prohibition against leaving children in a weak state economically, physically, or spiritually. Al-Qāḍī Abū Bakr al-Baqillānī (337-403 H) deemed the fourth opinion most fitting because it aligns with surrounding verses on orphans. Imām al-Ṭabarī preferred the third view, matching prior verses on inheritance through bequests. Wallāhu aʿlam. Ibn Kathīr's Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿAẓīm explains that having offspring is a significant trust every Muslim must safeguard; parents must ensure children do not face hardship worldly or spiritual after their demise (Nasution et al., 2024). Classical scholars generally regard childfree without valid Sharia grounds as contrary to Islamic principles, hindering Muslim generational continuity and diverging from the Prophet's Sunnah encouraging marriage and childbearing. Al-Qurṭubī in al-Jāmiʿ li-Aḥkām al-Qurʾān adds that the verse instructs parents to provide strong religious education. Choosing not to have descendants without Sharia justification contradicts marriage's central purpose: producing a robust successor generation. Yet this classical approach is seen as less attuned to contemporary social dynamics. El Fadl's study suggests literal family-verse interpretations

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should be balanced with maqāṣid and social justice principles today highlighting progressive hermeneutics for new issues like childfree.

Contemporary scholars interpret QS An-Nisāʾ : 9 more broadly, considering maṣlaḥah and mafsadah in a Muslim's life (Mustaqimah & Rizik, 2024). They argue that although Islam encourages procreation, not every couple can fulfill this responsibility well. If having children may cause harm e.g., severe health issues, extreme economic instability, or psychological factors endangering child welfare, childfree can be allowed. Within maqāṣid, preserving lineage must be balanced with preserving life; thus, foregoing children to avert grave danger is permissible caution. Shaykh Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī in Fiqh al-Awlawiyyāt states Islam does not obligate procreation if valid reasons exist. The decision must not stem from ego or social trends opposed to Islamic values, but from clear maṣlaḥah consistent with Sharia. Research by Mohamad & Shirazi on urban Muslim couples in Southeast Asia shows mental-health and economic pressures dominate childfree motives, typically grounded in ethical and spiritual responsibility rather than rejection of Islamic values.

From a fiqh perspective, childfree decisions fall into two main conditions. First, choosing childfree without legitimate grounds e.g., prioritizing career, a free lifestyle, or unfounded fear of parental duties is generally viewed as conflicting with maqāṣid, potentially weakening the Muslim community and rejecting the Prophet's encouragement to multiply. Second, choosing childfree for Sharia-recognized reasons health issues, severe economic hardship, or psychological conditions preventing proper childrearing—can be permitted, based on the maxim ad-ḍararu yuzāl (Dita et al., 2024).

The Indonesian Council of Ulama (MUI) has not issued a specific fatwa on childfree. Contemporary fiqh studies suggest such decisions require thorough assessment of benefits and harms (Aminah et al., 2024). Childfree cannot be judged in black-and-white terms: if taken without clear reasons and merely personal preference contrary to Islam, it is deemed inconsistent with Sharia; however, if certain factors cause potential harm to the individual or family, the decision can be accommodated within broader Islamic law.

DISCUSSION

The Implications of Childfree from an Islamic Perspective on Responsibility Toward Future Generations

Choosing childfree in Islam entails broad implications for Muslim responsibility toward future generations. Islam places lineage (nasl) as vital for sustaining humanity and Islamic teachings. Thus, such decisions must consider impacts on community continuity, social welfare, and humanity's trustee role (khilāfah) on earth. One primary implication concerns Muslim generational continuity: Islam urges procreation to sustain daʿwah and preserve Islamic existence (Muyasaroh, 2019). QS An-Naḥl [16]: 72 affirms children and grandchildren as divine blessings. If more Muslim couples opt for childfree, Muslim population decline could weaken global social, political, and economic strength. Pew Research data show rising childfree trends among urban, productive-age Muslims; absent balanced family-education strategies, this poses serious challenges to intergenerational Islamic values. The Prophet Muhammad encouraged large progeny, boasting of his ummah's size (Abū Dāwūd 2050). Thus, childfree without valid cause may conflict with Islamic exhortations, affecting Muslim continuity (Aderibigbe et al., 2023).

The next implication concerns education and transmission of Islamic values. Islam stresses education in shaping pious Muslims who contribute positively to society. Parents hold the main role in guiding children away from worldly and spiritual harm, as in

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QS At-Taḥrīm [66]: 6. By choosing childfree, Muslims relinquish opportunities to cultivate and pass Islamic values to the next generation. A widespread childfree trend may reduce those who inherit and disseminate Islam, weakening its societal role. Childfree decisions also impact social and economic stability. Families are society's smallest units, vital to social-economic balance. A productive youth generation supports Islamic economic systems through zakāh and labor. A sharp birth-rate decline from childfree decisions could, long-term, create an imbalance where dependents outnumber contributors. Additionally, childfree bears on human stewardship (khilāfah) (Zabihi-moghaddam, 2023). Islam teaches humans are created to manage and develop the world per Islamic principles (QS Al-Baqarah [2]: 30). One responsibility is raising a generation to carry this trust. By choosing not to have children, Muslims forgo shaping future leaders in religious, social, and political spheres. Further implications arise in family and societal relations. In Islamic culture, family is central to individual and societal life (Nugroho et al., 2023). Children not only continue lineage but strengthen kinship ties. Islam upholds maintaining kinship (ṣilatu raḥim), reinforced through descendants. Childfree decisions may create tension in extended families expecting offspring for kinship continuity. Moreover, childfree individuals might face challenges obtaining social and emotional support in old age, lacking children for care.

Specific Contribution of This Research

This study's specific contribution to childfree discourse in Islam lies in providing a contextual and comprehensive understanding by referencing authoritative Islamic sources—both classical fiqh and contemporary thought. It not only reviews normative legal aspects of choosing childfree but also analyzes it amid social, cultural, and economic shifts influencing present-day Muslim views. The novelty offered is an integrative approach combining religious perspectives with sociological realities, mapping the spectrum of scholarly opinions while illustrating the dynamic interplay between traditional values and contemporary Muslim needs. This research enriches academic discussion of childfree by supplying an analytical foundation that is both theological and reflective of modern Muslim life's complexity.

CONCLUSION

Marriage and having children in Islam is part of the maqashid of sharia, especially in maintaining the continuity of generations (hifzhun nasl). The decision to live without children (childfree) raises debate; The majority of classical scholars reject it without Sharia reasons, while contemporary scholars allow it under certain conditions such as health or psychological reasons. QS. An-Nisa verse 9 emphasizes the responsibility of parents for the welfare of their children, so that having children is seen as an important mandate in Islam.

Future research is recommended to explore more deeply the perspectives of young Muslims on childfree decisions, including the sociological, psychological, and religious factors that influence these choices. Furthermore, comparative studies of the views of Islamic scholars from various schools of thought or countries are also important to provide a broader and more contextual understanding of the dynamics of Islamic law related to childfree in modern society. An interdisciplinary approach combining Islamic jurisprudence, psychology, and sociology will enrich the analysis and provide more applicable recommendations for Muslims.

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