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Analysing The Understanding Of Childfree Practitioners From Islamic Academia On The Hadith About Multiplying Offspring

Riri Fitria

Universitas Islam Negeri Imam Bonjol Padang, Indonesia

ririfitria@uinib.ac.id

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ABSTRACT

Childfree has been a phenomenon that has attracted public attention since its emergence in 2013. There is opposition in society to childfree because it goes against human instinct and nature and Indonesian culture that understands many children's sustenance. This article investigates the childfree trend among Islamic academics, exploring their understanding of the hadith that explicitly encourages Muslims to multiply offspring by taking into account the social dynamics that influence this understanding and choice. The research uses a qualitative method with a descriptive approach, through in-depth interviews with seven Islamic academics who choose to go child-free. The results show that in understanding the hadith they tend to understand it contextually. This leads to the conclusion that the hadith is a recommendation, not an obligation, for married couples who have mental readiness, physical health, economic stability, and desire to have children. Other things that influence this understanding are spousal support and the great challenges of educating children today. Despite facing social pressures, the informants maintained their commitment to being child-free but remained open to re-evaluating in the future. This study highlights the complexity of childfree decision-making, which is influenced by personal, social and religious factors

Kata Kunci

Akademisi Islam, Childfree,
Hadis, Pemahaman hadis

Abstrak

Childfree telah menjadi fenomena yang menarik perhatian masyarakat sejak kemunculannya pada tahun 2013. Terdapat kontra di masyarakat terhadap childfree karena bertentangan dengan naluri dan fitrah manusia serta budaya Indonesia yang memahami banyak anak banyak rezeki. Artikel ini menyelidiki tren childfree di kalangan akademisi Islam, menggali pemahaman mereka terhadap hadis yang secara gamblang menganjurkan umat Islam untuk memperbanyak keturunan dengan memperhatikan dinamika sosial yang memengaruhi pemahaman

dan pilihan tersebut. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan pendekatan deskriptif, melalui wawancara mendalam dengan tujuh orang akademisi Islam yang memilih childfree. Hasilnya menunjukkan bahwa dalam memahami hadis tersebut mereka cenderung memahaminya secara kontekstual. Hal tersebut memunculkan kesimpulan bahwa hadis tersebut merupakan anjuran, bukan kewajiban, bagi pasangan suami istri yang memiliki kesiapan mental, kesehatan fisik, kemapanan dari segi ekonomi, dan keinginan memiliki anak. Hal lain yang mempengaruhi pemahaman tersebut adalah dukungan pasangan dan tantangan besar pada masa sekarang dalam mendidik anak. Meskipun menghadapi tekanan sosial, para informan mempertahankan komitmen mereka terhadap childfree, tetapi tetap terbuka untuk mengevaluasi ulang di masa depan. Penelitian ini menggarisbawahi kompleksitas dalam pengambilan keputusan childfree, yang dipengaruhi oleh faktor pribadi, sosial, dan agama

Introduction

The Childfree Celebration, which emerged as a phenomenon in 2013 with the establishment of the Non-Parents Day Celebration in 1973, reflects society's changing view of the decision not to have children. The phenomenon received widespread attention when Time Magazine published the article 'The Childfree Life,' which recognized and discussed this commitment as a legitimate life choice worthy of respect. The article emphasized that the decision not to have children is a choice that should not be stigmatized or negatively judged.¹

Childfree is not a new term, this principle has long been an option for couples around the world, especially in America. In Indonesia, the current reality shows that the term childfree has become a controversial conversation in the community after a Muslim influencer, Gita Savitri, and her husband, Paul Andre Partohap, expressed their

decision to choose not to have children in their married life. The topic has dominated social media conversations and continues to spark pro and con debates among married and single people.²

Their decision is based on the belief that having children is not an obligation but a life choice. Of course, this has led to negative views from Indonesian society, especially regarding the decision not to have children, although in reality, the decision is a personal decision taken by the couple.³ However, publicizing it on social media opens the door for internet users to intrude on their privacy, resulting in pros and cons that have ultimately made the topic controversial. Most Indonesians believe that having children is the primary goal of marriage. Therefore, many couples in Indonesia who have been married but have yet to have children seek various methods and solutions to speed up the pregnancy process. Moreover, in the Islamic view, children are

¹ Roma Wijaya, "Respon Al-Qur'an Atas Trend Childfree (Analisis Tafsir Maqāṣidi)," *Al-Dzikra: Journal of Qur'anic and Al-Hadith Studies* 16, no. 1 (2022): 41–60, <https://doi.org/10.24042/al-dzikra.v16i1.11380>.

² Desi Rahman et al., "Childfree in Islamic Perspective: Solution or Controversy?," *Journal of Women and Family* 4., no. 1 (2023): 1–14, <https://doi.org/10.22146/jwk.7964>.

³ Maulida Rohmatul Laili et al., "Islamic Interpretation of Gita Savitri's Childfree Discourse," *Kediri Journal of Journalism and Digital Media (KJOURDIA)* 1, no. 1 (2023): 44–69, <https://doi.org/10.30762/kjourdia.v1i1.1384>.

considered a gift and sustenance, so avoiding the birth of children is considered a rejection of sustenance itself.⁴

Ultimately, this child-free phenomenon has become a trend that attracts attention in various walks of life. However, when this phenomenon occurs among Islamic academics, the dimensions of the decision become more complex as it relates to religious norms, family values, and solid social demands. Islamic academics study, learn, convey, and exchange ideas at Islamic religious institutions. As an integral part of Muslim society, they face expectations and responsibilities that are not only limited to the scientific field but also include traditional roles as husbands or wives and parents, as well as developers of Islamic knowledge in the broader community. Islam has outlined the provisions for marriage and family life. The phenomenon of childfree among them creates social dynamics that raise profound questions about the concept of family in Islam, the meaning of life, and how they understand Islamic teachings and their choices regarding marriage and offspring.

The scholars' views on the decision to have children in marriage vary. Al-Ghozali of the Shafi'i school of thought asserts that the right to decide to have children rests entirely with the husband, so the wife has no authority to reject her husband's decision. On the other hand, most Hanafiyah scholars believe this decision is a joint right of the husband and wife. Some Hanafiyah and Shafi'iyah scholars argue that the decision to have children involves the involvement of both husband and wife, taking into account the community's views. However, the final decision remains with the husband and wife. The fourth opinion expressed by the hadith scholars states that the right to decide

whether or not to have children should be related to the interests of society or the interests of the State.⁵

When a couple chooses not to have children, they can still achieve their marital goal of forming a family full of peace, love, and grace (*sakinah, mawadah, wa rahmah*). However, this view contradicts Imam Syafii's viewpoint, which emphasizes that the primary purpose of marriage is to preserve offspring and continue the lineage. This belief stems from a Prophetic hadith directive to marry a loving woman with many offspring, and he will be proud of the number of his people on the Day of Judgement.⁶

Previous research that examined this hadith concluded that it was of *hasan li ghayrihi* quality. From the explanation of this hadith, it is evident that the Prophet Muhammad strongly advised every Muslim to marry a fertile and loving woman to increase the number of offspring. No Muslim should choose not to have children in their marriage without emergency reasons. Therefore, based on the above explanation, the legal status of childfree is considered a *makruh* action. However, if there is a threat to survival, then the legal status may change from *makruh* to *mubah* (permissible) due to reasons related to women's reproductive rights.⁷

Another study also explained that textually, there is no Qur'anic verse that explicitly prohibits the concept of childfree. In Islam, having offspring is not an obligation, so it is not considered a sin if a couple decides not to have children. Therefore, childfree is not prohibited because every couple has the right to manage their household, including the decision to have children. Nonetheless, it should be understood that in Islam, children are

⁴ Rahman et al., "Childfree in Islamic Perspective: Solution or Controversy?"

⁵ Uswatul Khasanah and Muhammad Rosyid Ridho, "Childfree Perspective of Women's Reproductive Rights in Islam," *Al-Syakhsiyyah: Journal of Law & Family Studies* 3, no. 2 (2021): 104–28, <https://doi.org/10.21154/syakhsiyyah.v3i2.3454>.

⁶ Khasanah and Ridho.

⁷ M. Irfan Haecal et al., "Analysis of the Childfree Phenomenon in Society: A Study of Hadith Takhrij and Syarah with an Islamic Law Approach," *Gunung Djati Conference Series* 8 (2022): 73–92, <https://conferences.uinsgd.ac.id/gdcs Analisis>.

considered as sustenance, and there is a well-known saying, 'Many children, many sustenance.' The birth of a child in Islam is considered a blessing that one should be grateful for. This is because a child is considered a gift of marriage that can bring harmony to the family if both parents are spiritually and physically ready.⁸

Furthermore, this research will focus on investigating and analyzing the understanding of childfree actors from among Islamic academics towards the hadith about the recommendation to multiply offspring. This includes the factors that influence their understanding and choice to go child-free. By doing so, this decision reflects changes in the interpretation of religious values and how current social dynamics challenge traditional norms. This article will try to understand the dynamics of thought, social pressures, and value conflicts these Islamic academics face and how this phenomenon may affect their identity and role in society and their religious community.

Research Methods

The paradigm in this study is constructivist. Littlejohn uses the term constructivism to describe a theory that states that each individual interprets things and acts based on conceptual categories in his or her mind. Reality does not appear directly in raw form but must be filtered according to one's perspective on everything that exists.⁹ Constructivists believe that to understand the 'world of meaning,' they must interpret and investigate the processes of meaning formation that emerge in actors' language or social actions.¹⁰

This research is a type of field research. The method used is a qualitative method with a descriptive approach. The main focus of

researchers is on informants' answers to find, understand, explain, and describe their perspectives on the understanding of hadith and the phenomenon of childfree. The informants of this research are Islamic academics who have pursued Islamic undergraduate education and are considered to have known and understood Islamic teachings sourced from the Qur'an and Hadith. The suggested informant criteria are married Islamic academics who agree not to have children. Data collection was carried out through in-depth interviews with informants to obtain detailed and concrete information about their perspectives on the hadith recommendation to multiply offspring and the phenomenon of childfree, which is currently a hot topic of discussion they agree on. Interviews with informants are expected to provide new insights and thoughts related to understanding hadith and the phenomenon of childfree in the midst of Islamic academics. The informants found were seven people, all of whom were undergraduate scholars and even some undergraduate scholars of Islamic Sciences. After the data is collected, it will be analyzed, studied, and reviewed further to support the research conducted.

Results and Discussion

The Concept of Childfree in Hadith

Childfree is a person or couple's choice not to have children. Some Indonesians consider This decision quite shocking, leading to many debates. While the concept of childfree is not new in some foreign countries, the term tends to be viewed negatively in Indonesia as it goes against the local culture. In addition, Islamic teachings emphasize the importance of having offspring, as reflected in the hadith reported by the Prophet Muhammad, one of which is the following hadith reported by Abu Daud:

⁸ Rahman et al., "Childfree in Islamic Perspective: Solution or Controversy?"

⁹ Wijaya, "Qur'anic Response to the Childfree Trend (Analisis Tafsir Maqāṣidi)."

¹⁰ Sugar Wanto et al., "Peel Through the Borg & Gall Model of Development Research," *A Vehicle of Dedication* 3, no. 2 (2020): 98–110.

حَدَّثَنَا أَحْمَدُ بْنُ إِبْرَاهِيمَ حَدَّثَنَا يَزِيدُ بْنُ هَارُونَ أَخْبَرَنَا مُسْتَلِيمُ
 بْنُ سَعِيدِ ابْنِ أُخْتِ مَنْصُورِ بْنِ زَادَانَ عَنْ مَنْصُورٍ - يَعْنِي ابْنَ
 زَادَانَ - عَنْ مُعَاوِيَةَ بْنِ قُرَّةَ عَنْ مَعْقِلِ بْنِ يَسَارٍ قَالَ جَاءَ رَجُلٌ
 إِلَى النَّبِيِّ - صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ - فَقَالَ إِنِّي أَصَبْتُ امْرَأَةً ذَاتَ
 حَسَبٍ وَجَمَالٍ وَإِنَّمَا لَا تَلِدُ أَفَأَتَزَوَّجُهَا قَالَ « لَا ». ثُمَّ أَتَاهُ
 الثَّانِيَةَ فَنَهَاهُ ثُمَّ أَتَاهُ الثَّلَاثَةَ فَقَالَ « تَزَوَّجُوا الْوُدُودَ الْوُلُودَ فَإِنِّي
 مُكَاتِرٌ بِكُمْ الْأَمَمَ »

Artinya: Ahmad ibn Ibrahim reported to us from Yazid ibn Harun Mustalim ibn Sa'id ibn Ukhti Mansur ibn Zadzan, from Manshur (i.e., Ibn Zadzan), from Mu'awiyah ibn Qurrah, from Ma'qil ibn Yasar, who said: A man came to the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) complaining: 'I have chosen a woman who is rich and beautiful, but she is barren. Can I marry her?' So he forbade him. Then he came to him a second time, and he forbade him again. Then he came to him a third time, forbade him, and said: 'Marry a woman who is loving and fertile, for I am proud of your many children' (narrated by Abu Daud).¹¹

Muhammad Syams al-Haq Abadi explains the meaning of the word al-waduud in the above Hadith as a woman who loves her husband very much. At the same time, al-waluud is fertile or has the potential to have many children. These two characteristics are juxtaposed because they are interrelated. A woman with the potential to have many children but not loving towards her husband

will not be loved by him. Likewise, a woman who is loving but does not have many children cannot also achieve the goal of multiplying the people of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH in the future. These two traits are often found in honorable girls by investigating the number of siblings they have.¹²

An-Nasa'i also narrated the tradition with a slight difference in the main of the above tradition. Each of the traditions corroborates the other and thus is of hasan li ghayrihi quality. The Hadith shows that marriage and having offspring are essential to Islamic teachings. Most scholars understand this Hadith to command and encourage marriage and celibacy and emphasize the importance of choosing a partner who can provide many offspring.¹³

Other traditions also support the recommendation to have many children. One is a hadith narrated by Imam Muslim, which means 'O Allah, increase his wealth and children. Moreover, bless what You have given him.' This Hadith reinforces the content of the previous Hadith narrated by Abu Daud and Imam an-Nasa'i about the recommendation to multiply children. In addition, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) also encouraged Muslims to educate their children to become a rabbani generation by ensuring the quality of education so that they grow up to be pious children.¹⁴

Imam an-Nawawiy explains that the above Hadith relates one of the Prophet's prayers for his friend Anas bin Malik to be blessed with many children. The supplication is mentioned after praying for him to be blessed with much wealth, followed by praying for the blessing of the gift. With his prophetic status, the prayer was answered

¹¹ Abu Sulayman bin al-Asy'ats As-Sijistaniy, *Sunan Abi Daud* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1996); A.J. Wensink and JB Mansink, *Al-Mu'jam Al-Mufahras Li Alfazh Al-Hadith an-Nabawiy* (Leiden: Percetakan Brill, 1967).

¹² Abu ath-Thayyib Muhammad Syams al-Haq al-'Adzim Abadi, *'Aun Al-Ma'bud Syarh Sunan Abi Daud* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, n.d.).

¹³ Haecal et al., "Analysis of the Childfree Phenomenon in Society: A Study of Hadith Takhrij and Syarah with an Islamic Law Approach."

¹⁴ Rahman et al., "Childfree in Islamic Perspective: Solution or Controversy?"

by Allah swt. Anas bin Malik had abundant wealth, many children, and the blessing of what he had.¹⁵

About the phenomenon of childfree, in addition to the above hadith about the recommendation to multiply offspring, scholars also relate it to the following hadith narrated by Imam Muslim from Abu Hurairah:

حَدَّثَنَا يَحْيَى بْنُ أَبِي أُيُوبَ وَقُتَيْبَةُ - يَعْنِي ابْنَ سَعِيدٍ - وَابْنُ حُجْرٍ
قَالُوا حَدَّثَنَا إِسْمَاعِيلُ - هُوَ ابْنُ جَعْفَرٍ - عَنِ الْعَلَاءِ عَنْ أَبِيهِ
عَنْ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ أَنَّ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ - صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ - قَالَ «
إِذَا مَاتَ الْإِنْسَانُ انْقَطَعَ عَنْهُ عَمَلُهُ إِلَّا مِنْ ثَلَاثَةٍ إِلَّا مِنْ صَدَقَةٍ
جَارِيَةٍ أَوْ عِلْمٍ يُنْتَفَعُ بِهِ أَوْ وَلَدٍ صَالِحٍ يَدْعُو لَهُ»¹⁶

Artinya: Yahya bin Ayyub (Ibn Sa'id) and Qutaybah (Ibn Hujr) reported from Isma'il (Ibn Ja'far) from `Ala' from his father from Abu Hurairah that the Prophet said: 'When a person dies, his deeds are cut off except for three things: charity, useful knowledge, and a righteous son who prays for him.'

According to Imam Nawawi in his Syarah/explanation of Sahih Muslim, all human deeds will be cut off when he dies. However, the three things mentioned in the hadith will continue to flow rewards because the culprit is the cause of the three things. In the phenomenon of childfree, this hadith seems to remind every husband and wife to have pious children, educate, and introduce religion properly. This, in turn, makes it clear that

this Hadith also recommends having children so that they will become one of the Jariyah deeds that will help in the hereafter. Of the many traditions that recommend marriage and having children, besides being natural, instinctive, and fitnah. As mentioned in the hadith above, one of the purposes of marriage is to have many offspring. Therefore, the concept of childfree, if there is no harmful reason, is not in line with Islamic teachings. It also goes against the pronatalist values held in Indonesian culture.¹⁷ This Hadith also conveys the virtue of getting married in order to have pious offspring.¹⁸

The idea of going child-free is not a problem in liberal countries, where it is considered a form of human right. In these countries, choosing to go child-free is a free decision.¹⁹ Indonesia is neither a liberal nor a religious country but a democratic country that is always in the middle, not leaning to the right or left. Regarding the concept of childfree, Indonesian culture can accept it on the one hand but also reject it on the other. The view of childfree is accepted if there are harmful reasons but rejected if there are no apparent reasons.²⁰

According to Islamic law, the recommendation to have offspring in marriage does not amount to an obligation for every man to marry a woman and have children. However, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) expressly forbade rejecting the presence of offspring in domestic life, so deliberately not having children can be viewed as makruh (disliked). Although the scholars of fiqh differ on this issue, the desire to marry and have offspring is

¹⁵ Muslim ibn Hajjaj al-Qusyairiy An-Naysaburiy, *Shahih Muslim Bi Syarh Al-Imam an-Nawawiy* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, n.d.).

¹⁶ An-Naysaburiy.

¹⁷ Jihan Salma Mubarak et al., "Hadith Commentary on the Childfree Phenomenon in Indonesia with an Ijmali Approach," *Gunung Djati Conference Series* 8 (2022): 270–82, <https://www.conferences.uinsgd.ac.id/index.php/gdcs/article/view/571>.

¹⁸ An-Naysaburiy, *Shahih Muslim Bi Syarh Al-Imam an-Nawawiy*.

¹⁹ Amy Blackstone and Mahala Dyer Stewart, "Choosing to Be Childfree: Research on the Decision Not to Parent," *Sociology Compass* 6, no. 9 (2012): 718–27, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1751-9020.2012.00496.x>.

²⁰ Kharisul Wathoni Wathoni et al., "The Concept of Childfree from the Perspective of Family Education in Islam," *WISDOM: Journal of Early Childhood Education* 4, no. 1 (2023): 113–26, <https://doi.org/10.21154/wisdom.v4i1.5692>.

human nature. Refusing to have children may be considered a deviation from that fitrah.²¹

In fiqh studies, the phenomenon of childfree can be linked to the issue of *`azl* (interrupted coitus). However, the madhhab scholars associate *`all* with tandem an-nasal (regulation of childbearing), not *tahdid an-nasal* (denial of offspring). They view *`all* as a *rukhsah* (concession) for specific harmful reasons, such as spacing children to enable breastfeeding and preserve the health of both mother and child, arranging for pregnancy to occur at a safe time, and taking into account the physical, financial, educational and maintenance capabilities of the child.²²

Indonesia once implemented a family planning policy that limited the number of children to two. A 5 Rupiah note was issued to reinforce this policy (with a picture of family planning). This restriction was made because the population growth rate was not proportional to the growth of economic welfare when Indonesia was in the second country category. This family planning policy caused debate among some Muslims who believed that Islam does not limit the number of children. Nevertheless, the policy was still implemented because, at that time, Indonesia's rapid population growth was not proportional to the community's welfare. Muslims accepted this policy for solid reasons.²³

The phenomenon of choosing a child-free attitude certainly has specific reasons, which may be casuistic, such as concerns for the future of children in an unstable family situation. Married couples with these conditions require psychological and spiritual assistance. Childfree is a forced choice because having children is a natural, instinctive character recognized as a positive thing. Therefore, the choice of child-free

for married couples must be carefully considered and addressed wisely by the surrounding environment.

The Concept of Childfree in the View of Seven Islamic Scholars

Having offspring is the fitrah in a household for a married couple. Couples who choose not to have children are often regarded as anti-natalists and engage in deviant behavior, as society considers women who do not have offspring to be unable to fulfill their fitrah fully. The Prophet encourages his followers to multiply offspring in Islam, as mentioned in previous traditions. Apart from being a fitrah, having children is also a field of worship whose rewards continue to flow even though the parents have died. The trend of going child-free without emergency reasons seems to contradict these traditions.

This research was conducted through in-depth interviews with a wife with a master's degree in Islamic science. She knows the hadith related to the recommendation to multiply offspring and even understands the syarh of the hadith. However, according to her, it is only a recommendation, not an obligation. In searching the hadith commentaries, she did not find any coercion, and it is back to individual choice and agreement with the couple. She is even aware of other traditions with the same theme. She and her husband have agreed to be child-free since before they got married because they feel that they are not ready to be parents who can educate children to be pious. This decision was not permanent, only for the first three years of marriage. She calls it the 'rules' in her marriage.

Similarly, the second informant, a scholar of Islamic academics with a six-year pesantren

²¹ Jk Habibi et al., "Childfree Marriage in the Perspective of Islamic Law," *Transformatif* 7, no. 2 (2023): 139–52, <https://doi.org/10.23971/1f.v7i2.5903>.

²² Sri Aisyah and Zainal Azwar, "Family Planning (Study on the Analysis of Fatwa Ali Jum'ah in Kitab Al-Fatâwâ Al-Islâmiyyah)," *Journal Al-Ahkam* XXI, no. 1 (2020).

²³ Mubarak et al., "Hadith Commentary on the Childfree Phenomenon in Indonesia with an Ijmali Approach."

education background, was familiar with the hadith and what it recommends. He also knew the hadith and what the Prophet recommended. However, the challenges of educating children today are enormous. So, the fear of failing to educate children often haunts his mind. Some verses and hadiths mention the sin of parents who fail to educate their children. She feels sad about this choice but is forced to take it rather than being more sad because of failing to educate children. This was agreed upon before marriage with her husband, and she tried to show understanding to her close family. Another factor that influenced her choice was the psychological trauma she experienced from not receiving complete affection from her father. She stated: 'I grew up in a family with many sisters. My father could not show affection to my mother and treated her like a subordinate. My father did not work and only spent the money my mother made.

The informant was also traumatized by her younger siblings' disrespect for their mother, similar to their father's behavior, which caused them to be reluctant to have children. However, this agreement was also temporary. The presence of nieces and nephews in their neighborhoods could undermine their desire to have children.

The third informant is a lecturer at an Islamic University. He believes that the critical point of the hadith is to educate children to be pious and virtuous. However, the hadith applies to married couples who are mentally, physically, and financially prepared, while in the present time, many parents do not pay attention to this. Of course, this is a crisis. Therefore, she and her husband wanted to adjust to a new life together before taking on the role of educators, saving money so that they could provide financial stability and prepare the facilities and infrastructure needed to welcome the baby. In addition, she wants to equip herself and learn by preparing mentally and developing herself personally so she can later be a good parent, at

least trying to minimize various shortcomings that hurt children.

Although sometimes she feels that choosing childfree is the wrong decision, she insists that the decision is still temporary and can change. Not having children at this time does not mean she does not want to, but she is waiting for the right time. She wants to be educated first before educating.

The fourth informant works as a moral creed teacher at an Islamic boarding school in East Java and has a master's degree in Islamic science. He has heard hadiths, especially those that emphasize the virtue of having offspring to preserve the Muslim ummah. He understands the hadith as a recommendation to multiply offspring so that Muslims will flourish. However, she also believes that every couple's situation is different. They have the right to determine their life plans, including having children. She understands the hadith as explaining that the prayer of a pious child is one of the jariyah deeds that will continue to flow even after a person dies. However, she also believes that there are many other ways to give charity and do good that will still be beneficial even without having children.

She said that she and her husband have not chosen to have children because they want to focus on self-development, career, and contributing to society in other forms first. They also want to ensure they are mentally, emotionally, and financially ready before having children. "This commitment gives us more time to develop our potential, pursue our careers, and contribute to society without being limited by the responsibility of caring for children," she continued.

She has been married for three years after undergoing ta'aruf to maintain religious values and ethics in relationships before marriage. Her decision to go child-free is not a rejection of religious teachings but rather due to personal considerations and responsibility. Although sometimes the longing to have children arises, it

does not discourage them from returning to their original commitment. Because of that, they can be happy and free to enjoy other things.

The fifth informant is an assistant lecturer in Islamic science at the State Islamic University in Malang. His understanding of the hadith recommendation to multiply offspring is the same as the previous informant. He agrees with the recommendation to multiply offspring as part of the sustainability of the ummah. He also understands that pious children are an investment for their parents. However, that is not the only charity.

The child-free option emerged after two years of marriage because she was diagnosed with a severe medical condition that caused a very high risk of pregnancy. In addition, she had experienced the loss of a child at a considerable gestational age. The experience shook her mentally and emotionally, and she and her husband decided not to try again because they did not want to experience the same loss. The husband fully supported the decision because he saw first-hand how the loss affected the informant's mental state.

Although the close family found the decision difficult to accept, they eventually began to understand the reasons for both. The child-free decision will remain forever for them until medical developments allow them to have children without significant risk. Life is now spent focusing on each other's happiness and well-being and utilizing life to contribute to society differently.

The sixth informant is a scholar who works as a religious teacher in a remote area with her husband. As an academic who studies Islamic science, she admits that she often comes across references that encourage Muslims to have many offspring. She further said:

“I understand that the hadith encourages the reproduction of offspring to maintain the continuity of the Muslim Ummah. However, I believe that the main

goal in life is not just to reproduce offspring but also to become individuals who benefit others. I have been married for six years, and my spiritual understanding has made me realize that having children is not the only way to contribute to this life”.

Through her spiritual journey, she realized that the recommendation is not an absolute obligation. According to her, there is room to consider each individual's circumstances and life goals. Having pious children, indeed, is one way to earn a continuous stream of rewards. However, her spiritual journey has taught her that *jariyah* charity can come in many forms, such as helpful knowledge and meaningful social contributions to society. For her, dedicating her life to benefiting many people is also an essential form of worship.

The informant's husband fully supports this because they have the same vision. They are fully aware of living a simpler and more meaningful life where they can give their time, energy, and resources to help others without being bound as parents. Although not all close family members accepted the decision, they gradually gave understanding and had the determination to choose forever to live in a child-free way.

The seventh informant is an administrative staff at a reading tutoring center. Her understanding of the hadith above tends to be the same as the previous informants. She claims to be familiar with other traditions that recommend the same thing—however, feelings of childhood trauma and unwillingness to have children make her prefer to live childfree. A less harmonious family makes the informant not want to be a parent. She had expressed this long before marriage so her husband could understand what she had experienced.

She further said that she understood the hadith that pious children are rewards that continue to flow even though their parents have died. However, for her, having children is not the only way to leave a trail of goodness. She believes

that people can contribute to society in other ways and still get a Kariya charity without having children, such as by giving practical knowledge or positively contributing to others.

The decision to live child-free is permanent. She and her husband feel that this is the most suitable way to live. By choosing not to have children, the informant did not want to experience experiences that triggered the emergence of childhood trauma due to a family full of conflict. When in the midst of children, she feels happy but does not open her heart to becoming a mother.

Based on the results of the interviews above, it was found that all informants understood the hadith about the recommendation to multiply offspring above. The hadith narrated by Abu Daud above is understood as guidance in finding a loving partner with the potential to have many offspring as a way to develop the ummah and the continuation of Islamic propagation. However, the Hadith cannot be understood textually because of today's context. When the understanding of the hadith is drawn to the current context, there must be careful preparation when deciding to have offspring. When one is not mentally, financially, knowledgeable, and physically capable, one can consider having children or not. In addition, several traditions remind parents not to neglect mandated children.²⁴

The informants also seem to agree in understanding the hadith that explains that having a righteous child is one of the three deeds whose reward is uninterrupted even after one dies. However, when the hadith is drawn to the present context, there is elasticity to choose other deeds that have the same reward as having a righteous child. It is quite a challenge to raise a righteous child today. Without a parent, one can perform several deeds equivalent to having a righteous child that significantly impacts society. They believe that when the hadith is understood

contextually, it will positively impact couples who are not ready or even willing to have children.

Overall, the results of these interviews reveal that the decision to go child-free is based on complex and multifaceted reasons, including mental and emotional readiness, partner support, past experiences, and understanding and interpretation of religious injunctions. Despite facing challenges from social norms and environmental criticism, the informants indicated that this decision resulted from good communication and mutual agreement in their marriage. Four of the seven informants mentioned that the decision was not permanent and open to re-evaluation. The other three planned for a permanent decision until another decree from Allah swt.

Analysis of the interviews regarding the child-free decision shows that the reasons behind this choice are varied and complex. Despite their educational background and religious understanding, some informants felt mentally and emotionally unprepared to become parents. Moreover, the second and seventh informants experienced deep childhood trauma, which further convinced them not to want the role of parents. Social pressure and criticism from the surrounding environment did not change their decision. Some informants felt that their decision did not contradict their religious principles. Ultimately, the results of this study highlight the complexity of the child-free decision-making process, which is influenced by various personal, social, and religious factors.

The results of the interviews above leave us with the view that the understanding of hadith experiences elasticity when drawn to one's social circumstances and psychological condition. Especially if one believes that the teachings of Islam are peaceful and not burdensome. However, examining the values and wisdom in the Prophet's

²⁴ Ismail bin Ibrahim bin al-Mughirah bin Bardazbah, *Shahih Al-Bukhariy* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1999).

words is essential so contextual understanding remains manageable. Childfree may be considered in certain emergency cases but not in general. In principle, marriage in Islam is considered worship and forms a golden generation that will continue the relay of goodness in the fields of religion, culture, economy, etc. Suppose the concept of childfree is applied to the public domain indefinitely. In that case, it will result in the loss of the next generation, as has happened in the territories of Japan and Korea.

The child-free decision also reflects an awareness of the importance of mental, spiritual, and financial readiness before taking on the responsibility of parenthood. This is where the importance of family resilience, attention to good parenting, parenting education, and pre-marital education for the younger generation lies. Academic education goes hand in hand with mental maturity and readiness to contribute to forming the nation's next generation and religion without ignoring religious recommendations and human nature.

Conclusion

Interviews with seven informants from Islamic academia showed that the hadith about the recommendation to multiply offspring is understood contextually. The recommendation to multiply offspring is intended for mentally, knowledgeable, physically, and financially ready couples. When the challenges of educating children today are severe, and couples feel unready to have children, they may choose to be child-free. Although the deeds of pious children are rewards that flow to their parents even after their death, other deeds are in the same position. It gives room for couples who are not ready to have children to contribute to society with other charities that are no less impactful.

The reasons behind the decision to go childless are complex, including religious understanding, knowledge, mental readiness, financial sufficiency, past experience, and

unwillingness to have children. Some informants feel that this decision is temporary in the future, while some feel it is permanent. They feel happy with the agreement and can contribute to society without being burdened with children.

Despite social pressure and criticism, the informants maintained their commitment, showing that the child-free decision was not made rashly but after careful consideration. Overall, this study provides an in-depth insight into the complexity of the child-free phenomenon among Islamic academics and its implications for their identity and role in society and their religious community. By exploring the perspectives and experiences of the informants, this research makes an important contribution to the understanding of religious teachings and social dynamics in the context of personal life decisions.

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